



RECOGNIZING BIAS: LESSON PLANS ON STEREOTYPES



Made Possible in Part by a Grant from the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department



RECOGNIZING BIAS: LESSON PLANS ON STEREOTYPES

Table of Contents

What Is A Stereotype?	2
How Stereotypes Function	3
How Stereotypes Can Be Harmful	4
How The Media Promotes And Reinforces Stereotypes	5
Italian Americans and Stereotypes	6-7
Activities	8-11
Standards Addressed	12



Recognizing Bias: Lesson Plans On Stereotypes ©2022 by the Italian American Museum of Los Angeles. May be duplicated for educational use only. Permission to quote, excerpt, or reprint must be obtained from the owner for all other uses.

Made Possible in Part by a Grant from the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department



WHAT IS A STEREOTYPE?

The Oxford Dictionary defines a **stereotype** as “a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.” The word traces its origins to the Greek word for “solid,” “*stereos*,” and the French word for “kind,” “*type*.” In late eighteenth-century France, the word *stéréotype* referred to the process of printing from a solid metal plate.

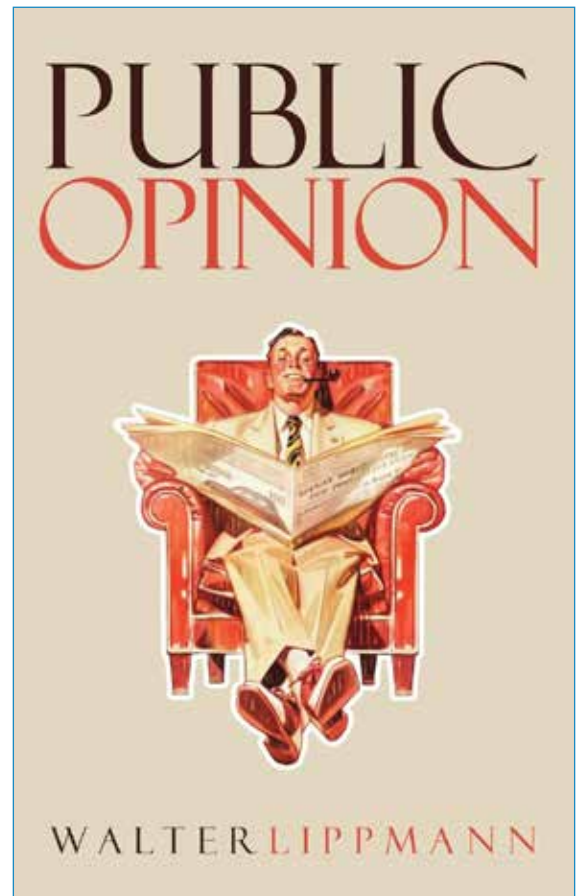
By 1850, the word had evolved to mean an “image perpetuated without change,” and, in 1922, Walter Lippmann coined its present-day meaning in his book *Public Opinion*. His definition of stereotype was a “distorted picture or image in a person’s mind, not based on personal experience, but derived culturally.” He hypothesized that stereotypes are formed by social, political, and economic motivations and are passed down through generations.



In the late eighteenth century, the word *stereotype* referred to a metal plate that was used for printing.

HOW STEREOTYPES FUNCTION

Stereotypes categorize people according to race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, among other characteristics. Most categorizations are based on assumptions rather than on facts and are therefore largely negative. Stereotypes often inspire prejudice and lead to discrimination.

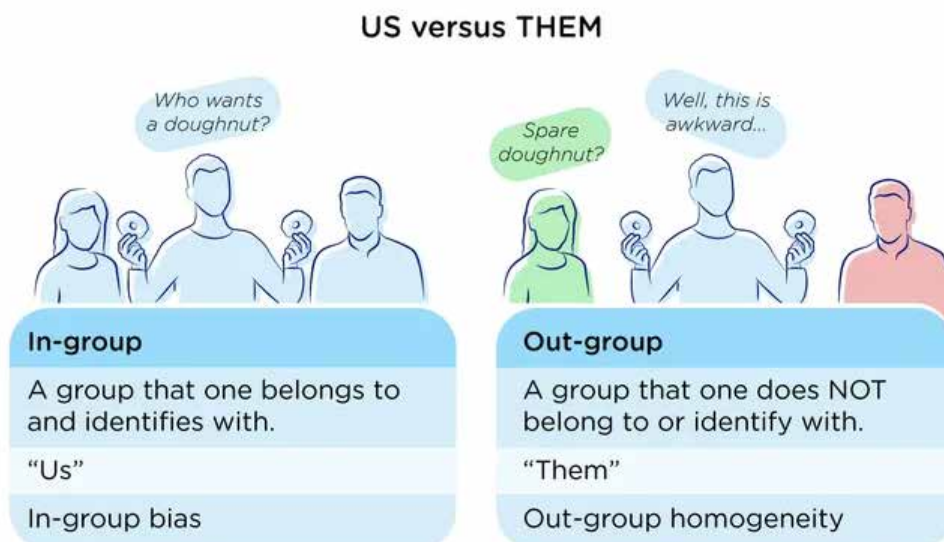


Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922)

Psychologists explain that stereotypes allow people to simplify beliefs, perceptions and judgements, and thereby facilitate the processing of information in a more general manner. Throughout history, this permitted humans to respond rapidly to situations. Some scholars consider stereotypes as an essential part of evolution, contending that humans have, for millennia, used them to identify and manage external events and stimuli—both threats and opportunities that arise in the social world.



Stereotypes also contribute to in-group and out-group identification. An **in-group** is a group of people who identify with each other based on shared qualities, such as religion, race, gender, place of residence, etc. Accordingly, an **out-group** consists of people who do not share that quality. In-groups take various forms, such as fans of a sports team or alumni from a specific university. These self-categorizations highlight and reinforce the similarities and differences between groups and often promote an “**us versus them**” mentality.



Jack Westin

HOW STEREOTYPES CAN BE HARMFUL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

★

NOTICE TO ALIENS OF ENEMY NATIONALITIES

★ The United States Government requires all aliens of German, Italian, or Japanese nationality to apply at post offices nearest to their place of residence for a Certificate of Identification. Applications must be filed between the period February 2 through February 7, 1942. Go to your postmaster today for printed directions.

EARL G. HARRISON, Special Assistant to the Attorney General. FRANCIS BIDDLE, Attorney General.

AVVISO

Il Governo degli Stati Uniti ordina a tutti gli stranieri di nazionalità Tedesca, Italiana e Giapponese di fare richiesta all' Ufficio Postale più prossimo al loro luogo di residenza per ottenere un Certificato d'Identità. Le richieste devono essere fatte entro il periodo che decorre tra il 2 Febbraio e il 7 Febbraio 1942.

Andate oggi dal vostro Capo d'Ufficio Postale (Postmaster) per ricevere le istruzioni scritte.

BEKANNTMACHUNG

Die Regierung der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika fordert alle Ausländer deutscher, italienischer und japanischer Staatsangehörigkeit auf, sich auf das ihrem Wohnorte naheliegende Postamt zu begeben, um einen Personalausweis zu beantragen. Das Gesuch muss zwischen dem 2. und 7. Februar 1942 eingereicht werden.

Gehen Sie noch heute zu Ihrem Postmeister und verschaffen Sie sich die gedruckten Vorschriften.

Post This Side in States of Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington

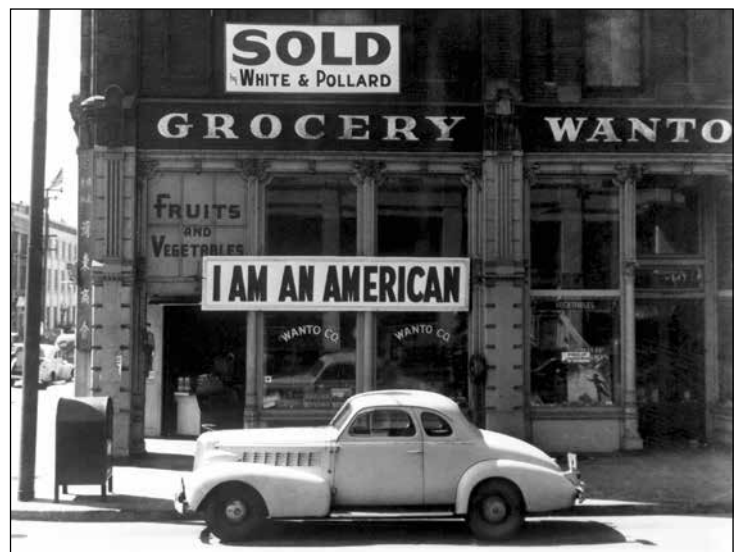
敵國外人注意
日獨伊諸國籍ヲ有スル在留外人ハ
二月二ヨリ七日ノ間ニ其居所ニ一番
近イ郵便局ニ自分證明書ヲ申込ニ可ス
會々早送郵便局(行)ニ説明書類ヲ願ハス。

Stereotypes may cause people to judge their fellow human beings according to information that is often incomplete or highly generalized, without acknowledging that each person is unique. Stereotypes, and the inaccurate assumptions that they engender, often affect how we behave towards others. Not only is this harmful to the individual being stereotyped, but it also hinders the relationship between the two people.

When people act based on prejudiced attitudes, they sometimes engage in **discrimination**, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, age, nationality, creed, or sex.” Discrimination fosters inequities among groups, and often one group is unfairly disadvantaged. Prejudice and discrimination are one of the most harmful ways in which stereotypes affect society.

Racism towards Italian, German, and especially Japanese Americans was rampant during World War II.

In addition to stereotyping others, people can stereotype themselves; individuals may engage in stereotypical behavior in order to feel more included in their group and thereby perpetuate a stereotype. Social psychologists use the term **stereotype threat** to describe a phenomenon in which members of a marginalized group acknowledge that a negative stereotype exists surrounding their group, and they demonstrate apprehension about confirming the negative stereotype by engaging in particular activities. The threat of fulfilling a stereotype can create anxiety and interfere with an individual's performance. For instance, when adolescent girls were told that a test they were taking was being used as a measure of gender differences in math skills, their performance on the test declined.



An American of Japanese descent placed this I AM AN AMERICAN sign on his storefront on December 8, 1942, the day after Pearl Harbor.

HOW THE MEDIA PROMOTES AND REINFORCES STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes are learned ideas and behaviors that can be explicitly or implicitly taught through various means, including friends, family, society, and the media. The average American spends 463 minutes per day, or 7.5 hours, ingesting media, both actively and passively. Passive consumption of media includes viewing advertisements such as billboards or bus ads while carrying out daily activities, while active consumption includes activities such as watching television and movies, listening to the radio or streaming music, reading magazines, newspapers, books, browsing the Internet and social media, and gaming.



Mr. Clean advertisement, released on Mother's Day in 2011, that suggests the most important job for women is to clean the house.

The media has long capitalized on and perpetuated stereotypes. Stereotypes enable the media to concisely communicate ideas and create recognizable concepts. Stereotypes serve as shortcuts for more complex ideas. For instance, the creators of a television show may employ stereotypes when introducing a new character to identify the character quickly and easily as a hero or villain.



Western portrayals of Indian culture in film and television; from left, Julia Roberts in *Eat Pray Love* (2010), Apu Nahasapeemepetilon in *The Simpsons*, and Tina Desai and Dev Patel in *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2015).

Unfortunately, many people rely solely on media portrayals of groups to formulate opinions and ideas, sometimes because they have little or no contact with those groups. Although audiences are not entirely passive, it is often difficult to recognize the subtle use of stereotypes and combat them with critical thinking.

ITALIAN AMERICANS AND STEREOTYPES

Italian Americans are one of the nation's most commonly stereotyped groups. Many stereotypes surrounding Italians can be traced to the period between 1870 and 1920, when some 14 million Italians, mostly peasants from Italy's south, left Italy. They fled social, economic and political inequality in what was one of history's largest human migrations. Four million of the 14 million Italians would settle in the United States. Many Americans resented this new group of immigrants, who looked, spoke, and worshiped differently. Italian immigrants faced widespread discrimination in housing and employment, were scapegoated as criminals and radicals, and were seen as "stealing" jobs from American workers.

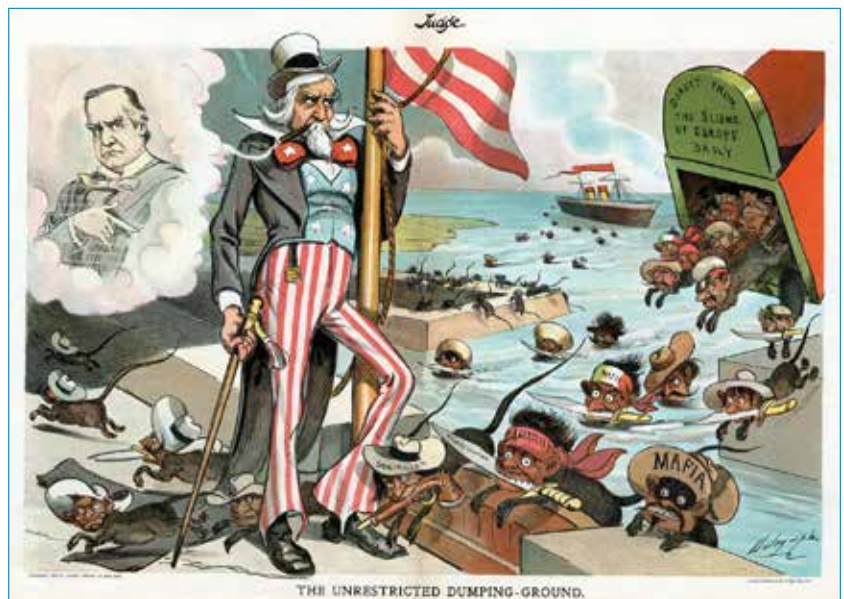


Immigrants in line at Ellis Island, ca 1900.



Job posting from *The Illinois Free Press*, 1910 soliciting mineworks; neither Italians nor African Americans were welcome to apply.

The arrival of Italian immigrants coincided with the birth of the motion picture industry in the United States. The media reflected the nation's prejudices against Italian immigrants (and other groups) and helped propagate stereotypes. Silent films portrayed Italian immigrants as violent, overly passionate, exotic, prone to criminality, and unable to assimilate to American ways. In the early 1900s, as nativism and xenophobia reached new heights and as dislike of Italian immigrants grew, Congress passed legislation that restricted immigration from Italy and other countries.



Political cartoon published in *Judge* magazine in 1903 that depicts Italian immigrants as rats prone to criminality escaping from the slums of Europe and invading American shores.



Poster for the film *Scarface* (1932)



A still from *The Godfather* (1972)

The earliest gangster films were released in the 1910s, and by the 1930s films such as *Scarface* and *Public Enemy* had cemented associations between Italian Americans and organized crime. Released in 1972, Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* reinvigorated the nation's obsession with the Mafia and the antisocial Italian American gangster while reinforcing other negative stereotypes about Italian Americans. It also inspired a never-ending stream of entertainment—from films to television series, video games, and music—that connects criminality with Italian Americans. More than 75 percent of Hollywood films depict Italian Americans as having ties to organized crime, or otherwise portray them in a negative light—as dim-witted, racist, or violent. As the entertainment industry becomes more culturally sensitive and inclusive, many Italian Americans wonder why such negative and one-dimensional portrayals are considered acceptable.

By eradicating such depictions, we can gain a richer understanding of experiences of the various groups that have shaped the United States—and, in doing so, a greater understanding of the American mosaic.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Explain the word *stereotype*
- Describe how stereotypes function
- Identify different kinds of stereotypes
- Understand how assumptions can lead to stereotypes and unfair judgments about individuals and groups
- Explain how stereotypes can create prejudices and lead to discrimination
- Explain how stereotypes and biases affect our lives
- Explore common stereotypes in our society
- Identify stereotypes in the media

KEYWORDS

Stereotype, culture, ethnic, racial, prejudice, assumption, assume, generalize, identity, perpetuate, inequity, inequality, gender, media, portrayal, image, scapegoat.

ACTIVITIES

Grades K–4

“What does a superhero look like?”

Ask students, “What does a superhero look like?” (You could also ask, “What does a scientist—or an athlete, a doctor, etc. — look like?”) Allow students adequate time to think about the question and draw their idea of a superhero or other figure. Depending on their grade and ability, ask students to write or describe the qualities that define the figure. What does he or she do? After the students have finished, display the drawings in the classroom and have students walk around to view each other’s drawings.

Ask students to share what they noticed about the drawings. Take the opportunity to highlight counter-examples in students’ work or provide counterexamples that challenge stereotypes while leaving the conversation open ended. Such counterexamples include that men can be tender and nurturing, that women can be fierce crime fighters, etc.



Grades 4–8

Stereotyping feels like...

Teacher leads students in a class discussion in which students discuss and define the word stereotype. Students then write an essay or create a film or presentation about a time when they were stereotyped. This activity provides an ideal opportunity to incorporate music, dance, and drama into student learning. Ask students to describe the experience, how they were stereotyped (was it based on race, class, gender, ability?), who did it, and how it made them feel. How did students know that they were being unfairly judged? Why do they think those assumptions were made about them? What words or actions were directed at students? What was their reaction? How do they think they should have been treated in that situation? Students present their projects to the class. When students have completed this task, ask them to reflect on a time when they stereotyped someone else. Why did they

engage in stereotyping? How do they think it made the other person feel? What did they learn from the experience?



Grades 6–8

Self-portrait collages

Begin by asking students to define the word “stereotype” and discuss the different types of stereotypes (race, creed, ethnic, gender, class, etc.). Write their ideas on the board or display them in a different way. Ask students to provide examples of stereotypes of the various groups that they fit into; for instance, “all girls like pink,” “Asians are good at math,” “jocks are dumb,” “immigrants are uneducated,” or “African Americans love basketball.” Make sure students understand that they can present stereotypes in a way that is respectful of others. After the lists have been created, ask students to think about whether they fit into the stereotypes presented on the board and how these stereotypes make them feel. Do

they capture their true selves? Ask students to brainstorm another list of how such over-generalizations impact people.

Assign students an art project in which they create a mixed-media collage that depicts themselves and describes their personality, beliefs, values, and interests through images, words, and symbols. This can take a variety of forms depending on the resources available. In addition to creating a likeness of themselves (a self-portrait), students will incorporate visual cues that highlight their individuality. Once they have completed the assignment, select students to present their work, discussing the elements they chose to represent their identity. Display students’ work.

Grades 8–12

The Consequences of Stereotypes in History

Prejudice and intolerance have played an ugly part in human history. In this activity, students select an event in history that was influenced by stereotypes and biases, tracing the steps through which a group becomes the target of prejudice and discrimination, and, if applicable, how such unchecked biases and bigotry led to persecution and violence, with genocide being the extreme expression of hatred and violence against a group of people. As part of their presentation, students should:

- Identify the event. Where did it occur and when? This section should include all the relative facts about the event.
- Who was impacted? Describe the group or people and how many were affected.
- How did stereotypes, scapegoats, prejudices, and discrimination lead up to the event?
- What role did propaganda and demagoguery play in the event?
- How was language, particularly slang, used to dehumanize the affected group(s)? Describe if and how this dehumanization was a precursor to discrimination, marginalization, and violence.
- Who came to the group's defense, if anyone?

After students present their reports, discuss the responsibility we have as global citizens in identifying, condemning, and opposing such behavior.



A Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1933. The Nazi party was responsible for the Holocaust, which involved the persecution and murder of Jews, homosexuals, Roma, and communists, among many other groups.

Grades 8–12

Stereotypes in Media



A still from Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953) depicting a caricature of Native Americans.

As a class, discuss the word “stereotype.” Talk about what this word means and ask students to brainstorm examples of stereotypes connected to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, creed, and other categories.

Discuss how the media perpetuates negative stereotypes, citing not only film and television, but books, music, etc., providing students with appropriate examples. Students then think of a book, film, song, commercial, or some other media that perpetuates a stereotype. Teachers can elect to narrow the media to specific years or leave it broad. (This activity aligns well with U.S. History units.)

Students need to provide a link or a copy of the medium they selected and explain:

- What is the medium (i.e. a commercial for a soft drink)
- Who is the creator? (This could include the author, director, or company that sponsored the medium.)
- Who is/are the group(s) being stereotyped?
- What is the type of character; i.e., a villain, a terrorist, an elderly person, etc.
- How does the character's/group's behavior, actions, speech, dress, etc. shape perceptions about him/her/them?
- How are they being stereotyped?
- What is the message or inference?
- Who is the target audience?

Teacher can include additional questions, if desired. As extra credit or as part of the assignment, students can also write a persuasive letter to the creator(s) of the media or the network/platform broadcasting it, discussing why the stereotype-laden media is unfair and why it should be eradicated.

CALIFORNIA CONTENT STANDARDS

Content Area: History and Social Science

1.5 Students describe the human characteristics of familiar places and the varied backgrounds of American citizens and residents in those places.

10.11 Students analyze the integration of countries into the world economy and the information, technological, and communications revolutions (e.g., television, satellites, computers).

11.5 Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.

12.8 Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life.

Content Area: Health Education

Standard Identifier: K.1.3.G, 3.4.2.G Category: Growth and Development

Standard: Name ways in which people are similar and ways in which they are different.

Standard: Identify how to show respect for individual differences.

Standard Identifier: K.1.4.M, K.7.2.M, 2.1.7.M, 2.7.2.M, 2.8.1.M, 3.8.2.M, 3.8.3.M, 6.4.2.M, 6.4.3.M, 6.7.3.M, 6.8.1.M, 6.8.2.M, 7-8.1.5.M, 7-8.7.2.M, Category: Mental, Emotional, and Social Health

Standard K.1.4.M: Describe characteristics that make each individual unique.

Standard K.7.2.M: Describe positive ways to show care, consideration, and concern for others.

Standard 2.1.7.M: Discuss how to show respect for similarities and differences between and among individuals and groups.

Standard 2.7.2.M: Show respect for individual differences.

Standard 3.8.3.M: Demonstrate the ability to support and respect people with differences.

Standard 6.4.2.M: Describe how prejudice, discrimination, and bias can lead to violence.

Standard 6.4.3.M: Demonstrate ways to communicate respect for diversity.

Standard 6.7.3.M: Practice appropriate ways to respect and include others who are different from oneself.

Standard 6.8.1.M: Encourage a school environment that is respectful of individual differences.

Standard 7-8.1.5.M: Recognize diversity among people, including disability, gender, race, sexual orientation, and body size.

Standard 7-8.7.2.M: Practice respect for individual differences and diverse backgrounds.

Standard Identifier: 5.2.1.G Category: Growth, Development, and Sexual Health

Standard 5.2.1.G: Explain how culture, media, and other factors influence perceptions about body image, gender roles, and attractiveness.

Standard Identifier: 7-8.2.2.S Category: Injury Prevention and Safety

Standard 7-8.2.2.S: Evaluate individual, group, and societal influences that promote cooperation and respectful behaviors and those that promote violence and disrespectful behaviors.

