

Overview:

For many people, their first impression of a particular national culture may come from the media that they consume. The language used by journalists and other media professionals to describe an event in a different part of the world can alter perceptions of the people who live in that area and, in turn, foster stereotypes or negative associations.

This lesson plan challenges participants to interrogate the tone and common tropes used in United States media and reflect on how that media may cause them to view other cultures in a particular way. They will read a satirical article that uses these media tropes to describe an event that takes place in the United States and discuss their feelings about the article and how it depicts US Americans. Then, they will search for current examples in mainstream media that negatively portray groups of people and reflect on how they will apply what they have learned when they consume media in the future.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Interrogate the tone and common tropes used in the United States media.
2. Reflect on how that media may cause them to view other cultures in a particular way.
3. Identify examples in mainstream media that negatively portray groups and people.
4. Apply what they learned when they consume media in the future.

Time:

45 minutes

Group Size:

Small group

Materials:

Internet access, a computer/tablet for each group, and one of the following *Slate* articles:

- “[If It Happened There: In Brutal Contest of Strength and Strategy, a Culture is Revealed](#)”
- “[If It Happened There...America's Annual Festival Pilgrimage Begins](#)”

Optional: Facilitators can use the Language Constructs Enemies PowerPoint (in [Downloads](#)) to display activity directions and debrief questions to participants

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness:

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Curiosity:

- To ask complex questions about other cultures.
- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks:

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

Other Skills:

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Activity Instructions:

1. Ask participants to read one of the articles listed above.

Note: Before they begin reading, acknowledge that people have varying investments/associations with the topic addressed in the article, so different emotional responses are expected.

2. Once they finish, have a discussion with the entire group using the following questions:

- What happened with this article?
- How did you feel reading it? (The facilitator may once again want to remind participants that different responses/reactions are okay.)
- If this was your source of information about the United States, how would you feel toward US Americans?

3. Next, participants will examine the language used in the article more closely. It is suggested that the facilitator divide the participants into small groups or pairs and assign each group 1-2 paragraphs in which they do the following:

- Highlight words and expressions that have negative connotations.
- Explain what those connotations are and the feelings/attitudes associated with them.
- Rewrite at least one sentence or phrase to create a more positive tone.

4. Debrief with the entire group using the following questions:

- What are some of the words or expressions you highlighted and their effect?
- What are some of your rewrites?
- Why did you choose to rewrite those particular sentences/phrases?
- How did it feel to do a rewrite?

5. Instruct each group to research a current mainstream news source for concrete examples of how language constructs negative views of groups of people.
6. Debrief with the entire group using the following questions:
 - What examples did you find?
 - Before doing this activity, how would you have felt about the group of people depicted in the article? How do you feel about them now?
 - What did you learn after doing this activity?
 - How will you apply what you learned?

Related Tools:

Similar tools:

- [Critical Mass](#)
- [HSBC Cultural Differences Commercials](#)
- [Impact of Bias in Advertising, The](#)