

## Overview:

This lesson plan challenges participants to better comprehend the concept of empathy by embracing their own story, sharing it, and processing it with someone different than them. To effectively empathize with someone, it helps to first form a personal connection. In this activity, participants will pair up with someone who is culturally different from them. Then, they will share their personal experiences with each other and determine how their stories intersect.

## Background:

This activity was created by Michael Bittinger for the Global Leadership for Freshman Study Abroad Program at Purdue University. It was inspired, in part, by a chapter in Nadine Dolby's book *Rethinking Multicultural Education for the Next Generation: The New Empathy and Social Justice* (see citation below).

## Objectives:

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

1. Recognize the intellectual and emotional dimensions of another person's experiences and perspectives.
2. Comprehend that empathy is a skill that can be developed, and that empathy is not synonymous with sympathy.
3. Demonstrate empathy across cultural difference using story-telling.

## Time:

30 minutes

## Group Size:

Pairs

## Materials:

A blackboard or a projector to display the Story of Me, Us, Now PowerPoint (in [Downloads](#)).

*Optional:* Note-taking materials for students.

## Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Polarization
- 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).

### Empathy

- To interpret intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview.
- To demonstrate ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.

### Other Skills:

Friendship; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

### Activity Instructions:

1. Cross-Cultural Partner: Pair up, or if in a large group, find the person in the room most different from you. Different can be defined by gender, skin color, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, college major, where you're from, whether you say soda or pop, etc. Aim to find someone with at least 4 differences. Once you've selected a partner, stand face-to-face, close enough to touch elbows. This may challenge the comfort zones of many: an intentional first step (5 mins).

*For the facilitator:* Consider using the 6 Differences PowerPoint slide (in [Downloads](#)) to help participants find a partner.

2. The Story of Me: Share an experience or brief story about something influential (intimate or not) that helped shape you into the person you are today. Examine the choices you have made in your lives, the pivotal moments, and the turning points. Share one with your partner.

*For the facilitator:* The instructor shares first to connect with the group and provide a suitable example. This mentorship is key! (5-10 mins)

3. The Story of Us: Partners explore how their stories are interwoven with each other's by asking:
  - How might our stories intersect?
  - Where does the commonality come from?
  - How might one with another worldview respond to our stories?

The Stories of Us compel students to enter another's world (5 mins).

4. The Story of Now: This section moves from "our story" to a bigger one. What will you now do with this connection/understanding?

*For the facilitator:* Partners discuss a specific action each can take that will propel your ability to empathize; not simply sympathize. Example: "*I won't just promise to try to show empathy abroad, I will see small, but important connections with people I befriend while traveling, especially those different than me*" (3 mins).

5. AAC&U Intercultural and Competence VALUE Rubric: Consider where you are on the empathy line of the scale today and where you might be if you keep this exercise in mind while engaging with difference (3 mins).

## Reflection

Three questions to pose to the group for a short mental reflection on the exercise (2 mins):

- What just happened?
- Why does it matter?
- What am I going to do with this knowledge?

## Related Tools:

*Tools to use in conjunction with this activity:*

- [6 Differences](#)
  - Use this activity to help participants find a partner for this activity.
- [Cultural Autobiography](#)
  - Use this activity to help participants brainstorm stories about themselves.