



HOW ARE STEREOTYPES ABOUT FAMILIES REINFORCED?

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 4 – 6

LENGTH OF TIME: One 75 minute session or two 45 minute sessions

GOALS

- To explore students' understanding of who can make a family.
- To develop a greater understanding of family diversity.
- To understand how stereotypes and assumptions are learned and reinforced.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to identify the difference between stereotypes about families and real families they see and know.
- Students will be able to recognize the presence and negative impact of stereotypes and assumptions about families in books, media, and advertising.
- Students will be able to create strategies for creating a more inclusive school.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (Also SL.5.1 and 6.1)
- Social Studies Strand 1: Culture – Learners understand how human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to culture, and appreciate the role of culture in shaping their lives and society, as well the lives and societies of others.

EDUCATORS' NOTES

In this lesson, students will brainstorm ideas about families. They can then look at books on diverse families or watch the film [Our Family!](#) Afterward, they will return to their list and decide which ideas were assumptions and how what they saw in the books or the film challenged those stereotypes. Students will then discuss how those assumptions about families may have been learned and reinforced.

This project centers the concept that all families are unique and different. This activity is designed to be inclusive for all; be sensitive to the individual needs of the students in your classroom.

Your students may have families with two moms or two dads, stepparents, a transgender parent, adoptive parents or foster parents. It is useful to find out the language they use to refer to their families to help respectfully answer questions that may arise. If, for example, you have only one student in your school with same-gender parents, then be mindful not to put that student in the position of teaching other children about their family. That is the job of the educator, not the student.

MATERIALS

- *Different?/Similar?/I Wonder?* worksheet
- *Stereotype Reinforcement* worksheet (optional)
- Chart paper and markers
- [Family Diversity Vocabulary](#) (additional resource)

SUGGESTED BOOKS / VIDEO

Have available a selection of diverse books about or featuring families.

- *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman.
- *Families* by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly.
- *Who's in My Family?: All about Our Families* by Robie Harris.
- *One Family* by George Shannon.
- *Families* by Susan Kuklin.
- *Love Makes a Family: Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Parents and Their Families* by Peggy Gillespie and Gigi Kaeser.
- For additional ideas, see Welcoming Schools' booklist: [Children's Books to Embrace Family Diversity](#)
- [Our Family! A Film About Family Diversity](#) (7 min.)

ACTIVITY 1: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT FAMILIES?

Label a piece of chart paper "What do we know about families?" Ask the class the following questions and record their answers on chart paper:

- What are qualities that are true of many families?
- What do we know about families?
- Who is in a family?

Families can be defined in many ways. Each one is unique. Make sure to include all the different kinds of families that are in your classroom. At the same time, it is important to name a wide variety of families (such as single parents or families with two dads), especially ones that are not represented in your classroom.

ACTIVITY 2: GATHERING DATA FROM BOOKS

Give each student the *Different?/Similar?/I Wonder?* worksheet. Ask each student to review a different book about families.

Once students have completed their worksheets:

- Facilitate a discussion based on the books and the list the students had brainstormed previously about families.
- Ask students: Which qualities on the list do you still agree with, and which are really stereotypes about families?
- Circle the assumptions on the list, asking students for specific examples of families that challenge the assumption, either from the books or from their own lives. The list

may be considerably shorter after this discussion, with perhaps only one or two qualities remaining, such as, “They do things together,” or, “They love each other.” Reassure students that most adults doing this activity would probably generate a similar list with many assumptions. We have all learned these assumptions.

ACTIVITY 3: DISCUSSION – ASSUMPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES

- Ask students where people learn these assumptions about families. Brainstorm another list on the board, including TV, movies and videos, cereal boxes, etc. Offer a framework for understanding the reinforcement of assumptions. Either distribute copies of the *Stereotype Reinforcement* worksheet or project the same worksheet on a screen.
- Prompt a conversation with students about the harmful effects of making assumptions by stating, “Some of you may come from families who are different from or the same as the assumptions or stereotypes about families. Let’s talk about how it feels to be placed in either one of these categories.” This gives all children in the group the opportunity to discuss feelings about assumptions and may lead to a conclusion that actually all families are different in some ways and alike in others.
- Ask students to talk about how they feel about assumptions. You might ask:
 - “Do you think that stereotypes really describe anyone’s family exactly as they are?”
 - How do you think it feels to someone to have their family excluded from conversations about families? Or to have their family shown in a stereotypical way?
 - Can you think of places that this happens in our society such as toys, books, TV shows, magazines, cereal boxes?
 - Can you think of ways that stereotypes are harmful?”
- Make a list of strategies for countering these situations and feelings. Ask the students:
 - “What are some ways that all families can be made to feel included?”
 - What are some ways that all kinds of families can be represented in books, magazines, TV, and other places to show a diversity of families as they really are?
 - How can we work together here at school to become more aware of and welcoming to all families?”

NOTE

It is important to emphasize to students that we have all learned assumptions and that it is part of human nature to notice differences and to categorize people and things. The important lesson is to become aware of bias and move beyond it to a place where difference is centered. This lesson can be particularly effective when educators model their own assumptions in front of the class. When a teacher catches themselves falling into stereotypical thinking, realizes the mistake and corrects their thinking, students then have a model for a healthy response.

EXTENSIONS

- Use the Welcoming Schools recommended [booklist](#) featuring family diversity and make these books available to your students.
- Choose some books to read together as a class to learn about lots of different families.
- Have students write on a sticky note one thing that they feel makes their family special or different. Post the notes on a chart in the front of the class and decorate the chart.
- Have students interview members of their family and share the interviews with the class.
- Have students interview each other or students from another class about their family background.
- For homework, ask students to think about gender, race or sexual orientation and how we learn assumptions about these identities. One way to do this is to distribute copies of the *Stereotype Reinforcement* worksheet and ask students to write examples in each box for the identity they have selected to explore.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- During the class discussion, listen in on the vocabulary that students are using to talk about different families.
- Notice if the vocabulary mirrors the family structures you generated together as a class.
- Review the strategies students brainstormed to help children from all kinds of families feel welcome. Do the strategies show an understanding of how they can help or how the school could help? Did students participate in the discussions?

DIVERSE AND UP-TO-DATE RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS

[Children's Books to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Lesson Plans to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Embracing Family Diversity School Resources](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

Credit: Adapted from "How Are Stereotypes of Families Reinforced?" by Michael Feldstein, *In Our Family: Portraits of All Kinds of Families Lesson Plans and Activities*. See www.familydiv.org.

HOW ARE ASSUMPTIONS ON FAMILIES REINFORCED?

DIFFERENT? / SIMILAR? / I WONDER?

1. What family is different from yours?

List the differences:

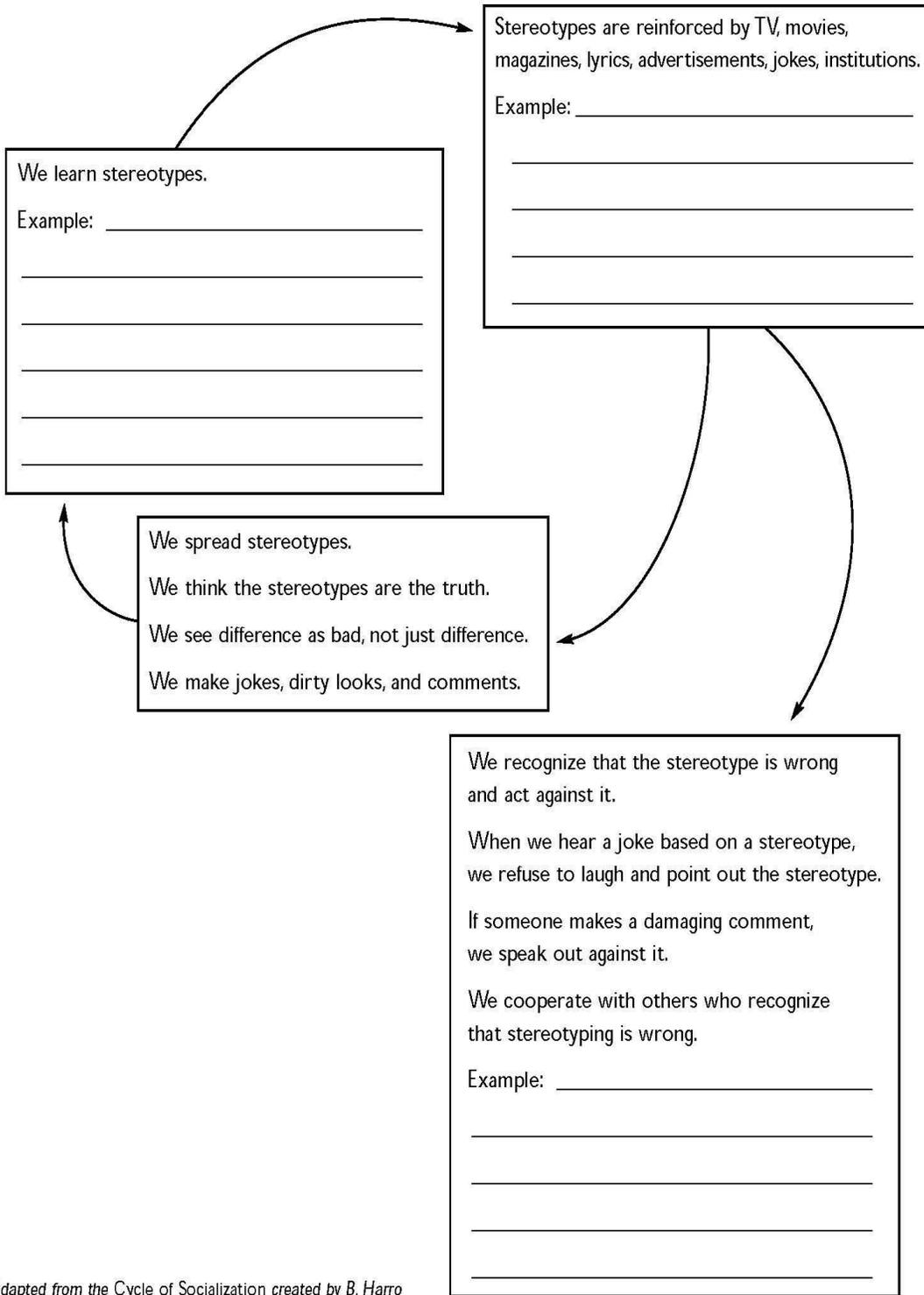
2. What family is similar to yours?

List the similarities:

3. What family makes you wonder something?

4. What do you wonder about them?

Stereotype Reinforcement



Adapted from the Cycle of Socialization created by B. Harro