

DEFINING STEREOTYPES IN POP CULTURE



ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What types of racial stereotypes have been perpetuated by the media, and how have they changed over time?
- How do media portrayals of race influence our attitudes in conscious and unconscious ways?



OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Define racial stereotypes and identify them in familiar texts.
- Observe images and video clips with racial stereotypes and discuss the implications for their uses.
- Write an opinion piece (1–3 paragraphs) that discusses the impact of racial stereotypes.



LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



TIME NEEDED

75–90 minutes



MATERIALS

- Teacher Edition—Vocabulary Planning and Definitions handout
- Media Stereotypes Gallery Images
- Cartoon T-Chart
- Print out or share on smartboard a student writing sample from this link: <https://achievethecore.org/page/1258/argument-opinion-range-of-writing>



VOCABULARY

CONTENT

Stereotype

Intersectional

Offensive

Minstrel Show

Mammy

Animated Cartoons

Pickaninny

Sarcasm

ACADEMIC

Artifact

Analyze

Opinion

Collaborate

Discuss

PROCEDURES

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PART 1

Introduction (30 mins.)

- 1** Begin the lesson by reading the essential questions. Tell students that in this lesson they will be sharing their opinions about racial stereotypes and how they impact the way we see other people. Say: *There will be some images and videos that we view that we will see differently after our discussions. That doesn't make them bad, but it is a cultural artifact and a part of history that we should examine so that we don't repeat the same actions/mistakes.*
- 2** Write the word stereotype so that all students can see it, and ask, "Have you seen this word before, and, if so, what do you think it means?" Ask students to do a quick turn and talk for 1 minute to discuss what they think this word may mean. When the minute is up, ask for a few responses from volunteers.
- 3** Break the word into word parts by meaning (morphemes) and say, *"When we come to words we don't know, often we can find some meaning by breaking the word into word parts. For example, the word biology has two word-parts: bio and logy. Bio means life and logy is the study of something. When we put those together, biology means the study of life. Let's try it with stereotypes. Stereo comes from the Greek word stereos meaning solid and types comes from typos which means impression. When we put those together, we get the meaning, a solid impression. When we make a solid impression about someone (to stereotype), we can think of things about them that may or may not be true. Stereotypes are impressions or thoughts, made about a group of people that are unfair and untrue. They can be dangerous because if someone is stereotyped, they could be prevented from getting a specific job or living in certain neighborhoods, all because they are believed to behave in a certain way. As you walk from station to station in the gallery walk we are about to do, be sure to talk with your group about some of the things that you notice."*

- 4** Students will engage in a gallery walk using the images from the gallery walk handout that has images along with explanations for why these images are harmful to people of color, women, and people with disabilities. Students will discuss in pairs/triads things that they notice. Purpose: The goal is for students to see that stereotyping is intersectional (all related and connected, finding overlap in issues that impact different people) in that it outcasts groups of people and is harmful in their progression and place in society.

PART 2

Content Analysis (30 mins.)

- 4** Once you have come to a consensus on what a stereotype is and how it can be harmful, unfair, and untrue, transition students to cartoons that use racial stereotypes of Black people for entertainment. Students will then write down what they notice and why this has the potential to cause harm using the T-chart handout.

- 5** Say: *The gallery walk activity was a way for you to see examples of how stereotypes are portrayed in the media. Stereotypes also exist in some of the books we read. As we learn more in society about the lives of others, we have fewer instances of racial stereotypes being presented in our books/texts, movies, and TV shows. They still exist, but over time have become less offensive. We are going to watch short video clips from the cartoons Tom and Jerry, Little Black Sambo, and Family Guy. Has anyone heard of these cartoons? (Invite students to share). When the first two cartoons were created in the 1930s and 1940s, fewer people of color had a say in how these cartoons were developed. It is important to see these images and talk about them so that we understand their history and have conversations about how to not repeat these harmful images. The last clip is from a more recent cartoon, Family Guy, which uses images to prove a point about how uncomfortable stereotypes can be and tries to find the humor in each situation. However, there is nothing funny about racial stereotypes, and it's important to see how these images can have an impact on what people believe and how they then treat others based on those beliefs. On the T-charts, I invite you to write down what you notice about the images and how they have the potential to cause harm. You will use these notes to help with your opinion writing piece. We will work on the first one together.*

- 6** Support students by starting with the first example. Before showing the clips, remind students again that these cartoons are offensive and harmful and we are watching them not for enjoyment but to understand why these types of stereotypes are not okay.

NOTE

Your students may not know how to react to some of these clips and may be tempted to laugh to cover discomfort or simply because the cartoons were meant to be funny, even though they are offensive. Don't shame students for any laughter, but talk with them about it and why it is problematic.

- 7** Show “Original Tom and Jerry” clip from 0:00 to 2:10 and then help them with the T-Chart for this first example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiMpnCp8Qbl>
- 8** Show the next two videos and then instruct them to fill out the T-Chart for each example.
- Little Black Sambo (0.00-1.25) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WipeRloNPY>
 - Family Guy (2:44-2:55) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQHUpiDnqDY>

BACKGROUND ON TOM AND JERRY

In the first clip, you notice that there are two brothers instead of the cat and mouse duo that we normally associate Tom and Jerry with. “Tom and Jerry were fictional characters that starred in a series of early sound cartoons produced by the Van Beuren Studios. The series lasted from 1931 to 1933. When Official Films purchased the Van Beuren library in the 1950s, the characters were renamed Dick and Larry to avoid confusion with the famous cat and mouse team of the same name. Today, animation historians refer to the characters as Van Beuren’s Tom and Jerry.” Tom and Jerry (a cat and mouse duo) was created in 1940 by William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, and had many different spin-off series and movies spanning from 1940 to 2021.

BACKGROUND ON FAMILY GUY

Set in Rhode Island, Family Guy, from creators Seth McFarlane and David Zukerman, follows a family of 5 as they use sarcasm to explore different scenarios touching on various issues from racism, sexism, ableism, etc. The adult cartoon comedy began in 1999.

BACKGROUND ON LITTLE BLACK SAMBO

Sambo was a Tamil boy, and the story was allegedly set in the jungles of South India and written by Helen Bannerman. Sambo is depicted as having very dark skin, a large broad nose, and large lips. While set in India and about an Indian protagonist, the illustrations matched what African Americans such as Langston Hughes recognized immediately to be the “pickaninny.” “In *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011), Robin Bernstein writes, “The pickaninny was an imagined, subhuman black juvenile who was typically depicted outdoors, merrily accepting (or even inviting) violence.” (34) In response to the suggestion that Bannerman’s book was nothing more than a simple children’s story, Hughes would cut to the quick of American race relations saying that: Little Black Sambo was “amusing undoubtedly to the white child, but like an unkind word to one who has known too many hurts to enjoy the additional pain of being laughed at.”

PART 3

Writing (30 min)

- 9** Introduce the writing samples to students in groups. They will be using a 3rd-grade text to examine the components of an opinion piece. Have students read the text and point out its different components, then say: *These are exemplars of student writers that wanted to share their opinion about a specific topic. The topic they were writing about was if school should be year-round. As changemakers, we will use our writing to make a difference in the lives of those around us. Our topic is based on the work we did together in class. Your focus question is: **Do you think racial stereotypes are harmful or not?** For the next 3 minutes, before you begin writing, talk with a partner about this question and write down any information from this conversation that you think will help your writing. (Have students share some responses after 3 minutes). I invite you to think about your introduction statement and how you will begin your writing. Next, give examples of why racial stereotypes are or are not harmful. Lastly, close your work with a conclusion statement.*
- 10** Ensure that students have at least 25 minutes to write. Rotate and conference with students who may need additional support.

PART 4

Share/Conclusion (5 min)

- 11** Invite 1-2 students to share their work and encourage the class to give compliments on their work.
- 12** Say: *Today we did amazing work defining the word stereotypes. We engaged in word study and said that the word **stereotype**, based on its word parts, means solid impression. When we make a solid impression about someone (to stereotype), we can think of things about them that may or may not be true. Stereotypes are impressions or thoughts, made about a group of people, that are unfair and untrue. We also examined pictures from books, movies, and tv shows that contained stereotypes of different types of people. While racial stereotypes began with harmful feelings and actions towards people of African heritage, specifically those that are now identified as Black American or African American, many different groups suffer from being stereotyped, and often those stereotypes are connected. Then, we watched cartoon clips from cartoons of the past up to the present and saw how racial stereotypes became harder to immediately spot, but still exist. Finally, you all had enough information to use your opinions to write about racial stereotypes and the harm that they cause. Excellent work today!*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

+ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqID-eZm1ck>



Teacher Edition: Vocabulary Definitions

This document is meant to serve to build teacher knowledge and capacity. Please use the following document to know and understand the vocabulary for this lesson. Review and define these terms before teaching your lesson to help better understand and frame the content. There is also space to add any context necessary for your students.

Word	Definition	Teacher Notes/Context
CONTENT VOCABULARY		
Stereotype		
Intersectional		
Offensive		
Minstrel Show		
Mammy		
Animated Cartoons		
Pickaninny		
Sarcasm		
ACADEMIC VOCABULARY		
Artifact		
Analyze		
Opinion		
Collaborate		
Discussion		



Media Stereotypes Gallery Images



Character Jim Crow was thought to be lazy, silly and unintelligent.



Aunt Jemima, seen on pancake boxes and packages, reminded people of the “mammy” figure from slavery.



Black men are often feared as being dangerous or threatening. This is not true.



Black women are often stereotyped as being angry. This is a misrepresentation of Black women.



Media Stereotypes Gallery Images



American artist Haddon Hubbard "Sunny" Sundblom was best known for his classic Coca Cola illustrations with Santa, but also designed this 1955 advertisement for Aunt Jemima.



From the Disney movie Peter Pan (1953), A portrayal of Indigenous people "in a stereotypical manner" with red skin and exaggerated features.



The cartoon character "Little Black Sambo," shows Black women and children in an unfair and inaccurate way.



Media Stereotypes Gallery Images



Black people are often stereotyped for a love of watermelon and fried chicken.

Origin of stereotype: With the Confederacy's defeat and slavery's end, early Black entrepreneurship was bolstered by women selling their fried chicken and other home-cooked foods to hungry white railroad passengers at train stops. Likewise, watermelon was a cash crop and a token of financial independence for the formerly enslaved. But white Southerners viewed any modicum of Black success as an affront to their own sense of dominance.

For more: Reference this article:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/02/13/opinion/fried-chicken-watermelon-origins-racist-food-stereotypes/>



Cartoon T-Chart

While watching the video clips of cartoons. Write down what you notice in Column A and why this is harmful in Column B.

Column A	Column B
<p>Things that I notice...</p> <p><i>Example: Two men paint their faces Black and begin to speak differently.</i></p>	<p>How does this cause harm?</p> <p><i>Example: It makes it seem like all Black people speak this way. This is not true and can be hurtful.</i></p>