

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

Source

This activity is adapted from the Education Pack “All different – All equal” (Council of Europe 2005).

Themes

- ▶ Social and political context
- ▶ Differences in perspectives
- ▶ Stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination

Other topics addressed: biased perceptions and decision making

Competences addressed

- ▶ Attitudes: tolerance of ambiguity
- ▶ Knowledge of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination
- ▶ Skills: critical thinking

Complexity : Level 1

Group size : any

Time : 30 minutes

Objectives

- ▶ To show how our images of other people influence our interpretation of their behaviour
- ▶ To be aware of how we make up the gaps in our knowledge
- ▶ To be aware of the influence and power that our images have upon other people.

Materials

Pictures related to the theme addressed, paper and pencils for participants.

Preparation

This activity can be preceded by “Man/mouse” to show that although we believe we are seeing the same thing, our perception is biased by preconceptions.

Select a picture that relates to the theme you are addressing in your activity. Cut the picture into two pieces in such a way that each half separately “tells a story”, but which when put together gives a “different story”. Stick the two halves on separate sheets of paper. Make enough copies for one per participant.

Instructions

1. Tell the group that you are going to give each of them a picture and that, individually, they must write down what they think the picture is about, who the characters are, what is happening, where the action is taking place, etc.
2. Give each participant a copy of the first half of the picture and five minutes to think and write their story.
3. Now ask the participants to share what they wrote. If the group is big, this can be done in small groups of 6 to 8 people.
4. Now give out the second half of the picture and ask people to review their impressions of what they have seen.

Debriefing and evaluation

The discussion should provide an analysis of the ways in which we organise and review information. The following questions will help.

- ▶ What did you think the picture was about?

- ▶ Who were the people in the picture?
- ▶ Where were they?
- ▶ What were they doing?
- ▶ Why were they there?
- ▶ What made you imagine these things (rather than other things)? What were your assumptions based on?
- ▶ Did the picture have a different meaning to different members of the group?
- ▶ In what way did your thoughts and perceptions change when you saw the whole picture?

In real life, when something happens or we see only a small part of the “picture”, we nonetheless try to make sense of it.

- ▶ What happens if you then look at it again in a wider context and get a different point of view?
- ▶ Do you change your mind or do you stick to your original position?
- ▶ Why is it hard to be honest about changing our minds?

Tips for facilitators

Try to find pictures or drawings that are appropriate to the group and relevant to their lives or which are about an issue that you want to explore.

Suggestions for follow-up

This activity can be followed by the activity “Alternative narratives”. Understanding how our perception is shaped by the (limited) information we have helps participants understand the relevance of different story types and the importance of bringing alternative narratives into the mainstream.

It can also be followed by “The intercultural history line”, especially if participants come from neighbouring countries in which similar historical events are viewed differently.