

First Impressions, Greetings and Names

Overview

In this activity, students will explore first impressions, focusing on how handshaking and names play a part in first impressions. Students will then participate in a group activity in which they learn something new about one another by sharing personal information about their name.

discuss their names with one another to deepen that first impression, learning about one another's backgrounds.

Grades

Any

Activity Type

Small Groups

Individual

Whole Group

Materials

- Copy of "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", by Maya Angelou (Chapter 16, page105-111) - optional

Duration

45 minutes

Instructions

First Impressions

1. As a warm up, display the following questions for students to consider. Instruct them to fill in their best guess in terms of the numbers.

Consider the following questions and then fill in your best guess:

- a. It takes _____ seconds to make a first impression.
- b. It takes approximately _____ more meetings to change or undo a bad first impression.
- c. _____% of our message is through our body language.
- d. _____% of our message is through our tone.
- e. _____% of our message is through our words.

2. Once students have had time to fill in their thoughts, ask them to share their ideas with the rest of class. For each question, ask students what they thought and why, then give them the correct answer. As the correct answers are shared, ask students what this might mean in terms of their first impressions and the way they communicate.

ANSWER KEY:

- a. It takes 30 seconds to make a first impression.
- b. It takes approximately 20 more meetings to change or undo a bad first impression.
- c. 55% of our message is through our body language.
- d. 38% of our message is through our tone.
- e. 7% of our message is through our words.

Also discuss:

- Why is it important to make a good first impression? At what times in your life might it be most important to make a good first impression? (*beyond making new friends, discuss college applications and job interviews*)
- Based on these statistics, how can you ensure you make a good first impression? What do these statistics tell you about the way our communication is received?
- What do we need to monitor in ourselves to ensure we are not only making a good impression, but also communicating well? (*be aware of your body language and tone, learn good communication skills, etc.*)

3. Ask students:

- We know that our greatest message lies in our body language. When you first meet people, what is customary that involves body language? (*allow students to brainstorm, leading them to the custom of shaking hands*)

Professional Greetings

4. Next, ask two students to volunteer to simply come to the front of the room and shake hands. As soon as their hands touch and shake, tell them to freeze in place and not to move. Allow the class (or a small group of the class) to get up and walk around the frozen handshake image, examining it closer. Ask students to comment on what they see happening with each person in the process of the shake:
 - What do you see?
 - What do you notice about each person's body language? Facial expressions? Energy (are they relaxed, confident, nervous, welcoming, etc.)? Are they making eye contact? Is the shake firm or loose?
 - What do you think the characteristics of a "good" handshake are? (*Discuss the importance of making eye contact, having positive body language (lean in), having a firm handshake (but not painfully so!), maintaining a welcoming, positive facial expression, and radiating positive, confident and relaxed energy.*)
 - Who thinks they could improve this handshake? (Tap one of the students frozen in the image on the shoulder and ask him/her to have a seat. Allow the new volunteer to step into the image as the other student unfreezes. Have them shake again, then again yell freeze and allow students to note improvements made and improvements that may still be needed.)

After discussing, allow students to partner up and practice handshakes. Tell students that each time you yell "switch", they should turn to a new partner nearby and again shake hands, each time practicing a positive, effective handshake.

Note: The Consortium recommends that teachers greet students with a handshake each day as they enter the classroom. Not only does it allow young people to practice an important professional skill, this one-second moment also ensures you have recognized and had a positive interaction with each and every student that you teach. If you are implementing this strategy into your daily routine, now may be an appropriate time to let your students know that you will be greeting them each day because you want them to feel welcome in the classroom.

What's in a Name?

5. Next, move the conversation along by asking:
 - What is the first thing we generally learn about one another, sometimes as we shake hands or even before? (*lead students to the fact that we generally first learn someone's name before we learn much else about them*)
 - What is the purpose of a name? (*allow students to discuss, ensuring they note that names are part of our identity, may be cultural, can be part of our family heritage, etc.*)
 - Is your name important to you? Why?

5. Tell students you want them to think about their name and what they know about it. Explain that in a moment, they will be getting into small groups and sharing their name and what their name means to them. Encourage student thinking by asking them to consider:
 - How did you get your name? Do you know who named you?
 - Were you named after anyone? (a famous person, a family member, etc.)
 - Does your name have cultural or familial significance?
 - Do you like your name? Why or why not?
 - In what ways (if any) do you identify with your name?
 - Do you have a nickname or a middle name? What does this name mean to you?
 - Do you have a story about your name (funny, sentimental, etc.)?

6. Once students have had ample time to think, go over expectations for respectful sharing by allowing groups to brainstorm positive behaviors (i.e. look at the person speaking, smile at them, don't giggle or gossip, make positive comments afterwards, etc.) If there are important areas students do not bring up, facilitate discussion by asking, "No one has mentioned _____. Is that an important expectation for sharing?"

Once you feel students are clear on expectations, divide them into small groups and instruct them to share for 2-3 minutes each about their name and what it means to them.

7. After groups are finished, ask students to debrief what they learned about one another. Ask:
 - What kinds of things did you learn about one another's names and backgrounds? (encourage students to be specific; for example, "I learned that Erin is named after her grandmother, who she loves a lot...")
 - Did you find that you had any thing in common with anyone in your group, regarding your feelings towards your name, family, culture, etc.? Explain.
 - Why do you think names are important to so many people?
 - Why is it so bothersome when someone does not call you by your name; rather, calls you "out of your name" (teases you or disrespects your name)?

Note: It is quite possible that some of your students may not know the origin of their name or who named them due to various possible scenarios. It is important teachers be sensitive to the backgrounds of all students and explain that if they do not know of any significance to their name, it is alright. They should just think about what their name means to them, if they identify with it or not and why, etc.

Respecting Names (optional)

Teacher Note: This section of the activity is optional and recommended for students in 8th grade or higher. It leads students into exploring disrespect and also racism, as it involves a young African American woman whose employer refuses to pronounce her name correctly, and eventually insults her with a racial slur. The excerpt presents a wonderful learning opportunity for students, but it is imperative a class is prepared to deal with such sensitive content respectfully. If the above activities are being used during the first week of school as part of a “get to know you” process, it is advised teachers return to this part of the activity a few weeks later, once classroom expectations of respectful dialogue have been set and students are more comfortable exploring controversial language and issues.

8. Tell students that you are going to read them an excerpt from the book “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou. (Teachers should start reading at the third paragraph of Chapter 16, “Mrs. Viola Cullinan was a plump woman who lived in a three-bedroom house somewhere behind the post office...” (pg. 105) and stop at the end of the chapter.) Explain that in this excerpt, something happens regarding the narrator’s name. Tell students you want them to listen for what happens regarding her name, and to be prepared to discuss after this 10 minute reading.

Before beginning, set up the excerpt by explaining that the narrator, Marguerite, is a young black woman growing up in the 1940s. She had taken a job for an elderly white woman by the name of Mrs. Cullinan as a house keeper. Also preface the reading by warning students that there is some strong language in the passage as well as racial slurs. Remind students that while such disrespectful language may be present in the passage, it is still unacceptable to use such words within the classroom community or beyond. It is important that students explore such disrespect in the safety of a classroom community in order to truly learn; however, ensuring students are prepared to deal with such sensitive content is imperative.

9. After reading the passage aloud, discuss:
 - What did you learn about Marguerite based on the excerpt I read? What happened regarding her name? (Mrs. Cullinan refused to pronounce it correctly, and attempted to rename her Margaret or Mary)
 - Why did it upset Marguerite that her name was being pronounced incorrectly?
 - How do you feel about what Mrs. Cullinan did?
 - Based on this situation, how would you describe and characterize Marguerite?
 - Has anyone purposefully called you out of your name before? How did it make you feel? How would you feel if you were Marguerite?
 - What periods of history have people’s names been disregarded and/or disrespected? (*Holocaust, Slavery, Civil War, Jim Crow, etc.*)

9. Close class by reflecting and discussing:

- Why are names important to each of us?
- Although names are often the first thing we learn about one another, in what ways might they represent deeper meaning and experiences? In what ways might a name reflect a person's family history or culture?
- Why is it important that we respect one another and our names?
- How did this activity deepen your first impressions of one another?

Culminating Activities

- Have students expand this activity by writing a personal narrative regarding their name, expanding on the questions they answered in the group sharing activity.
- Connect this activity to Social Studies and discuss the different ways various cultures greet one another, the history of the handshake, and the various ways names can represent cultures.
- Organize a "Mix It Up" Day at your school, in which students sit with an entirely different group of people at lunch to learn more about one another. Go to <http://www.tolerance.org/teens/about.jsp> for more information.