

# UNIT 1

## Stereotypes and prejudices

What is identity?  
How do I perceive others,  
how do they see me?



### 1.1. How others see a person...

There is more to a person than one might think

### 1.2. How differently a person can be described...

How to get a better picture of a person

### 1.3. Stereotypes and prejudices

Our ideas about other people, groups or countries

### 1.4. Stereotypes about me!

How do I see myself – how do others see me?

## **UNIT 1: Stereotypes and prejudices**

### **What is identity? How do I perceive others, how do they see me?**

Who am I really? Every day, students experience a wide variety of values and ways of living together. In order to find their own position, they need to develop the ability to make choices. What may I do, what mustn't I do? What is right and what is wrong? Children and adolescents soon realise that these questions are not easy to answer. What may be right in one case may be wrong in another. How can I decide? What guidelines do I have?

Two important tools for personal guidance are a country's constitution and its approach to human rights. These are two points of reference which demonstrate the pluralism of values in a society. The most important principle is personal liberty, which allows every individual the right to develop his or her personality, against a background of mutual tolerance and responsibility, thus bringing benefits both for the community in which he or she lives and for mankind as a whole. We may differ widely in our views and interests, provided that we have agreed the rules on how to discuss our disagreements peacefully.

Children and adolescents should know that adults also wrestle with the challenges and demands that they encounter. They should also realise that teachers do not possess the key to absolute truth, but make mistakes and try to learn from them.

This teaching unit deals with some of the questions about the development of a person's identity and how people and groups perceive themselves and others. The students should understand that their identity is defined both by themselves and by their interaction with others. Identity is defined by marking both the differences between individuals and the need to belong to and be protected by the family or a peer group. Young people will understand themselves better if they explore their personal feelings and needs, their personal development and their wishes for the future. They need to experiment with different forms of behaviour, thus expanding their repertoire of interaction with others. They will learn this if they constructively contribute to situations of social interaction.

The social and political history of our country has a strong impact on our lives today. Students should become aware of this influence by regularly collecting information about current issues and discussing them, forming their personal opinions and listening to the opinions of others. They must pay careful attention to views, prejudices and stereotypes that are part of public opinion. A person needs to be aware of these subtle forms of influence in order to counteract them, and to critically reflect on his or her own choices and change them if necessary.

#### **Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights**

Through this series of lessons students will:

- be introduced to concepts of stereotyping and how prejudices are produced;
- realise that we are all constantly ascribing certain qualities to individuals and groups;
- understand that such ascription helps us to cope with the complexity of our daily lives;
- realise that ascription may be harmful and unfair;
- learn that ascription supports the formation of individual and group identities;
- learn that identity is a complex thing, and this means that each person can and must be understood and described differently.

## UNIT 1: Stereotypes and prejudices

### What is identity? How do I perceive others, how do they see me?

Lesson title	Learning objectives	Student tasks	Resources	Method
Lesson 1: How others see a person	The students experience the complexity of views and make their own choices.	The students are assigned specific roles and form their views. They learn how to switch perspectives.	Role descriptions, student handout 1.1 (groups 1-3), large sheets of paper, markers.	Group work
Lesson 2: How differently a person can be described	The students realise that different descriptions may refer to one and the same identity.	The students rehearse and act scenes and present their written work. They discuss the scenes they have seen.	The results of the first lesson become the basic material of the second. The students realise that without their participation and their input, the unit cannot be continued.	Role play, presentations and guided plenary discussion
Lesson 3: Stereotypes and prejudices	The students understand how stereotypes and prejudices are linked and how they may lead to simplified but also unfair views of individuals, groups of people and whole countries.	The students think about their views of others and discuss them in groups.	Blank sheets of paper and markers.	Group work, plenary discussion
Lesson 4: Stereotypes about me!	The students become aware of how they are perceived by others and learn to accept this.  They understand better how others perceive their identity and react to it.	The students describe themselves and each other and they compare their results.	Student handout 1.2.	Work in pairs, plenary discussion

## Background material for teachers

### Stereotypes and prejudices

#### What is a stereotype?

People are often defined as members of groups, depending on their culture, their religious beliefs, their origin or external features such as the colour of their skin, their size, hairstyle or clothing.

Often this definition of groups goes together with assigning specific qualities to people, so that specific images are associated with certain groups. If these images are exaggerated to the extent that they hardly correspond to reality any longer, we call them stereotypes.

Stereotypes can also be found in books (even school textbooks), comics, advertisements or movies. You almost certainly have come across such stereotypes yourself. Think, for example, about the image of African women wearing skirts made of palm leaves, having thick lips and little bones stuck in their noses.

#### From a stereotype to a prejudice

If a person or a group is judged based only on stereotypes and not as an individual or group of individuals, we are dealing with a prejudice. An opinion has been formed about a person or a group without actually knowing them. Such views and ideas most often have nothing to do with reality and they are also often unfavourable or hostile.

#### “Positive” stereotypes

However, there are also positive stereotypes. For example if someone says that black people are fast runners, we can call this a positive stereotype. “Well, what’s wrong with that?” you might think. But in this case people are also being wrongly lumped together. Just think: is it really true that all black people can run fast?

#### What are stereotypes good for?

Prejudices seem to make the world simpler and less complicated. If people meet others who seem to be strange it often gives them a feeling of uneasiness. In such situations, prejudices allow people to conceal their uneasiness – I can pretend that I know everything about the other/s and need not ask any questions. But as a result, from the very beginning, a meaningful encounter and a real understanding have become impossible.

#### What is the effect of prejudices?

Prejudices are offensive. Primarily, they are used to treat someone unfairly. Prejudices deprive people of the opportunity to show who they are and what they are capable of achieving. For example, an employer may not give Turkish applicants a job because he has heard that “they” always come to work late. Some people will cling on to prejudices and populist ideas although they know no one who could confirm these negative views.

#### What can we do against prejudices?

Prejudices die hard and are therefore hard to deal with. But there is no need to lose hope: no one is born with prejudices. They have been learnt and can therefore be unlearned. Before judging a person, ask him or her to explain why he or she has done whatever is under discussion. Remember that you surely would not like being judged without being listened to.