

# SCAPEGOATING

An Activity for Middle School Children

## Rationale:

The purpose of this activity is to examine how stereotyping, prejudice and discriminatory practices can lead to unfairly blaming individuals and groups for events when, in reality, the cause or causes are unclear or when the blame actually belongs elsewhere. This lesson also provides students with an introduction to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

## Part I.

### Understanding the Difference Between Stereotyping, Prejudice, Discrimination and Scapegoating

#### Directions:

1. Write the sentences below, minus the identifying term in parentheses, on a piece of chart paper, an overhead transparency or the chalkboard. Have students identify each statement as an example of stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination.
  - Third graders are all babies. (stereotype)
  - We don't like the third graders. (prejudice)
  - Let's not let the third graders play with us. (discrimination)
2. Review the definitions of the terms stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination with the class and then have students develop examples similar to the ones in Procedure #1. The definitions are as follows:

A **stereotype** is an oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences.

**Prejudice** is pre-judging, making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is based on stereotypes. Prejudice is an attitude.

**Discrimination** is the behavior that can follow prejudicial thinking. Discrimination is the denial of justice and fair treatment in many arenas, including employment, housing and political rights.



When it is clear that students understand how the terms differ, show them the statements below and again have them identify each as an example of stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination:

- All teenagers shoplift. (stereotyping)
  - I don't like teenagers. (prejudice)
  - Teenagers aren't allowed in my store. (discrimination)
3. After students have correctly identified each of the statements, add a fourth statement as follows:
- Teenagers are the reason why prices are so high.
4. Ask students to consider the following questions about the statement, using the following questions:
- What is the underlying assumption in this statement? (e.g., teenagers are to blame for high prices.)
  - How would you determine if this information is accurate?
  - What are some other possible reasons why prices might be high? (e.g., storekeepers want to make a profit.)
  - Do you think it is fair to blame teenagers for high prices without more factual information? Explain your thinking.
  - How might stereotyping lead to blaming?

Write the word "scapegoating" on the chalkboard or on chart paper. Explain that scapegoating is when people unfairly blame a person or a group of people for something when in fact the blame lies elsewhere or when it is uncertain where the blame lies. Saying that teenagers are to blame for high prices is an example of scapegoating.

## Part II.

### A Historical Example of Scapegoating: The Internment of Japanese Americans

#### Directions:

1. Tell students that there are many examples of how scapegoating has taken place throughout history both in the United States and around the world. Among other things, groups of people have been blamed for economic problems, diseases, unemployment, illegal drug problems and wars. One example of how stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory practices against a group of people led to scapegoating was the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Ask students to share the knowledge they have about the



internment of Japanese Americans. Allow a few minutes for sharing then read the following information to the group:

Shortly before 8:00 a.m. on December 7, 1941, Japanese aircraft attacked the naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. By the time the attack was over, a large part of the U.S. Naval Fleet in the Pacific Ocean was lost. The United States immediately declared war on Japan and entered World War II.

Many people in the United States were angry and afraid. They began to worry that if the Japanese would attack Hawaii, they might also be able to attack other cities on the West Coast. Prejudice and discrimination against Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans did not start with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, however. In fact, Japanese Americans had faced discrimination in both employment and education since they began immigrating to the United States in the late 1800s. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the U.S. military was able to pressure the government to suspend many Japanese Americans' Constitutional rights.

2. Using resources like *The Children of Topaz: The Story of a Japanese American Internment Camp* by Michael O. Tunnell and George W. Chilcoat (New York, NY: Holiday House, 1996), show students pictures of internment camps and explain the meaning of the word "internment." Explain to students that because many people were afraid that people of Japanese ancestry were a threat to the United States, they wanted to keep them in an area where they could be watched constantly. Once the government decided to relocate people of Japanese ancestry to internment camps, they were told where and when they were to report and what they were allowed to bring or not bring (e.g., no pets were allowed, people could only bring what they could carry).
3. Have students list what they would take with them if they were suddenly told that they had to leave their homes for an indefinite amount of time and could only take with them what they could carry.
4. Explain to students that there were many factors that led to the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Tell students that you want them to think about the following questions:
  - What were some stereotypes about Japanese Americans that people believed prior to World War II?
  - What were some of the prejudices against Japanese Americans?
  - How was the internment of Japanese Americans an example of discrimination?
  - How did rumors and misinformation create a distrustful attitude toward Japanese Americans following the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

#### Web Site Source

National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)

Contains photographs from various time periods in United States history, including many photographs from the time period of Japanese-American relocation and internment.



- Do you think people felt they had to blame someone for the bombing of Pearl Harbor? Explain your thinking.
  - How were Japanese Americans scapegoated?
5. End this lesson by having students read a book about the internment of Japanese Americans and write one or more diary entries from the perspective of one of the characters in the story.

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Adapted from *A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Anti-Bias Study Guide, Elementary/Intermediate Level* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 2000).

