



Fresh off the Boat: Helping Immigrants and Non-Immigrants Unpack the Stereotypes that Affect their School Experience in America

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Middle and High School ESL, Language Arts and Social Studies Courses

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Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: This curriculum unit addresses the fact that all students, especially immigrant and minority students, face stereotyping in our classrooms. Not only do other students stereotype them, but also they hold stereotypes of others and may be quite unaware of the effects these stereotypes have on their school experience. Teachers, as leaders in the classroom and school, need tools and activities to deal with the sensitive topics of stereotyping and racism. This unit explores research explaining why we stereotype and what to do about it. Activities, readings, videos and projects are described that can be used in many types of classrooms in middle and high school, in content areas such as English, Language Arts, ESL, and Social Studies. Stereotypes about Africa and African immigrants are the focus of some of the research and activities, but most information and activities contained in this unit could pertain to any student. The resources section of the unit contains a list of sources and readings related to stereotypes and immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, among other groups.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 30 students in ESL English and English Language Development classes for 9th to 10th grades.

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Justine H. Busto

Introduction and Rationale

A new school in the United States can be a magical, yet frightening place for recently arrived immigrant students. Sometimes the least of their worries is language. Many American schools are much larger and more technologically equipped than the schools to which immigrant students, especially those from rural areas, are accustomed. Schedules are confusing, classroom norms alien, and food in the cafeteria is mostly unfamiliar. Every new immigrant comes with ideas and dreams about how their new home in the US will be, and every one of them faces the reality that things are never as they imagined. Then add language barriers, gaps in education, the stress of being uprooted from family and friends, and you have students who are upset, scared, excited and stressed out. Any teacher with a heart will recognize the “deer in the headlights” expression of a new immigrant student.

Then, over time, those recently arrived immigrants settle down into the routine and become a part of the fabric of the classroom. If you teach an English as a Second Language (ESL) class, you are lucky in that all of the other students in the room have been through a similar experience and delight in helping newcomers learn the ropes. And non-immigrant students are usually willing to help new students acclimate; everyone has some experience of being in a new school or a new city for the first time. With the help of new friends, the basics of the school routine are deciphered and managed. Now, we can get down to learning, right?

However, there are often more subtle misconceptions and delusions to unpack from the “baggage” that those new immigrants bring to your classroom. Many are learning a new language, but all of them are learning about themselves in relation to a new culture that may be very different from that of their home country. Some ESL students come from countries where almost everyone has the same or very similar racial and cultural background. Others may have lived in countries that are diverse on the whole, but the areas in which they lived might have been predominantly one ethnic group or another. They may have never experienced multi-ethnicity and diversity in the classroom and have no idea how to relate to students who look and behave very differently from themselves. They are overwhelmed by the adjustment to American culture, and in addition must cope with navigating the complicated waters of international relations!

Even for students who do come from multi-ethnic, diverse cultures, they are now on unfamiliar ground. They don't understand the complexity of race relations in the US. They often confuse race, ethnicity, and nationality as they blunder their way into the American melting pot. As an ESL teacher in a large, urban high school, I've experienced numerous collisions of culture, language, stereotypes and misconceptions in my classroom. They can be learning opportunities or they can become major meltdowns. Thorny issues of race, culture, and stereotyping are not unique issues to the ESL classroom. “Racial Literacy,” a term coined by Frances Widdance Twine in her 2010 book, *A White Side of Black Britain: Interracial Intimacy and Racial*

Literacy,¹ is another form of literacy that all students, immigrants and non-immigrants, must develop if we are to have classrooms where dialogue and conversation replace divisiveness and conflict.

This curriculum unit will help teachers explore with their students the stereotypes that affect their school and life experiences, especially focusing on the stereotypes that immigrant students face. These include stereotypes that immigrants have of Americans and people from other countries as well as stereotypes that other immigrants and Americans have of them. Teachers in middle and high school can use the teaching activities to help unpack misconceptions and stereotypes that simmer under the surface of any multi-national/multi-ethnic class. Even classes that are not multi-ethnic face issues around stereotyping. Gender, economic status, sexual orientation, and regional differences are among the other stereotyped identities that teens in any classroom can face. Therefore, the objectives and activities in this curriculum unit will be appropriate for most English, language arts and content area classes in middle and upper grades.

I've chosen Africa and African immigrants as the focus for specific content and examples to flesh out the objectives and strategies of the unit, however the classroom activities are appropriate for all students. In addition, the annotated bibliography lists literature and resources that can be useful and relate to students immigrating from Asia, Latin America, and other parts of the world. Africa is a very large continent, and all immigrants from Africa do not come with the same cultural background. However, all African immigrants, like other immigrants, encounter racial stereotyping and misunderstanding— especially difficult for black Africans due to the complicated history and issues of race and skin color in America.

African immigrants are often blindsided by racial and cultural issues in this country of which they have little awareness, or the awareness they have is based on popular culture and other biased portrayals. As an example, in a case study of obstacles encountered by Somali Bantu refugee students to academic and cultural integration into an urban American high school, authors Roxas and Roy relate that these immigrants

worked to adopt interactional discourse patterns to appear 'tough' or 'gangsta.' These practices were not favored by teachers and only succeeded in further racializing and positioning the Somali Bantu young men in this study in a way that was not always positive within their high schools. Ironically this move by Somali Bantu students did not result in any increase of friendship with African-American students at their school.²

In the case study, the authors relate how teachers in the high school made no attempt to understand the refugee students' backgrounds or find ways to help them assimilate. An opportunity was missed for global awareness and dialogue, a dialogue that might have helped open *all* students in the class to the difficulties created by racial stereotyping. This curriculum unit seeks to give teachers some background and tools to manage situations like the one described in the study, so that more positive outcomes can result.

Census data reported on the American Immigration Council website shows that the African foreign-born population in the US doubled in size between 2000 and 2010 to 1.6 million. The top African countries represented in those figures were Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya and Ghana. American Immigration Council statistics also show that seven out of ten African immigrants speak only English or speak it "very well."³ Given the fact that the numbers of African

immigrants are increasing and that the majority of them speak English well, it is surprising how many misconceptions Americans, even educated Americans, have about Africa and immigrants from Africa. If asked which immigrant group in America has the highest level of education—Asians, Latin Americans, Europeans, or Africans—most people would probably answer “Asian” or “European”, but they would be wrong. African immigrants have the highest overall level of education of all immigrants to the US. They also have a higher level of education than the general population of the US. According to research by the Migration Policy Institute, black African immigrants have a 38 percent rate of four-year college completion, while the overall US population has a 27 percent rate of college completion.⁴

There are countries in Africa where the average level of education is low. Somalia, which has not had a functioning central government since 1991 and has experienced periods of violence and famine, does not have a strong education system. Immigrants coming from countries such as Somalia may have a limited education. But, to assume that all Somalis, or all Africans, are illiterate and living in huts is a grave error and could lead to the untapped potential of many misunderstood students who give up and drop out.

In a searing exploration of the experience of African students in another urban American high school, “Voices of African Students in America: ‘We’re Not From the Jungle’,” Rosemary Traoré describes how crippling the atmosphere of hostility and denigration can be for some newly arrived students.

The African students reported a lack of respect for them as Africans on the part of the Americans, both by the other students and by their teachers. It surprised the African students how little anyone here seems to know about Africa. They get asked the strangest questions. For instance, one student recounted the questions asked her by some Americans. “Do you have houses?” “Do you have cars?”⁵

At the school where Traoré conducted her research, relations between African and African-American students were not positive, and one student described how his teachers allowed stereotypes to be perpetuated. When a student in the class stated “I know that all Africa is a jungle,” no one invited the African students to comment or contribute to the discussion. An African-American Social Studies teacher related to the African students that “he doesn’t cover the subjects of Africa or Africans much in his classes because ‘they sold us into slavery.’”⁶ The African students reported teasing, mocking and physical violence that prevented them from feeling engaged in a quality education. Their experience in the classroom was a far cry from the vibrant hopes and dreams of an American education they had held before they arrived.

Immigrant students coming to America from all parts of the globe face some degree of misunderstanding and stereotyping in our classrooms. After all, to stereotype is human, and no group is free of stereotyping by others and of others. Linda Altman relates the psychology behind stereotypes in her book for young adults, *Racism and Ethnic Bias: Everybody’s Problem*. “Stereotypes grow out of the human need for order and structure. Everybody uses them.”⁷ Her book could be a helpful introduction to the topic in the classroom. A frank and open discussion of stereotypes must begin with the understanding that research in social psychology shows that everyone is guilty of stereotyping. In an article on intergroup relations in multicultural education programs, authors Walter and Cookie Stephan summarize the challenges of mitigating negative elements of group interaction, such as stereotype and racism, which are “deeply embedded in the

history of every society and, without intervention, tend to be replicated across generations.”⁸ In their article, they cite social and cognitive theory explanations of social categorization as “both a natural cognitive process and functional for adaptation in a complex world.”⁹

It is especially important to help new immigrants realize that they *will* encounter stereotyping from other students, both immigrant and non-immigrant, as well as from teachers—and also, just as importantly, from *within themselves*. Sometimes students are disgruntled when others stereotype them, but in their own actions and words they exhibit stereotyping that is just as disturbing toward other groups and can be just as destructive to their own success in school. Teachers need to be aware of how stereotyping and bias can hinder their success as teachers as well. In order to lead a group of students from many parts of the world, and create a classroom and school community that is truly supportive of students from all different backgrounds, teachers must bravely and honestly face their own experience and expression of stereotyping and be willing to listen and learn from their students.

Before teachers can help students have a clearer understanding of stereotypes and how to deal with stereotypes others may have of them, they must explore their own experiences of stereotyping. Take a moment to think back to times you realized others had a pre-conceived notion about you because you were male or female, young or old, white or brown, etc. As I was preparing this curriculum unit, I recalled an embarrassing moment during my two-year stint as an English teacher in Mexico. I was in the school auditorium watching a skit when I realized the student wearing a blonde wig and throwing money all over the stage was supposed to represent an American. As the only blonde US citizen in the room, my face turned red, I laughed, but deep inside I felt a complex mix of indignation and shame. I realized that the “rich American” stereotype was not aimed at me as a specific individual—after all I was earning the same salary as all the Mexican teachers and living a simple, humble life with no extra money to throw around. But I couldn’t help but feel misunderstood and stereotyped. I also realized that after all the years of seeing Mexicans stereotyped in my home country, it was equalizing to see that Mexicans had their own stereotypes of Americans. They were no more enlightened in this instance.

An honest appraisal of the stereotypes you as a teacher hold of the students in your classroom is another pre-requisite to leading an open exploration of stereotypes in your classroom. Before you do the activities listed in the Teaching Activities section of this unit with your students, take some time to assess your own stereotypes of students in the classroom. List each student’s name, gender, national origin, and race. Then write a list of some of your own ideas about people with those identifiers. It is difficult to recognize unconscious stereotypes, of course, but if you take the time to jot down your first thoughts honestly, then when students reveal themselves to you through the activities and class discussions that follow, you will have some idea of where *your* misconceptions intersect reality.

Background

I teach in a large, urban high school with a diverse population originating from 45 different countries and speaking around 40 different languages at home. Our total enrollment of around 1,900 students includes about 150 English Language Learners (ELLs). This school year, my ESL classroom is an international mix of students who have immigrated from Brazil, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nepal, Somalia, Thailand and Vietnam. A local refugee

resettlement agency has recently informed me to expect new students soon from Syria and the Congo. Their families are escaping crisis situations in their home countries and are being resettled in our area.

In addition to international diversity, my school's demographics include 48% African American, 26% white, 15% Hispanic, 6% Asian and 5% other. 57% of the students in my school are economically disadvantaged, as measured by the number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Content Objectives

The first objective of this curriculum unit is to help middle and high school students understand what stereotypes are, how and why they are formed, and how to recognize them. Using stereotypes of Africa and Africans as examples, students from any background can begin to recognize the ubiquitous habit of stereotyping and understand how damaging the habit can be. Curtis Keim, in his book *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, explains that

sometimes we use other people, including Africans, as a mirror. We want to know about them so we can know about ourselves. ...In the case of Africa, we might say that many of us want Africans to be a bit savage so we can feel more satisfied with our own lot in life.¹⁰

He goes on to relate how Africa became a symbol for extreme “otherness”—in both good and bad ways. Keim illustrates many ways in which African difference is conceived and evoked in popular culture as troubled, helpless, unchanging, exotic, sexualized, wise and superior.¹¹ An analysis of children's literature set in West Africa, by Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, reveals a similar list of ways in which the complexity of life in West Africa is oversimplified into easy stereotypes such as primitive, romantic, barbaric and mysterious.¹² Binyavanga Wainaina's humorous article “How to Write about Africa” in *Granta: The Magazine of New Writing* could be used in a high school classroom to illustrate typical stereotypes of Africa. Wainaina describes the oversimplification of Africa with tongue-in-cheek advice to the writer:

Avoid having the African characters laugh, or struggle to educate their kids, or just make do in mundane circumstances. Have them illuminate something about Europe or America in Africa. African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life—but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause.¹³

In literature, movies, TV news and other media, students can find numerous examples of African stereotypes, and the annotated bibliography at the end of this unit lists some resources for classroom use. Teaching activities in this unit will describe how to lead a class through an examination of stereotypes—asking students to look for common stereotypes of Africa and Africans and discuss how those stereotypes could affect the attitudes and interactions that recent immigrants from Africa might face. This discussion can then be used as a springboard for students to identify stereotypes of other groups to which they belong—racial, ethnic, regional, gender, etc.—and stereotypes they harbor of those outside their group.

Another concept that this curriculum unit addresses is the fact that, as Linda Altman states, “one of the reasons stereotypes endure despite their weaknesses is that they often contain a grain

of truth.”¹⁴ In other words, a stereotype may grow out of a small part or truth within a much more complicated story. We can use the example of violence in Africa over the exploitation of mineral resources such as diamonds, or “conflict minerals,” as an illustration. This dominant narrative, repeated and exaggerated by the media and used to fuel numerous action movie scripts, has become part of the popular image of Africa. While based on real situations, the “blood diamond” story has focused on one source of violence while downplaying other problems, such as poverty, marginalization, ethnic exclusion and corruption.¹⁵ Severine Autesserre, in her analysis of dominant narratives about the Congo, makes the point that this tendency to oversimplify a complicated story is partly due to the power of the simple narrative. “Media outlets need to find a story that fits in a few pages, or can be told in a few minutes, and that their audience can easily understand and remember.”¹⁶ Helping students understand that stereotypes often form from a grain of truth, or a simplification of a complicated story, helps to take out some of the sting when the stereotype strikes close to home. The activity “Grain of Truth,” described below, can be used to teach this concept.

The main objective of this curriculum unit is introducing students to the concept that Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie eloquently expresses in her TED talk “The Danger of A Single Story.” In her talk, Adichie relates that “the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.”¹⁷ She describes with authenticity how she discovered within herself the simple narratives she had absorbed about others—poor villagers in her own country of Nigeria and Mexican immigrants in the US—and how those simple narratives narrowed her view of people with those identities. In addition, with humor and wisdom, she relates how she herself has been a victim of the single story, as exemplified by the reaction she received from her roommate when she started college at an American university. The work of any teacher in a multi-ethnic classroom is to counteract the simple narratives, those seen most often by the masses through popular media, with the complex stories of the real world and in literature. Introducing students to a broad range of literature about different areas of the world, and helping them think critically about the stories they have been exposed to, is a starting point for dialogue and discussion about stereotypes. Also, giving students the space to express and share their own stories, in counterpoint to the stories and stereotypes that other students in the class may have about them, is a way to unpack and defuse stereotypes in the classroom.

A final objective of this unit, and a culminating activity of the unit, is making an appropriate, creative response to stereotypes. What good is recognizing that one is stereotyped by others, or holds stereotypes of others, if no dialogue or response to stereotyping follows? To understand how to counteract stereotypes and racial bias, students need to observe how others have responded with wisdom and humor, as in the above-mentioned article by Wainaina and TED talk by Adichie. The culminating activity of the unit springs from a short video, easily found on YouTube, about stereotypes of African men. The teaching activities section describes how to use the video to discuss stereotypes in general and inspire students to counteract stereotypes in particular, those they have experienced based on their own identities, by making a short video modeled on the YouTube video of stereotypes about African men.

Teaching Strategies

Start with Self-Reflection and End with Self-Reflection

Teachers as well as students come to any classroom with conscious and unconscious bias and stereotypes. This is a fact of life, and as discussed above, a result of our natural tendency to create order and simplicity from complex situations. One way to address this tendency, which can lead to serious conflict and misunderstanding, is to take some time at the beginning of the semester or school year to write down existing ideas and opinions about others in the class. Both teachers and students need to do this activity. At the end of the unit or semester, take some time to revisit the statements made at the beginning and compare them to the same statements completed at the end of the activities in the unit. A list of sentence starter/prompts that can be used for this reflection with your students is provided in Appendix II. Most students, when given the opportunity to communicate on a personal level, even with the most basic ESL vocabulary, will find common ground with others who initially seemed very different. Bringing just one or two stereotypes up for air, allowing them to be discussed openly, will help diffuse other stereotypes.

Be Aware of What You Are Fed by the Media—and Laugh at It

Help students think critically about images they are fed by the media, through Facebook posts, movies, television, YouTube videos and other online sources. There is a myriad of videos, some of high quality, on YouTube dealing with stereotypes of almost any identity group imaginable. (There are even some on stereotypes of teachers—yikes!) A list of good videos, in addition to those used in the teaching activities section, is provided in the Additional Reading and Viewing List for Students at the end of this unit. Use these videos as a springboard to energize your class around the topic of stereotypes and how to deal with them in daily life. Rather than cover stereotypes up, highlighting and even laughing at them is a good way to help students work with stereotypes for positive outcomes.

Open Students' Eyes to the Illusion that is Race

In a PBS video titled “Race: The Power of an Illusion,” recent scientific discoveries that topple assumptions about race are revealed. In the video, a dozen students, including African-Americans, Asians and Latinos, sequence and compare their DNA and discover that their closest genetic matches in the group are not always the students from their own “race.”¹⁸ Provide students with the key concept that outward physical attributes such as eye shape and skin color, which society uses to define “race,” do not make anyone more genetically similar to people with the same physical attributes. This helps to dispel the idea of racial or ethnic differences. When students realize that race is not a biological reality, but a social construction, their minds are more open to looking for similarities between identity groups, rather than difference.

The resources section at the end of this unit contains links to the PBS video and the website, newsreal.org, which contains a link to a companion quiz, “The Power of Illusion Race Literacy Quiz.” This online quiz could be used in the classroom as an introduction to the topic of race and stereotyping. The website also contains many resources for teachers such as slide shows, printable worksheets, videos and other materials that could be used to teach an entire unit on

race, racial equality, stereotyping and civil rights issues. This website, based on the PBS video, is an excellent resource set up for educators, especially social studies educators.

Share Unique Stories and Embrace Stereotyped Identities

In his groundbreaking book on identity threat, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*, Claude Steele, a social psychologist and provost of Columbia University, explains and proves through fascinating case studies and scientific research that it is human nature to protect ourselves from the threat of being judged negatively based on a stereotyped identity. And, when faced with situations that really matter to us, our fear of proving a stigmatizing stereotype right will impede our performance on critical tasks, such as exams and sports competitions. Thus, for example, women who are top math students will perform worse on math exams if they are told that women as a group perform worse on the exams than men.¹⁹

In the concluding chapter to his book, Steele explains that unless you remove the threat of negative judgements based on identity, “you won’t succeed in reducing group achievement gaps or in enabling people from different backgrounds to work comfortably and well together.”²⁰ He lists a number of practical ways to reduce stereotype threat in schools and workplaces, and emphasizes that this is an important skill for teachers and leaders to be effective in integrated settings.

However, what Claude Steele does *not* state is that our goal should be a “post-racial” society. He argues for a society that puts “multiple identities forward, using them as a bridge.”²¹ Steele recommends that teachers help students realize the fluidity of identity, and how identities can influence our reactions and behaviors based on situational relevance. He recommends that teachers allow students to affirm their most valued identities and develop narratives about situations in which they face identity threat in order to project positive engagement, a greater sense of belonging and success in the situation.²² Therefore, the strategies employed in this unit are not aimed merely at encouraging students to see how we are “all the same,” as much as exploring how we are all unique and all have stories that should be equally valued.

Respond Creatively

When faced with a situation in which one feels the threat of stereotype, one of the best ways to respond is not with anger or withdrawal, but with creativity, humor and empathy. As discussed earlier, once students realize that to stereotype is human, and that they have stereotyped others, they are more able to respond positively in situations where they are stereotyped. Using videos and humorous writing with examples of how Africa and Africans are stereotyped can be one bridge to help students identify ways that other groups may be stereotyped. When given high-quality examples of creative responses in literature and film, students are inspired to view their own stereotyped identities in a broader perspective.

Classroom Activities

Pre-Assessment and Post-Assessment

Before embarking on a unit of instruction related to stereotypes, teachers and students should take a self-assessment. What are stereotypes? Why are they formed? What are the stereotypes that you feel others have of you? What do you think about people with identities other than your

own? How do you think stereotypes affect your school participation? A sentence-completion exercise is included in Appendix II of this unit that can be used as a pre- and post-assessment.

In addition, I recommend the “Power of Illusion Race Literacy Quiz” online (newsreal.org). It is one of the many resources provided along with the powerful PBS documentary, available online, titled “Race: The Power of an Illusion.” This quiz could also make a good pre-assessment, particularly before viewing the documentary. However, the vocabulary in the quiz would be too difficult for many English Language Learners (ELLs).

What is a Stereotype?

Give students a basic definition of a stereotype and explain that the word “stereotype” originated as the word for a mold that was used to manufacture identical copies of a single object. In 1922, a journalist used the word to describe standard, “cookie-cutter” ideas and images of a particular group of people. Linda Altman gives this background of the word and characteristics of stereotypes in her young adult book *Racism and Ethnic Bias*.²³

Next, show some images or short videos displaying common stereotypes about students, old people, Americans, or other groups. At this point, choose images and videos that would be relatively safe. Age is a good choice because everyone who lives long enough experiences both youth and old age so there is no possibility of any student feeling singled out. In addition, you are probably quite “old” in the eyes of your students, so you can have a little fun as the butt of the stereotype. A listing of good videos I’ve found on YouTube for this purpose is in the Teacher Resource section of this unit.

Let’s Map this Class

Find out what personal identities, particularly those that might be stereotyped, are salient for the students in your class. If you have a class of immigrants, then nationality will probably be prominent. But, other identities such as gender, age, race and religion will be important, too. Model for students, especially ELLs, by sharing your list of personal identities. Also, pull out a world and US map to locate the continents, countries and geographical areas where your students were born and have lived. Find out where they call home and how strongly they identify with their place of birth. This activity helps to raise geographical awareness and increase students’ knowledge of others in the class. Point out that the identity you consider important in one situation might not be as important in another situation. For some people, being a fan of a particular sport could be more important than national identity when in their home country, but national identity might be more important when they are abroad. Ask each student to write down the four or five identities they feel most strongly, especially ones for which they may be stereotyped by others. Then compile a list on the board of all the identities in the class.

After the class has been “mapped” using geographical as well as other identifiers, hand out a copy of the chart included in Appendix III and ask students to complete the first column with five identities they can claim, reserving the first one for the identity “student,” an identity they all share. This will be important as you model the activity. You, the teacher, should have a similar chart, but your chart will have “teacher” written on the first row, in the first column. Then, demonstrate for the students that you will write things you think and questions you have about students on their charts (examples are written into the chart in Appendix III) and they would

write down things they think about teachers on your chart. You might want to put your chart on a document camera and ask students to call out what they would write in each column about your identity as a teacher. You can make it humorous and encourage stereotypes about teachers to surface. Make sure you set the ground rules that no bad language or violence will be expressed on these charts, but that the idea is to express as truthfully as possible the thoughts and stereotypes you have about others in the class. No names will be written on the charts, but each student should have a number written at the top of his or her chart and remember the number so that it can be retrieved at the end of the activity.

Once students have written the five identities they claim on their charts, then the charts are circulated around the room and everyone fills in comments and questions *about all the identities on each chart that do NOT match their own*. So, for example, if I am a Vietnamese girl soccer player, I won't write any comments on any rows of other charts that have Vietnamese, female, or soccer player. But, I will write comments and questions on the rows of another chart that have Italian or male, or tennis player for example.

This chart will serve as a way for students to express the stereotypes they have of others in the class and learn what stereotypes others have of them. They can use this chart to prepare for the "Grain of Truth" activity that follows. The activity does require a certain level of maturity and language ability to be successful. If you have a class with a very low level of either, then a more teacher-directed activity, with a chart similar to the one in Appendix III on the board that the class fills out as a group activity may be more appropriate.

The Grain of Truth

After all the charts are returned to their originators, ask each student to make a chart on a piece of paper with 3 columns. The chart will look like this:

What other people said about my identities:	What parts have a grain of truth? List examples that show these statements have some truth:	What parts are not true and examples I can give that disprove them:

Explain to the students what we mean by "a grain of truth." Use an example from one of the identities you listed to demonstrate.

Students then fill in the chart with information they got from the chart in Appendix III and their own reactions to what others wrote. Also, allow some time for students to answer any of the

questions from the third column of the chart in Appendix III if they would like to respond. Ask students to share things that surprised them, hurt a little, or made them laugh.

This activity serves to raise student awareness of the fact that the problem with stereotypes is not “that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete,” in Nigerian author Adichie’s words. This would be a good point to show the YouTube video of the TED talk by Adichie, “The Danger of A Single Story.” This video is just over 19 minutes long and could spark discussion about how stereotypes form and why they are so universal. It also serves as an excellent example of an eloquent and humorous response to stereotypes. Adichie recognizes that she has been both the one who stereotypes and the one stereotyped.

Stereotype Hunt

Ask students to search online and in magazines or other print media for images of stereotypes about any of their identity groups. Upper level students could read the Wainaina article, “How to Write about Africa,” and find images in the media that support the stereotypes Wainaina exposes. That article, and other literature and media that illustrate stereotypes about Asians, Latinos, and other groups are listed in the Resources section. Students could make a poster or a video montage of images. These images should be collected and saved for use in the culminating activity below.

How are Stereotypes, Race, and Biology Related?

As students explore stereotypes and cultural differences, and how judgements of others are often made based on physical appearance, the question of biology and race may surface. What makes people have different skin color or eye shape? Can we biologically distinguish one race from another? What is the genetic basis of race? The five-minute segment of the video “Race-The Power of Illusion” found on the website of California Newsreel as an excellent introduction to this discussion. The full video is available for digital rental on Vimeo for \$5. A transcript of the video is available online.

In the video, students of various races sequence their DNA and find that other students of the same race are not necessarily more genetically similar to them than students of other races. This serves to point out that “racial differences” and stereotypes are social constructs, not based on biological difference.

Venn Diagrams

Ask students to sit with a partner in the class whom they think is the most different from them. On the outer sections of the diagram, students write all the ways in which they are different from their partner. On the intersecting parts of the diagram, students write all the ways in which they are similar. Students should include the identities they listed in the Let’s Map The Class activity above. Ask students to note any patterns they see in their differences and similarities. Are the differences more about outer appearance? Did they discover anything new about their partners?

Repeat the activity several times, so students have an opportunity to engage with a number of different partners and notice how their identity stereotypes intersect.

Make Creative Responses - Breaking Stereotypes

Now that students have had a chance to know other students in the class better and identify stereotypes they experience in common with others in the class, tell them that they are going to work as individuals and as teams to make creative responses to stereotypes they experience.

For the individual activity, give each student two large pieces of white paper and a marker. Ask students to write on one piece of paper, in large, clear print, a common stereotype about one of their identities. For example, mine might be “I am American, so I love hamburgers.” On the second sheet of paper, students write how they break the stereotype, so my second page would be “I don’t eat hamburgers.” Videotape each student holding up the first sheet of paper for five seconds, tear it up, and then hold up the second sheet of paper for five seconds. There are some good examples of similar videos made by teachers and students on YouTube, under the keyword “stereotypes,” that could be shown as examples and inspiration. If you have access to a movie-making program like iMovie, you can get creative with special effects and have students tear up the second sheet of paper as well, run that video backwards and then connect the two so that it appears that the students first tear up a stereotype and then put the pieces back together to form a new statement about their identity. This idea came from a YouTube video I found titled “I’m Human So I must be Stereotyped.”

Also, you could have some students make stereotype statements that show the “grain of truth.” For example, my Chinese friend might hold up the first page stating that “I am Chinese, so I work in a Chinese restaurant.” The second page could state, “I own a Chinese restaurant, and I’m a bodybuilder!”

Other excellent videos that can be found at the MamaHope.org website and on YouTube can be used to inspire a team effort to make a creative response to stereotypes. A description and link to several of the videos is listed in the Resources section, but the video that would work best for the culminating activity that follows is titled “African Men. Hollywood Stereotypes.” It can easily be found on YouTube and at the MamaHope.org site.

In this short video, under three minutes, a group of young African men ask, “Do you know who we are? If you’ve only seen us in Hollywood movies, this is what you think of us.” Then they list, with increasingly serious and dramatic faces, the common stereotypes as clips from movies show African men shooting machine guns, obsessed with violence, unsmiling, only speaking in one-liners, and ultimately rescued by brave, white protagonists. At the end of the video, they are shown at ball practice, smiling as their real-life identities as medical and business students are displayed onscreen.

Show the “African Men, Hollywood Stereotypes” video to the class and then tell students that they will write a script for a video about an identity of their choosing, hopefully one they share with others in the class. Ask students to form teams that will focus on a common stereotyped identity. For example, in one of my ESL classes, the identifiers might be immigrants, Latinos, Asian students, Ethiopians, Brazilian soccer players. Students could work individually, but encourage them to form teams. Each team should search for images in print, examples of dialogue, samples of music or video that depict stereotypes about the group. Teams can model

their videos on the “African Men” video or creatively reinterpret the theme. They should write and submit a script with a storyboard showing the images or videos they plan to use before they make the videos. If your students follow stereotype, they will have more facility with the technology to create the videos than you! These videos can be shared with other classes and wider audiences, such as teacher training, parent/teacher organizations, and international clubs on campus.

Post Assessment

Finally, remember to revisit the sentence completions from Appendix II at the end of the unit. Ask students to write and reflect on what they have unpacked about the stereotypes they brought to your classroom. Also, share with your students ways in which you have learned from them.

Notes

¹ Blake, Caitrin. “*Teaching Racial Literacy: Concepts and Strategies for Educators*,” posted February 10, 2015 on Concordia Online Education, online.cune.edu/teaching-racial-literacy/ (accessed October 16, 2015).

² Roxas, Kevin, and Laura Roy. 2012. "That's how we roll': A case study of a recently arrived refugee student in an urban high school." *The Urban Review* 44, no. 4: 468-486. *PsycINFO*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 19, 2015), 480.

³ *African Immigration in America: A Demographic Overview*, American Immigration Council, June 28, 2012, immigrationpolicy.org (accessed September 25, 2015).

⁴ Fix, Michael, and Randy Capps. *Young Children of Black Immigrants in America: Changing Flows, Changing Faces*. Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2012, 7.

⁵ Traoré, Rosemary. "Voices of African Students in America: 'We're Not from the Jungle'" *Multicultural Perspectives* 8.2 (2006): 29-34, 30.

⁶ *ibid*, 30.

⁷ Altman, Linda Jacobs. *Racism and Ethnic Bias: Everybody's Problem*. New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2001, 23.

⁸ Walter G. and Cookie W. Stephan. “Intergroup Relations in Multicultural Education Programs,” *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, 2nd ed., editors Banks and Banks, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, 2004, 782.

⁹ *ibid*, 783.

¹⁰ Keim, Curtis A. *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014, 10.

¹¹ *ibid*, chapt. 5.

¹² Yenika-Agbaw, Vivian. “Images of West Africa in Children’s Books: Replacing Old Stereotypes with New Ones?” *The New Advocate*, vol 11, 1998, 203-218.

¹³Binyavanga Wainaina, “How to Write about Africa,” *Granta: The Magazine of New Writing* Vol 92, 2005.

¹⁴ Altman, Linda Jacobs. *Racism and Ethnic Bias: Everybody’s Problem*. New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2001, 23.

¹⁵ Autesserre, Séverine. 2012 “Dangerous tales: Dominant narratives on the Congo and their unintended consequences.” *African Affairs*. III, 443.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, TED talk, “The Danger of a Single Story.”

¹⁸ “*Race: The Power of an Illusion*” documentary video at pbs.org and California Newsreel.

¹⁹ Steele, Claude M. *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010.

²⁰ *ibid*, 215.

²¹ *ibid*, 218

²² *ibid*, 216

²³Altman, Linda Jacobs. *Racism and Ethnic Bias: Everybody’s Problem*. New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2001, 19.

Resources

Materials for Classroom Use

Altman, Linda Jacobs, *Racism and Ethnic Bias: Everybody’s Problem*, New Jersey: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2001. This book, one in a series titled “Teen Issues,” is easy to read, with many illustrations and simplified language, suitable for teens and young adults. It contains chapters on racism, stereotyping, bridging the racial divide, the power of belonging and taking a stand.

Binyavanga Wainaina, “How to Write about Africa,” *Granta: The Magazine of New Writing*, vol 92, 2005. This magazine article would be suitable for a high school class with more advanced readers. It contains tongue-in-cheek advice poking fun at common stereotypes of Africa. It would be useful for teaching about stereotypes, as well as understanding the author’s tone, intended audience and literary technique of sarcasm.

Short Videos on YouTube used in the teaching activities section of this unit:

--Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi TED talk, “The Danger of a Single Story,” relates this famous Nigerian author’s understanding of stereotyping within herself and by others. An excellent video for high school students, but maybe a bit difficult for middle school or newcomer ESL students.
<https://youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg>

--“Stop Stereotyping,” a video published on YouTube in 2013 by “The Mix” at Lambert, produced by Ali Khosravic. This video would be a good introduction to the topic of stereotyping, racism, and bullying for middle or high school, any level of English comprehension. There is no dialogue in the video, only words written on students’ faces depicting the different stereotypes that others have labeled them with.

<https://youtu.be/OuQMBvNi2XQ>

--“Stereotypes of African Men,” a video available on YouTube and on the website MamaHope.org, a nonprofit organization working to empower communities in Africa. The video humorously addresses the issue of African men being depicted only as warlords or victims in Hollywood movies. It could be used as an example video for the culminating activity of this curriculum unit, or as a companion piece for the Wainaina article “How to Write about Africa”.

<https://youtu.be/qSEImEmEjb4>

--“Race: The Power of an Illusion,” several short segments are available on YouTube of this three-part series produced by PBS and available through California Newsreel, published in April 2014. The videos expose misconceptions about race from the standpoints of science, history and social institutions. At the California Newsreel site there are other resources, such as “The Power of Illusion Race Literacy Quiz,” that could be used as a pre-assessment activity. There are also interesting worksheets available to go along with different sections of the video, including one on analyzing fingerprints. The first segment of the video is at this link:

<https://youtu.be/Y8MS6zubIaQ>

Additional Reading and Viewing List for Students

In addition to the sources listed in the section above, the following books and videos would be good for addressing stereotypes or raising awareness about these identities:

Africans

Kamkwamba, William and Mealer, Bryan. *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009. This book tells the true story of a boy in Malawi who taught himself physics and built a windmill that brought running water and electricity to his village. This *New York Times* Bestseller is also available as a children’s book. The adult version would be suitable for middle or high school. The children’s book could be useful for newcomer ELLs.

Lekuton, Joseph Lemasolai. *Growing Up Maasai on the African Savanna*. Carmel, CA: Hampton-Brown, 2003. This is the autobiography of a young Kenyan who grew up as a nomadic Maasai, but also attended school and learned modern Kenyan ways. He eventually earned a scholarship to a university in America and now acts as a translator of culture and language to educate Americans about Kenya and Africa.

African Americans and Latinos

Draper, Sharon M. *Romiette and Julio*. Carmel, CA: Hampton Brown, reprinted with permission of Atheneum Books for Young Readers, Simon & Schuster, 1999. Romiette is an African-American girl and Julio a Mexican-American boy. Their relationship mirrors Shakespeare's famous star-crossed lovers when racism and prejudice threaten their special bond. This is a good novel for teens interested in race relations and stereotyping.

Asians

Yang, Gene Luen and Pien, Lark. *American Born Chinese*. New York: First Second, 2006. This young adult graphic novel chronicles a story of Chinese-American boyhood and how the dominant culture impacts minorities. Written in comic book style, with sophisticated plots and themes, this book will especially appeal to boys.

“Asian Stereotype Police” videos, in several short segments on YouTube, make a humorous response to the typical stereotypes that Asians face in the US. <https://youtu.be/OQPidMfITW0>

Girls

“Always #LikeAGirl” is an inspirational ad that gets viewers to think about how stereotypes affect the self-esteem of young women. People are asked to “run like a girl” or “throw like a girl” in front of the camera and then asked if real girls they know really run or throw like that. Why can’t “run like a girl” mean run to win? <https://youtu.be/XjQBJWYDTs>

Latin Americans

“Latino or Hispanic?” a short BuzzFeed video on YouTube that shows young people from Mexico, Brazil, El Salvador and other countries discussing how they feel about being labeled Latino or Hispanic. <https://youtu.be/KBDGwB50YBY>

Jimenez, Francisco. *Breaking Through*. Carmel, CA: Hampton Brown, reprinted with permission of Houghton Mifflin Co. 2001. Jimenez, whose family left Mexico to do migrant work in the United States, inspires middle and high school students with this autobiography. In school he struggled to complete his education despite the racism he encountered and the exhaustion of long hours in the fields. Jimenez is now a university professor and writer.

Muslim Women

“Muslim Women Making Waves and Breaking Stereotypes” is a short documentary video on YouTube, produced in January 2015, about a 17-year-old Moroccan surfer who doesn’t let stereotypes about Muslim women hold her back. <https://youtu.be/-Jnqc9-80Mg>

Old People

“Break the Stereotype- Elderly Physical Health Promotion” is a short, humorous video on YouTube that shows old folks breaking stereotype as they do gymnastics, dance, and precision-park a car, among other activities. <https://youtu.be/AdH8TKAOPu0>

Bibliography for Teachers

Davis, Bonnie M. *How to Teach Students Who Don't Look Like You*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2012. This is a handbook of culturally responsive teaching strategies. It includes sections on self-reflection, examining racial and cultural identity, working with new immigrant learners, understanding stereotyping and racism, and building relationships with culturally diverse students and their families.

Fox, Dana L. and Short, Kathy G., editors. *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003. This collection of essays explores issues such as the social responsibility of authors to present characters from diverse backgrounds, cultural sensitivity, and the role of literature in educating students from multicultural backgrounds.

Keim, Curtis A. *Mistaking Africa, Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014. This is a good book for the teacher who wants to explore more deeply the topic of stereotypes about Africa and Africans. The author gives historical, psychological and social perspectives on the reasons we mistake Africa and Africans. He also gives helpful suggestions for ways that teachers can help students revise and expand their view of this vast continent.

Okpewho, Isidore, and Nzegwu, Nkiru, editors. *The New Africa Diaspora*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009. This book is for the teacher who wants a deeper knowledge of African migration and how African immigrants struggle, thrive, and respond to their experience of living outside their native lands. The essays in the volume cover a range of topics and perspectives from researchers and professors across a broad range of disciplines, many of them immigrants themselves.

Steele, Claude M. *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Ltd., 2010. The title of this book comes from the story of a young African American man who learns that when walking on the street he can defuse the fears of white people by whistling a Vivaldi tune. Claude Steele, a social psychologist, presents fascinating research on "stereotype threat" and how stereotyping can influence behavior and performance. His book also discusses interventions to reduce the impact of stereotype threat. This book is relevant for any teacher leader, especially those working with students of diverse backgrounds.

Tavangar, Homa Sabet. *Growing Up Global: Raising Children to Be At Home in the World*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2009. This book contains a wealth of information, resources and practical, fun activities for both teachers and parents who want to inspire global awareness and cultural sensitivity in children.

Appendix I: Implementing Teaching Standards

This curriculum unit addresses the following Common Core Standards for the State of North Carolina, English/Language Arts, Grades 6-10, and WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards for grades 9-12:

Common Core Standards Grades 6-8, English/Language Arts, under the cluster Integrating Knowledge and Ideas –

Standard 7. Find similarities across information presented in different formats (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia).

In this curriculum unit, students will view a video of a TED talk by a Nigerian author, watch videos on YouTube depicting creative responses to stereotyping and read a humorous magazine article on stereotypes of Africa. They will find similarities across these different forms of media used to expose and respond to stereotypes.

Standard 8. Determine whether claims in a text are fact or opinion.

In this unit, students will view videos and look for articles in print and other media that depict stereotypes. They evaluate the stereotypes and messages presented to discuss whether those messages contain a grain of truth or not. They will look for bias and opinion versus fact. In this unit, a PBS documentary about the illusion of race—how race is a social construct and not a biological fact—will also help students have a clearer understanding of how popular assumptions and opinion can cloud our understanding of truth.

Common Core Standards Grades 9-10, English/Language Arts, under the cluster Analyze ideas and themes across texts and mediums –

Standard 7. Analyze the representation of a subject or topic in two different artistic mediums (e.g. poetry and illustration) and determine what is present and absent in each.

In this unit, students will analyze representations of stereotyping through various artistic media, including video and literature.

The WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards 2 and 5:

English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies and Language Arts

In this unit, students will use graphic organizers and charts as they engage with peers to communicate information, ideas and concepts around the topic of stereotyping.

Appendix II

A sentence completion pre- and post- assessment is provided below. Teachers may need to modify some of the questions for newcomer students and define some of the words, such as “stereotype,” with examples. This activity should be given at the beginning of the unit and collected. Then, the same sentence completions should be given at the end of the unit and compared. A class discussion or writing assignment could be developed around what students have learned about stereotypes from this unit and what they have learned about the stereotypes that they have of others and others have of them.

Complete the following statements:

1. A stereotype is...
2. An example of a stereotype that other students have of me is...
3. An example of a stereotype that I have of other students is...
4. (For immigrants) Before I came to this country, I thought Americans were...
5. (For non-immigrants) I think people from other countries are...
6. People stereotype others because....
7. People usually think I am.... but I am....
8. People usually think I am.... and that is correct because....
9. People from Asia are...
10. People from Africa are....
11. People from Latin America are....
12. Old people are...
13. Teachers are....
14. A stereotype about teenagers is....
15. If someone stereotypes me, I feel....
16. Stereotypes affect me in school when...
17. One more thing I can say about stereotypes...

Appendix III

5 Identities I claim:	Other people think I am...	Also, others think I may be...	Questions others have about this identity are...
<i>student</i>	<i>-addicted to cell phones -tired in the morning because I stay up too late</i>	<i>- good with technology - not good at having a face-to-face conversation</i>	<i>Why don't you go outside more? Why do you like to look at little screens all the time? Why do you like such awful music?</i>