Lesson 1: Who Are You?

Grades 4 – 8

A person's identity is what makes them who they are. Physical traits, characteristics, traditions and beliefs all help us define ourselves as being the same or different from other individuals or groups. The concept of identity can be interpreted differently; it has both negative and positive dimensions. For instance, group identity can create a sense of belonging, but it can also create divisions (e.g. gender inequity) leading to stigmatization and violation of human rights, as in the case of girls in India who are named "unwanted".[1] In this lesson students will explore the concept of identity and examining naming customs from various cultures and how they influence children's identities.

Students will

- Identify factors that contribute to personal identity
- Describe how identity is influenced by belonging in a group or connection to a community
- Communicate ideas and support opinions

Materials

- Paper and pencil for each student
- Chart paper and markers
- KWL Chart
- World map or globe

Time 75 minutes

Activity 1 – Identifying Identity

Instructions

1. Distribute a sheet of paper to each student. Ask students to write in the centre of the page the first thing that comes to mind in response to the question: Who are you?
2. Ask: What is identity? Record student responses on chart paper.
3. Instruct students to write down four things about themselves anywhere on the page (likes/dislikes, physical traits, groups they belong to, things they are good at, interests, etc.).
4. Holding up their paper, students walk around the room and look for others who have similar information written on their page. Tell students to form groups with several peers who have things in common with them. In their groups ask students to discuss which aspects of their identity fit or don't fit with the group.
5. Instruct students to add to their paper other words or images that describe who they are.

Discussion

- What aspects of your identity did you focus on to form your groups?
- Was it easy or hard to find others with similar identities?

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[1] Source: BBC News South-Asia: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-15414796

- Did being in a group influence what you added to your page afterward? Explain.
- What groups do you belong to? How do they influence who you are?
- Which aspects of identity are we born with and which ones do we choose?
- How can we refine our initial definition of identity?

Extension Activities

- **Create artwork** representing students' identities. Here are a few ideas to get you started:
  Self-Portraits (K – 8) http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/elem/selfport.htm
  Self-Portraits (5 – 8) http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/self_portraits/
  Identity Boxes (K – 8) http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/lessons/grade-6-8/Identity_Boxes.aspx#Instruction
  Metaphor Identity Box (6 – 8) http://youtu.be/amWYt9TxbHE
- **Listen to "Who I am"** by Jessica Adams http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jd9zYKLepCw and identify factors that contribute to her identity. Write a song or poem about the factors that contribute to your identity.

Activity 2 – Behind the Name

Instructions

1. Ask students what comes to mind when they hear the name "Harry Potter"? "Voldmort"? Why do you think having a name is important?
2. Ask students if they know where their name comes from. Draw a KWL chart and list what students know about naming customs from around the world. Share where your own name comes from and what it means.
3. Make a list of things students would like to learn about naming customs.
4. As a whole class or in small groups use the following articles and slideshow to examine naming customs from around the world. Locate the countries on a map.

   Nigeria: The Yoruba people do not name a child until after he or she is born. Then the names are chosen to represent important people or events that occurred at the time of the child's birth.[2]

   Ethiopia: In the Boran culture, when the first boy is born, the family holds a three-day naming ceremony. If the first-born child is a boy, he is named either after a village elder or a famous personality to show greatness.[3] (See link to slideshow in footnotes)

   India: In India some girls are called "Nakusha" which means "unwanted" by parents who would have preferred sons.[4]

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[2]Source: http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/byrnes-africa/anijen/background
[3] Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/05/africa_ethiopian_naming_ceremony/html/1.stm

[4] Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-15414796

5. Ask students to write a few sentences about what they learned or what stood out as being interesting. Have students share their sentences with the class as they add them to the third column of the KWL chart.

Discussion

- Explain if you think the naming customs examined are fair. What would you change?
- How do names influence our identity (both positively and negatively)?
- Will changing your name change your identity?
- How are these naming customs similar to or different from how you got your name (students may need to do the extension activity *Behind the Name* before answering this question.

Extension Activities

- **The Day I Was Born**: Have students research and create a multi-media presentation, collage or time capsule about interesting things that happened on the day they were born (e.g. important events and people in the news, most popular movie or T.V. show, celebrities, etc.). In the tradition of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, ask students to re-name themselves after an important event or person from the year they were born. Ask students to explain their choice.
- **Behind the Name**: Have students present the story behind their name to the class. Students may interview a parent or guardian and conduct Internet research to find out the story and meaning behind their names. Use the following sites to have students research the meanings of their names: http://www.20000-names.com/, http://www.behindthename.com/,
- **In the Name of Art**: Here are some fun activities for creating artwork about names: http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/Files/names.htm