



LESSON PLANS ON AGING ISSUES:
Creative Ways to Meet Social Studies Standards

Participation in Government
STEREOTYPES AND AGEISM

Ithaca College Gerontology Institute
www.ithaca.edu/aging/schools

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Participation in Government

Stereotypes and Ageism

Introduction

People of all ages commonly hold negative attitudes about aging. This lesson introduces the study of aging by having students examine their own stereotypes about older people. Students think about their own grandparents or other older adults in their lives. Finally, they consider the similarities between the lives of teenagers and the lives of older people.

Objectives

Students will:

- Recognize stereotypes they might have toward older people
- Recognize that teenagers too are stereotyped
- Recognize pervasive negative attitudes about growing old
- Consider the similarities between the situations of teenagers and older people
- Recognize ageist thinking in society and in themselves

Materials

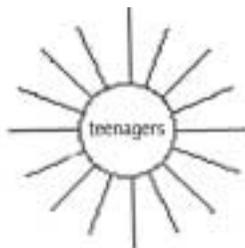
Handout: Life Changes - Similarities between Young and Old

Key Terms

stereotype, ageism, prejudice, discrimination

Lesson Steps

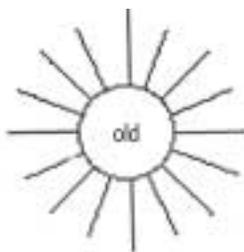
1. Draw a large circle on the board with the word *teenagers* in the center. Draw lines coming from the outside of the circle. (The use of circles generally elicits more varied responses than simple lists.)



2. Ask the class: “When you hear, see or think the word *teenagers*, what other words come to mind?” Write the word associations on the lines around the circle as students respond out loud. Common word associations are: wild, silly, fun seeking, active, crazy and inexperienced.

Adapted from *Schools in an Aging Society: Social Studies Classroom Activities for Secondary Schools*, State of Connecticut, Department of Education and Department on Aging, 1992.

3. After two or three minutes of word associations, discuss the following:
 - What do you notice about attitudes toward young people?
 - In what situations have you felt people prejudge you because of your age?
 - How have negative attitudes affected how you feel or what you do?
 - How have positive attitudes about young people helped you?
4. Introduce the concept of ageism – a form of discrimination that relegates people to an inferior or limited position simply because of age. Discussion: have you ever experienced or known anyone who experienced prejudice or discrimination based on age? (Possible occasions for age discrimination are when applying for a job, renting an apartment, or trying to participate in an activity intended for another age group.)
5. Repeat the circle association in step 1 – only this time use the word *old* instead of teenagers. Common word associations are lonely, sick, retired, weak, depressing, wise, gray and wrinkled.



6. After two or three minutes of word associations, discuss attitudes toward older people. What kind of negative and positive connotations does the word *old* have?
7. Ten-minute free write on the following questions:
 - How do you perceive your grandparents?
 - Do they fit the stereotypes listed on the board?
 - How do your grandparents perceive you?
 - Do you fit the stereotypes listed on the board?

NOTE: Some students may not have grandparents; for these cases, revise the questions, e.g., how do you perceive an older adult you know? Ask for volunteers to share what they wrote.

8. Homework assignment: Review the handout chart “Life Changes - Similarities Between Young and Old”. Write a paragraph summarizing the similarities. Try to think of other similarities not already on the chart.

Extension Activities

The following are additional questions for writing assignments, group problem-solving activities or class discussions.

- Discuss how ageism differs from racism and sexism. Point out that we will never know what it is like to be a different gender or a different race. We hope, however, that we will all know what it is like to be old.
- Old is a relative measure of time, yet it conveys strong, mostly negative impressions. How might these attitudes about old affect one's attitudes about growing old? About being with older people?
- How might negative attitudes about aging influence public policy, health careers and social programs for older people?

Life Changes - Similarities Between Young and Old

Younger and older people face similar social, physical, and economic pressures.

<u>Category</u>	<u>Teenagers/Young Adults</u>	<u>Older Adults</u>
Transportation	Getting permission to drive; Higher insurance rates	Told they should not drive; Higher insurance rates
Work	Told they are too young, too inexperienced	Told they are too old, too experienced, unfamiliar with new technology
Companionship	Single; dating issues	Single (widowed); dating issues
Income	Low-paying jobs	No income from earnings
Sex	Told they are too young	Told they are too old
Drugs	Use of “recreational” drugs	Misuse of prescription or over the counter drugs
Housing	Moving away from home; Have to live with parents for economic reasons	Moving to smaller place; Have to live with adult children for economic and health reasons
Friends	Friends moving away	Friends moving away or dying
Dependency	Parents tell them what to do	Adult children tell them what to do
Aging	Physical changes related to age	Physical changes related to age
Emotions	Occasional depression, feelings of hopelessness, sometimes leading to suicide	Occasional depression, feelings of hopelessness, sometimes leading to suicide
Time	Try to find meaningful ways to use time during school years	Try to find meaningful ways to use time during retirement years

From Couper, D. and Pratt, F., *Learning for Longer Life*, National Academy for Teaching and Learning about Aging, 1999.