

THE UN-COMMON DENOMINATOR¹

Age: all
Grade: all

WHAT IS IT?

Students interview each other in order to discover their differences. Through this exercise students can have a better understanding of the multiples ways in which people are different

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Diversity is a fact of public life. However, we sometimes are too limited in how we see differences. This exercise helps your group investigate the multiple dimensions of differences within the group.

WHEN IS THIS USEFUL? Early in PA

MATERIALS: none

CORE CONCEPTS: public, diversity, self-interests

SKILLS: interviewing, active listening, having an open mind

ACTIVITIES / STEPS:

- A. Introduce students to concepts of public and private. A good way to start is to have students list public and private places. Come up with working definitions of public and private.
- B. Introduce idea that there can be public and private relationships.
- C. Group students in pairs (if there are age, racial, gender differences—try to match students in ways that highlights perceptible differences)
- D. Instruct students to interview each other, the goal is to find as many differences as you can in how you view things. Make sure to remember to write down differences (20 minutes/ 10 minutes per person)
 - a. Hints:
 - i. Remember that these are public interviews. You want to find out what is important to your partner and how they are different from you, but don't dig for private secrets.
 - ii. Avoid asking yes or no questions, or if you ask them, follow them up with a why.
 - iii. Build on what your interviewee has already said (this means paying attention to what she or he has said).

¹ Adapted from Melissa Bass, *Making the Rules*.

- iv. Don't allow much empty time—ask questions to keep the conversation flowing.
- b. Sample questions: what music do you like? What makes you angry? What places would you like to visit? How do you like to spend your time? Where were you born? What is your favorite (and least favorite) subject in school?
- E. *Optional:* Gather in group, have each person in pair introduce the other (2 minutes per person).
- F. Have group discussion—see reflection questions.

EVALUATION:

1. Was it harder to answer or ask questions? Why?
2. Were you surprised about any of the similarities and differences that you and your partner had? Which one? Why?
3. Which differences would be important if you were working together on a project? Why? Which would not matter?
4. What did you learn about other students in the class/group?
5. Did any of the questions you were asked feel “too personal”? Where does public information end and private information begin?