

Lesson 25

What is Implicit Bias?

OBJECTIVES:

- Learn about implicit, or unconscious, bias
- Apply knowledge of brain science to help address bias
- Engage students in mindfulness
- Practice kindness
- Assign new Peace Partners

PREPARATION:

- Review lesson
- Video: [Verna Myers: How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them, TED Talk Dec 15, 2014.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYyvbglNZkQ)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYyvbglNZkQ>
- For the class, prepare to watch just a clip of the video from 4:25-5:35
- Your Peace Partners list
- Optional: bell or chime
- Optional: student journals

In the last lesson we talked discrimination based on conscious bias and prejudice. Today we'll be learning about implicit bias, sometimes called unconscious bias. When it comes to how we think about other people, it is important to try to notice our implicit biases and then decide whether they reflect our values. Mindfulness can help us to notice that our thoughts, including our biases about other people, are just thoughts, not facts. If we can notice that we have biases, we can take some time to decide if we actually believe them or not.

Racist or sexist actions are examples of acting on these biases, either explicit or implicit. These are challenging things to talk about and **it is important to assure our students that recognizing that you have a bias against someone, perhaps because of the way you were raised or the influence of the media, does not make you a racist.**

In her book, *The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias*, social psychologist Dr. Dolly Chugh writes about the need to let go of the "Good Person/Bad Person binary." She argues that it is more productive to see

ourselves and others as people who can be in the process of learning at all times, and when we know better, we do better.

“Recognizing our bias doesn’t make us racist but it can make us anti-racist.”

Dolly Chugh, author of *The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias*

We all have biases. Throughout the next few lessons, please communicate to your students that it is important for us to talk about our biases and try to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Remembering the community agreements you created in Week 1 can help. If we don’t recognize and talk about our biases, we can’t overcome them.

Background watching: To prepare for this class, watch the entire Verna Myers TED Talk. [Verna Myers: How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them](#)

Background reading: Rhonda Magee offers this helpful explanation for why we teach mindfulness as the foundation for addressing implicit bias. “How Mindfulness Can Defeat Racial Bias”. Greater Good Magazine, May 14, 2015.

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_mindfulness_can_defeat_racial_bias

Introduction

You might say: *Last week we learned about discrimination caused by conscious or explicit bias. Today we’ll be learning about something called implicit bias, also called unconscious bias. We all have bias - it’s part of being human. What we’re here to do is explore what our biases are and decide which ones align with our values and which ones don’t. We can see which of our biases aren’t helpful and might even be harmful. Mindfulness can help you do this for yourself.*

We’ll be practicing mindfulness first and then we’ll watch some videos that will help us to notice how we think about other people and whether we are aware of why we think about others in certain ways.

Review Community Agreements:

- Review the Community Agreements from Week 1.
- Identify any agreements you want to revise or reframe.

Mindfulness Practice

Invite today’s Mindfulness Leader(s) (ML) to come to the front of the class.

Prompt the ML to say: “Let’s sit up a little straighter. Close your eyes or look down into your lap. Let’s take 3 deep breaths.”

Repeat Remote Control Breathing practice from Lesson 8.

When you notice that your focus has wandered away from your breathing, notice if you are thinking about something that happened in the past or the future, or whether it is about something that is happening right now.

Bring your mind back to your breathing. You might want to try counting your breaths to help you.

After a few moments, say: *Now take one more deep breath in and out.*

Optional: Ask ML to ring the bell.

Ask students to open their eyes and/or look up when they are ready.

Cue the ML to return to their seat(s).

Stereotypes and Bias

You might introduce this lesson by saying: *Let’s review what we learned last time about stereotypes. A few lessons ago, we defined stereotypes as “a widely held belief about a group of people that may be true for some of them but is definitely not true for all of them.”*

We can also think about stereotypes as our expectations about how people will act based upon the group they belong to. Last week we learned about how stereotypes can make people feel like they must act a certain way based on their gender. We talked about how some people feel that it is ok to bully people who do not conform to gender stereotypes. We talked about how gender stereotypes can be harmful to everyone.

Ask: Did you notice any examples of gender stereotypes this week, maybe even some that you hadn’t noticed before?

Take a few answers.

Say: Today we are going to explore another term: implicit, or unconscious, bias

You might say: Sometimes we perceive people as different and have negative feelings about them without even realizing it. This is called implicit or unconscious bias. Everybody has this kind of bias. This bias can come from stereotypes that we hear about from our families or friends, or from commercials we see, or from movies, books, tv shows, and other places.

Having biases is part of being human.

Sometimes our biases can be a way of protecting us. Do you remember learning about the Negativity Bias? (See Lesson 9) The Negativity Bias is the tendency of our brains to remember bad things that happen to us more than good things; it is a way of keeping us safe. If you burn your hand on a hot stove or a coffee pot your brain will remember that so that you don't do it again. That is a helpful and important bias, most of the time.

Can you think of other ways that your Negativity Bias could help you?

Take a few responses.

Sometimes our Negativity Bias can make us think things that aren't true. What if you get bitten or chased by a dog? Your Negativity Bias might want you to think: "All dogs are dangerous and bad." But that isn't true. It is true that you will get burned if you touch a hot stove, but it is not true that you will get hurt by every dog you meet.

We need to notice that sometimes our Negativity Bias is trying to help us avoid harm when we're not actually in danger. In these situations, the Negativity Bias is not helpful and we need to consciously override the feeling that we are in danger with facts and experiences that counteract it. If we don't, we may take actions that are not in our best interest, or might even be harmful to others.

We can have these same kinds of biases when it comes to people. We noticed in the Gender Stereotypes Lesson that we have a lot of unhelpful or limited ideas about what it means to be a boy or a girl. Most of us don't even notice that we have these biases until they are pointed out to us. When we don't realize we have biases, they are called implicit or unconscious biases.

When it comes to how we think about other people, it is important to try to notice our unconscious biases and then decide whether we agree with what we are thinking.



Once we really think about these ideas that we have, we can decide if we want to change them. **Mindfulness helps us to notice that our thoughts and biases are just thoughts, not facts.** If we can notice that we have biases, then we can take some time to decide if we actually believe them or not.

NOTE: This might be a good moment to take a quick Mindful Moment - just three deep breaths - before moving on. Use this pause whenever you feel it would be helpful.

Reflect and Discuss

Share this quote and give a little background about James Baldwin. Baldwin, an African American man, was a famous writer, poet, essayist, playwright, and activist.

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

— James Baldwin

Say: Before we discuss the quote, I just want to remind us that it is not our fault that we have these unconscious biases or hold these stereotypes in our minds. We didn't choose them and we didn't make them up. We learned them just by watching tv, movies, reading books, playing video games or listening to our friends and family. Most of the time, we don't even realize that we have them.

Noticing that you have these implicit or unconscious biases does not make you a bad person and does not make you a racist. But it's important to notice them, or face them, as Baldwin says, so that we can change them if they don't line up with our values.

Discuss:

- What do you think this quote means?
- What does it mean to "face" things?
- Why can't we change things if we don't face them?
- What does this have to do with implicit bias?

Say: Now we're going to watch a clip from a video in which Verna Myers, an expert in equity, diversity and bias, talks about her own implicit or unconscious bias.

Cue the video to start at 4:25 and stop at 5:43.

[Verna Myers: How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them](#)

Discuss:

- What was the bias that she noticed while she was flying?
- Where do you think this bias came from ?
- Is there a stereotype at work here?
- Did her bias against a woman pilot line up with her beliefs about women's abilities?
- Can you think of an example of bias that you may have noticed in yourself?

Action for the week:

Once again this week, ask students to try to notice any stereotypes that they are aware of, especially ones that they hadn't noticed before. Also ask them to try to notice their own biases.

Peace Partners

Give students time to share what they did for the Peace Partners.

Assign new Peace Partners. Remind your students that their job is to do at least one kind thing for their Peace Partner this week.

Closing words: *Okay, our time is up for today. Thank you for a great class, everyone.*

Optional: *Let's have a nice quiet moment for the bell. If you want to, you can close your eyes, picture your new Peace Partner, and imagine yourself doing something kind for them this week.*