



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 8 and 10
About the Author: MediaSmarts
Duration: 1 hour

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Scapegoating and Othering



This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

Overview

In this lesson, students develop a deeper understanding of scapegoating and othering and how these factors may contribute to the promotion of hatred and intolerance. Through group and class discussions of various scenarios and a perspective-taking exercise students will develop the necessary critical thinking skills to recognize and respond to such incidents when they are encountered.

Learning Outcomes

Students will learn:

- what scapegoating and othering are and how these affect individuals and groups
- how to recognize both the subtle and more blatant ways in which hatred and intolerance are promoted through scapegoating or othering
- to articulate their own attitudes towards scapegoating and othering
- ways to respond to scapegoating and othering
- how to critically evaluate information
- the relationship between attitudes and discriminatory behaviour
- the difference between fact and opinion
- that what they read, see or hear in the media, should not be taken at face value

Preparation and Materials

- Print copies of the two *Scenario* worksheets to be handed out for the group activity (one per group, evenly distributed)
- Print copies of the *Points of View* assignment sheet
- Review the [Unpacking Privilege](#) mini-lesson
- Review the teacher backgrounder [Complicated Conversations in the Classroom](#)
- *Optional:* Send home the parent tip sheet [Talking to Kids About Hate Online](#)

Procedure

Start by dividing the class into groups and assign each group one of the two scenario worksheets (making sure an equal number of groups are tackling either scenario). Have students work together to fill out the questionnaire for the scenario their group has received.

Once the students have completed their questionnaires, bring them together so that they can present and discuss their findings as a class. Be prepared to talk through any points they may have missed or to clarify and expand on information as needed. If they feel comfortable doing so, give students some time to discuss their own experiences and observations relating to scapegoating and othering.

Discussion points for Scenario One

- 1) This scenario is an example of “scapegoating”. Based on the way this scenario played out, how would you describe scapegoating?

Based on how this scenario played out, scapegoating might be defined as assigning blame to a given individual, group, or circumstance in order to absolve a larger group or individual of responsibility/culpability for an unwanted occurrence. (That was in this case the team losing the game.)

- 2) How did the different group members come up with reasons to justify scapegoating GrumpySmurf? (In other words, how did they tell themselves it was okay to scapegoat them?)

Because the only thing they knew about GrumpySmurf was their gamertag, the group members tried to find reasons why that justified scapegoating them: suggesting it meant GrumpySmurf didn't take the game seriously, or was too young to play, or too old to play well.

- 3) In what ways does scapegoating the new player make the group members feel better or more secure?

It explained a difficult question (why they lost the match) and kept the group together. By placing the blame on the outsider in the group, the five actual friends don't have to put stress on their relationship by discussing each others' failings in the match. This protects their egos from being bruised and strengthens the group's identity by giving them someone else to blame their problems on.

- 4) Despite the social benefit of using scapegoating to protect the friends' egos and their friendship, how does this actually hinder things for them?

Because they rely on scapegoating, they aren't able to honestly discuss the real issues that are causing them to lose their matches, so they won't be able to improve their game. Another thing to consider is that scapegoating is a cycle. The next time these friends play together and lose, they will need to find a new target on which to focus their frustration. If they do not have an outsider on their team, they will have to turn on one of their own which will cause problems in their friendship.

- 5) Assuming that scapegoating is a behaviour that cultural groups are always in danger of resorting to, what would be a better way for these friends to approach such situations in the future?

It is important to recognize the tendency for group mentalities to lean towards scapegoating behaviour so that it can be stopped before it happens. If the friends stepped back and honestly looked at the situation, they would see that the match was a group effort and that all members contributed to the outcome of the game they played.

- 6) Now that we've seen an example of scapegoating in a small group, can you think of some examples in larger social groups either locally, nationally or globally?

Some examples may include: blaming immigrants for social problems, blaming LGBTQ+ groups for the spread of HIV/AIDS in straight communities; blaming working women for the breakdown of family values; blaming specific religious groups for global violence and terrorism. All of these are highly complex social issues that cannot be attributed to one specific cause. Scapegoating ignores the wide range of factors that are involved in bringing about various social problems.

Discussion points for Scenario 2

- 1) This scenario is an example of “othering”. Based on the way this scenario played out, how would you describe othering?

When othering takes place, certain groups are seen as being all the same, and that all members of the group have the same negative traits. This is used to establish a need to take action against them: as one scholar of extremism put it, “if the essence is bad, there is nothing to be done—negotiation and education can no more make a difference than negotiation or education can make a difference in the essence of a tiger. If tigers threaten us and hurt us, all tigers are targets. In this scenario the teenagers are treated by the shopkeeper with suspicion and as second-class citizens as compared to adult customers. The shopkeeper justifies his actions based on the belief that all teenagers are thieves who are generally ‘up to no good’.

- 2) Based on the scenario, in what ways might othering the teenagers make the shopkeeper feel safer or more in control?

Because he has such an irrational dislike of teenagers, he may also feel more confident or comfortable simply because there are fewer teens in his store at one time to keep an eye on. By only scrutinizing teenagers in this way, the shopkeeper manages to avoid alienating those customers he sees as more legitimate (adults). By kicking anyone who argues with him out of the store, the shopkeeper doesn't have to question whether or not his belief are right.

- 3) Despite the possible “benefits” to the shopkeeper, in what way does his approach actually harm him?

The shopkeeper may be alienating a demographic with a large amount of disposable income. By targeting a group arbitrarily, the shopkeeper isn't actually reducing the number of thieves in his store, he is merely reducing the number of customers. The shopkeeper may erroneously believe he has solved his problem and then stop trying to find out who was stealing from him. The teenagers he bans from his store have friends and parents who may decide to shop elsewhere in the future.

- 4) Assuming that othering is a fairly common practice among people, what would be a better way for the shopkeeper to deal with his problem?

Alternative solutions might include getting more accurate information about who is actually causing problems in the store, dealing with individuals that cause problems instead of stereotyping a whole group, and finding compromises about some of the things that bother the shopkeeper—for example, asking teens to put headphones on instead of listening to their music out loud.

- 5) Now that we've seen an example of othering, can you think of other local, national or global examples?

Othering is a common form of intolerance that is particularly insidious in its ability to spread throughout social groups. Students might suggest historical examples, such as the marginalization of Jews in Germany prior to the Second World War, or they might talk about segregation in the United States or Canada's internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. Societal attitudes towards people with a mental illness might also be another example. (You can also remind students that in the real world, while teenagers are often 'othered' or 'scapegoated' in places like stores, that is not applied equally—teens who are also members of certain traditionally disadvantaged groups, such as Black teens, face more suspicion and surveillance than White teens.)

As a class, have students develop a concise definition of scapegoating and othering and record this on the board.

Scapegoating:

Elements to include:

- The blame to a given individual, group, or circumstance is undeserved.
- Scapegoating is used to absolve a larger group or individual of responsibility for an unwanted occurrence.
- Scapegoats are often objects of *irrational* hostility.

Othering:

Elements to include:

- The group that has been designated as other does not reflect an *actual* group as it exists in reality, but is instead a fiction created to solidify the identity and superiority of the in-group and to justify its existence and its actions.
- Groups that are designated as being other are portrayed as being both inferior and threatening.
- All members of the group being othered are believed to share a set of intrinsic negative characteristics that make them what they are.
- Once they have come up with a definition, ask students: How is scapegoating connected to othering?

Explain to students that the combined effect of scapegoating and othering is *dehumanization*—when we 'other' and blame a group to the point where we see them as inhuman and dangerous, and as a result doing bad things to them is not only seen as justified but actively good.

Now ask students: based on the scenarios they read and the definitions they developed:

Why do scapegoating and othering seem attractive? (They strengthen the group identity, and make you feel more secure as part of the group. They let you blame your problems on other people and help you feel more in control because you have an identifiable 'enemy'.)

In what situations might people be more likely to engage in scapegoating and othering? (When they feel like the world is out of their control; when they feel like they're lost or didn't get something they feel they are owed; when they feel that they, or their group, is under attack; when they encounter a group that feels very different to their own. For example, the gaming group fell into scapegoating because they felt embarrassed about losing a game they expected to win. Because of this, while anyone can fall into scapegoating and othering, people who have historically had more advantages — men, White people, heterosexuals, etc.—are more likely to do so because other groups' gains can feel like losses to them.)

If students have difficulty with the idea that some groups are more advantaged than others, take a few minutes to do the [Unpacking Privilege](#) mini-lesson.

Why might some people or groups *encourage* scapegoating and othering? (*It can build support for their group; they can direct other people's anger at a group they see as an enemy; they can make money by getting people to donate money or buy things that 'defend' their group against the 'enemy'.*)

Assessment/Evaluation Activity: Points of View

Explain to students that the best way to avoid and prevent scapegoating and othering is through *perspective-taking* — looking at things from another person's point of view and imagining how they feel. Doing this makes it a lot harder to see a whole group as all being the same and helps us focus on the ways in which people are similar, while still respecting the things that make our cultures and ourselves distinct and unique.

Tell students that they are going to write three paragraphs based on one of the scenarios:

The first paragraph will be written from the point of view of one of the people engaged in scapegoating or othering (either one of the group members from scenario one or the shopkeeper from scenario two) and will retell the story from their perspective.

The second paragraph will be written from the point of view of the person who experienced scapegoating or othering (the new player in scenario one, or a teen in scenario two).

These first two paragraphs will be written in the first person (the "I" voice) and will focus on how the experience *felt* for the characters.

The third paragraph will be written in the third person (the "he, she or they" voice) and will show how the characters from the first paragraph could fix or avoid scapegoating or othering in the future.

Scenario One

A group of five friends and one random player are playing a ranked co-op match in a multiplayer online game. The team is made up of a diverse group of players. They usually get high scores in matches and some members of the group take a lot of pride in doing well.

Roger has been playing these games for years and he's pretty good at it. He usually plays with a more elite group, but he has decided to play with his real life friends for a while. Roger is almost a one man team: he has really fast reflexes and he knows exactly which weapons to use and when. He's used to playing over voice chat, and he's picked up all the game lingo. Whenever he talks he's barking out strategies and orders at lightning speed but not really explaining them. For some of the other players he's a little confusing because the language he uses is full of specialized terms they've never heard before.

Chris and Jen have a little less experience than Roger, but they've been playing this particular game for a couple of months. They also have a different team they normally play with and they're notorious for being obsessed with their personal kill points rather than worrying too much about how the team performs. To everyone else they actually seem to be playing a completely different game, which is a competition between the two of them to see who can rack up the most points between matches. While they're really good at the combat aspect of the game, their competitiveness causes them to frequently leave important areas unguarded while they run around looking for opponents to frag (temporarily kill).

Sam is a lot more casual than the other players but has some experience with the game so she knows how to play. Sam's playing in her basement while she watches old science fiction movies, she's got some loud music blasting over her stereo and she says something about a bowl of ice cream she's eating. It was hard to tell what exactly she said though, because her mouth was full. That may explain why her character seems to stop moving for a couple of seconds repeatedly throughout the match.

Cynthia more than makes up for Sam's silence – she barely stops to breathe. She regales her friends with jokes, silly stories and bizarre questions; she even breaks into a song every time she manages to get a kill. She's hilarious and a lot of fun, but she's talking so much that Roger's instructions are getting drowned out throughout most of the match.

The sixth player is a random player who joined via the game's pickup group system. Their gamer tag is GrumpySmurf, but no one in the group actually knows them at all. They all play well enough, but the players never come together as a team and as a result they lose the match. The regular players are very disappointed and feel embarrassed to have done so badly, especially Roger, Chris and Jen.

At the end of the match, as the scorecard is posted on the screen, the five real-life friends begin blaming the loss on the new player, crediting their poor performance to the one player's lack of experience in the game: Roger suggests that GrumpySmurf's gamertag means they must not take the game seriously, Jen says it must mean that GrumpySmurf is too young to play the game, and Cynthia thinks the gamertag means GrumpySmurf is too old to play well.

GrumpySmurf is kicked from the group and the friends continue to play, seeking out another random player to make up their group.

Questions (*answer on separate paper*)

- 1) This scenario is an example of a behavior called “scapegoating”. Based on the way this scenario played out, how would you describe scapegoating?
- 2) How did the different group members come up with reasons to *justify* scapegoating GrumpySmurf?
- 3) How did the different group members come up with reasons to *justify* scapegoating GrumpySmurf? (In other words, how did they tell themselves it was okay to scapegoat them?)
- 4) In what ways does scapegoating the new player make the group members feel better or more secure?
- 5) Despite these apparent 'benefits', how does this actually make things worse for them?
- 6) Assuming that scapegoating is a behavior that cultural groups are always in danger of resorting to, what would be a better way for these friends to approach such situations in the future?
- 7) Now that we've seen an example of scapegoating in a small group, can you think of some examples in larger social groups either locally, nationally or globally?

Scenario Two

A convenience store near the school has a policy of only allowing three teens inside at one time. This means that if there are already three teens shopping there and you want to go in and buy something, you have to wait outside. The shopkeeper has said that he brought in the policy because he knows that students shoplift and he wants to make sure there aren't more teens in the store than he can keep an eye on, and he says that anyone who tries to argue with him about the policy will be kicked out of the store.

The shopkeeper doesn't have any statistical evidence to support his claim that teenagers are likely to steal but a discussion with him reveals a number of expectations and beliefs on his part.

The shopkeeper states that it is common knowledge that teenagers are more likely to steal than adults because teenagers naturally have less respect for other peoples' property and for money than adults do.

He also points to the weird hairstyles and strange clothing some teenagers are wearing as proof that they are up to no good. Some wear baggy clothes, others have piercings in their faces, still others wear t-shirts with lewd slogans or violent imagery from various musical groups. Many of them are carrying bags or backpacks, which he maintains are all signs that these teenagers are troublemakers and thieves.

The shopkeeper further points to the fact that the students who come into the store frequently talk loudly and laugh a lot, and often listen to loud music while they shop, which he sees as disrespectful.

While none of these elements is direct proof of theft or even of trouble, the shop owner is convinced that all teenagers are trouble so he feels justified in keeping their numbers to a minimum inside his store.

Finally, you notice a distinctive difference in how the shopkeeper serves his teenaged customers compared to how he serves the adults who come into his store. With adults he is often very friendly and polite, whereas with teenagers he is always extremely curt. Even when he talks about the teenaged customers in his store, he differentiates between the teenagers and his other "real" customers.

Questions

- 1) This scenario is an example of "othering". Based on the way this scenario played out, how would you describe othering?
- 2) Based on the scenario, in what ways might othering the teenagers make the shopkeeper feel safer or more in control?
- 3) Despite the possible "benefits" to the shopkeeper, in what way does his approach actually harm him?
- 4) Assuming that othering is a fairly common practice among people, what would be a better way for the shopkeeper to deal with his problem?
- 5) Now that we've seen an example of othering, can you think of other local, national or global examples?

Points of View

For this assignment you will write three paragraphs based on one of the scenarios we discussed in class.

The first paragraph will be written from the point of view of one of the people engaged in scapegoating or othering (either one of the group members from scenario one or the shopkeeper from scenario two) and will retell the story from their perspective.

The second paragraph will be written from the point of view of the person who experienced scapegoating or othering (the new player in scenario one, or a teen in scenario two).

These first two paragraphs will be written in the first person (the “I” voice) and will focus on how the experience *felt* for the characters.

The third paragraph will be written in the third person (the “he, she or they” voice) and will show how the characters from the first paragraph could fix or avoid scapegoating or othering in the future.

Task Assessment Rubric: Website Analysis

	Learning Expectations	Achievement
<p>Use</p> <p>Skills and competencies that fall under “use” range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email, and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.</p>	<p><i>Making and Remixing:</i></p> <p>use media affordances and genre conventions effectively</p>	
<p>Understand</p> <p>Understand includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us.</p> <p>Understand also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.</p>	<p><i>Ethics and Empathy:</i></p> <p>understand the dynamics of scapegoating and othering and how it affects all of the people involved</p> <p>understand the group and individual reasons why people engage in scapegoating and othering</p> <p><i>Community Engagement:</i></p> <p>understand how meaning is produced through multimedia (text, images, audio, video)</p> <p>understand the responsibility of individuals to engage with biased or hateful content online</p> <p>identify the point of view of a text</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
<p>Create</p> <p>Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.</p> <p>The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.</p>	<p><i>Community Engagement:</i></p> <p>propose practical solutions to community issues</p> <p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i></p> <p>create new creative, critical or analytical works</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>