

Lesson 15
Being Different



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Introduction: In this lesson, students reflect upon and analyze personal stereotyping experiences using the context of apartheid.

Objectives: At the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Understand the legacy of apartheid in South Africa through another person's experience
2. Compare and contrast their experiences with discrimination using an essay "model."

Suggested Grade Level: 9-12

Time: One 50-minute class period plus homework

Materials:

- ◆ Apartheid Background Information Essay
- ◆ "Being Different" essay
- ◆ Apartheid Background Information Questions

Instructional Procedures:

1. Begin by discussing the following question: "Why do some groups suffer discrimination based solely upon some physical or social characteristic?"
2. Ask "everyone who is a member of an ethnic group" to raise their hand. Pretend not to look and say, "Every hand should be raised." As students think about this, explain that everyone belongs to at least one ethnic group.
3. Note that many conflicts, personal, domestic, and international result from ethnic differences. Explain that conflict in South Africa was the result of apartheid, and provide background information on apartheid.
4. Have students read the essay written by Sabrina B. and answer the questions about the essay. Form pairs or threesomes and discuss the questions and answers.
5. Ask students to think about a similar situation where they were treated unfairly because of something that identified them as different (possible suggestions: haircut, hair color, clothing, height, weight, ethnic background, jewelry, piercings, disabilities, tattoos, age, etc.) Brainstorm the possible situations-record on board or overhead projector.
6. Conclude by having students write an essay (at least one page) about the incident and how it made them feel. Topic: "Being Different"

Assessment: Essay and questions

Apartheid Background Information

Apartheid

Apartheid is defined as a “former policy of segregation and political and economic discrimination against non-European groups in the Republic of South Africa.” In Afrikaans *apartheid* means “apartness,” and that is exactly what the South African *apartheid* government sought.

The History of Apartheid in South Africa

South Africa is a country with an abundance of natural resources including fertile farmlands and unique mineral resources. South African mines are world leaders in the production of diamonds and gold as well as strategic metals such as platinum. The climate is mild, similar to San Francisco in the United States.

The English and Dutch colonized South Africa in the seventeenth century. The Dutch established the new colonies of Transvaal and Orange Free State due to the English domination of their Afrikaner (Boer) descendants. Around 1900, the Boer War was fought because of the discovery of diamonds in the colonies. Power was then shared between the English and Afrikaners until the 1940s, when the Afrikaner National Party gained a strong majority in the government. At that time, the National Party invented apartheid as a way to control the economic and social system. Maintaining white dominance while extending racial separation was the initial aim of *apartheid*.

- In 1948, with the enactment of *apartheid* laws, racial discrimination was institutionalized. Race laws touched every aspect of social life, including a prohibition of marriage between non-whites and whites, and the sanctioning of “white-only” jobs.

- In 1950, the Population Registration Act required that all South Africans be racially classified into one of three categories: white, black (African), or colored (of mixed decent). The colored category included major subgroups of Indians and Asians. Classification into these categories was based on appearance, social acceptance, and descent. For example:

A white person was defined as “in appearance obviously a white person or generally accepted as a white person.” A person could not be considered white if one of his or her parents were non-white. The determination that a person was “obviously white” would take into account “his habits, education, and speech and deportment and demeanor.”

A black person would be of or accepted as a member of an African tribe or race, and a colored person is one that is not black or white. The Department of Home Affairs (a government bureau) was responsible for the classification of the citizenry. Non-compliance with the race laws was dealt with harshly. All blacks were required to carry “pass books” containing fingerprints, photo and information to access non-black areas.

- In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act established a basis for ethnic government in African reserves, known as “homelands.” These homelands were independent states where the government assigned each African, according to the record of origin (which was frequently inaccurate). All political rights, including voting, held by an African were restricted to the designated homeland. The idea was that they would be citizens of the homeland, losing their citizenship in South Africa and any right of involvement with the South African Parliament that held complete authority over the homelands. Africans living in the homelands needed passports to enter South Africa. They became aliens in their own country.

- In 1953, the Public Safety Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act were passed, which empowered the government to declare stringent states of emergency and increased penalties for protesting against or supporting the repeal of a law. The penalties included fines, imprisonment and whippings.

- In 1960, a large group of blacks in Sharpeville refused to carry their passes. The government declared a state of emergency that lasted for 156 days, leaving 69 people dead and 187 people wounded. Wielding the Public Safety Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act, the white regime had no intention of changing the unjust laws of *apartheid*.

- The penalties imposed on political protest, even non-violent protest, were severe. During the states of emergency that continued intermittently until 1989, a low-level police official could detain anyone for up to six months without a hearing. Thousands of individuals died in custody, frequently after gruesome acts of torture. Those who were tried were sentenced to death, banished, or imprisoned for life, like Nelson Mandela.

The *apartheid* policy was highly effective in achieving its goal of preferential treatment for whites.

“Being Different”

“You will find that things are very different here than they are in the States,” a student from Johannesburg said to me on our tour of the neighborhood. Surveying the pastel-colored Dutch colonial houses, the vendors hawking goods in languages I didn’t understand, and the minibus taxis with drivers yelling out the window at us, I did not find her statement difficult to believe. “What is something that really stands out to you, that I will find different?” I asked. “Race,” she answered almost immediately. “What race do people think you are in the States?” I am used to my dark skin and hair branding me as something different, and guesses about my “race” are always off. “My father is Pakistani, my mother is a white American. I think people usually assume I am white,” I said, after giving the matter some thought. My acquaintance smiled. “Here in South Africa,” she told me, “you are colored. Nobody will think of you as white.”

I didn’t think about this statement until more than a week later, when I went to a mall in Clairmont with some friends. After paying our bill at a coffee shop, Sax remarked, “We shouldn’t have put the tip in with everything else. The waiter is going to think we want our change back.”

I just laughed. “Sax, that’s ridiculous. Doesn’t everyone tip that way? The waiter should know.” Just then our waiter (Michael) appeared and asked us if we wanted our R15.

In response to my expression, Sax just smirked. “It’s because we’re black,” she said as we gathered our things to leave, “They don’t think we leave tips.”

I was puzzled. Someone looking at us would assume that we wouldn’t tip? That was judgmental. But thinking of us all as *blacks*? I was thrown off completely. I looked at my three friends - two black Zimbabweans and one Indian South African. Sax had almost forgotten about her comment when I asked her about it. “They didn’t consider us to be white,” was all she said, giving her shoulders a shrug.

We sat down on some big leather couches in an aisle and continued our conversation, and were probably talking for ten minutes when a guard came over and told us to “sit properly.” Only Nafisa understood: “Ah yes, he wants us to sit nicely.” Bianca sat up out of her reclining position, I stopped slumping over the armrest, and Nafisa and Sax just sat up straighter. The guard thanked us and walked away, but I clearly remembered that, on our way to have coffee, there were six white girls our age sprawled out on these couches, and the very same guard had smiled and given them a little wave.

I was used to questions about my background, but not assumptions. I sat down that night and tried to fathom all the times I had been unscathed in situations where my coloring could have made a difference, if people could find a convenient label for it. Everyone experiences those moments on the other sides of those situations, and those who do are blessed with a few moments of clarity. And in those moments, I began to fathom exactly what apartheid was, and why race had been introduced to me on my very first day in South Africa as an obvious subject of difference.

Sabrina B. 6/2001

Questions for *Apartheid* Essay

1. What is the writer's purpose?
2. Why do you think the writer was unprepared for the racial discrimination she experienced?
3. Why would an American who is half-Pakistani be considered "colored" in South Africa in 2001?
4. Give three reasons why you think someone in South Africa would assume that blacks don't leave tips. How might those reasons be the consequences of *apartheid*?
5. The writer says, "I was used to questions about my background, but not assumptions." What were some other assumptions that were made about different racial groups during *apartheid*?
6. In one instance in this essay, people are placed into two categories – whites and blacks. Why do you think that *apartheid* caused the "gray area" to be erased?
7. From this essay, we see that race makes a big difference in everyday life in post-*apartheid* South Africa. What do you think the United States would be like if people were discriminated against like in this story?
8. When the writer was first confronted with the reality of this discrimination, she says "Sax, that's ridiculous." From your view, as someone from the United States, do you think that this example happens frequently in your life? What characteristics of the South African society allow for this to happen?
9. Identify at least one valuable lesson you have learned from reading the essay and pondering your own experiences with prejudice and discrimination.