

You may be wondering ...



What should I do if, when covering examples of common cultural symbols, students say that a symbol is offensive?

Exploring symbols and rituals associated with certain ethnic-racial backgrounds may generate examples that are a sense of pride for some students but offensive for others. It can be quite uncomfortable to engage in discussions such as these, in which students disagree with each other on things about which they care deeply. These discussions and the accompanying feelings of discomfort, however, are an important part of the process of identity formation. It is in the process of discussing the difficult topics, reflecting on one's perspective, and considering how and why one's perspective and perceptions are different from others' that one can begin to better understand one's identity. This includes recognizing how one's identity has formed, the factors that have influenced its development, and the important role that social context has played in how one views the world and one's self.

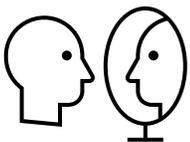
FOR EXAMPLE



If one student considers the National Anthem to exemplify a ritual that affirms their connection to U.S. culture, whereas another student considers the National Anthem to exemplify an offensive ritual worthy of protest, *what should you do?*



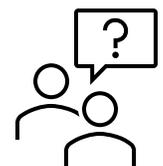
For You: Reflect on Your Own Perspective and Consider Different Perspectives



It is important to be mindful of your own perspective during student conflict. Research studies have shown that teachers who explore their own ethnic-racial identity tend to be more prepared to support diverse learners.¹⁻³ The goal of exploring different cultural symbols and rituals is not to hold up some as “good” or “right,” but rather explore how they can have different meanings based on our perspectives.

For Your Students: Question, Ask, and Approach with Curiosity

The ability to take different perspectives has many benefits for your students, including increased creativity⁴ and getting along better in groups.⁵ When different perspectives about symbols and rituals arise, lead with questions and approach with curiosity. Students will benefit from learning about the meaning behind different cultural symbols and rituals, even when not their own. In fact, research has shown that an important way that students learn about their own ethnic-racial background is by learning about and considering the experiences of those from other ethnic-racial backgrounds.⁶



Teacher Moves



In the space below, brainstorm strategies you might use to guide students to understand their own perspective and to learn about other perspectives, particularly those that are different from their own.

- How can you help students approach new perspectives with curiosity?
- What might you say to students if disagreements about the meaning of certain symbols arise?
- How can you model perspective-taking for your students?

Key Takeaway:

It is natural for disagreements to arise. When they do, it is important to approach different perspectives with curiosity and a genuine desire to understand where another person is coming from. One of our roles as educators is to model disagreement and perspective validation for our students. The more we can get students to take the perspectives of others and the more we can interrupt our biases and cognitive shortcuts, the more we can foster communities of empathy.

References and Articles for Further Reading:

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