

**Exploring Cultural Perspectives:
The Blind Men and the Elephant
Determining the Rest of the Story
Created by Laura Provencher**

AUDIENCE

This lesson plan is intended for K-2 students, but can easily be adapted for students K-12. While the book is written at a first/second grade level, its message is universal.

PURPOSE

This lesson encourages students to see “the rest of the picture” in a situation. In making the situations relevant to K-2 (actually, all) students it creates a foundation serving as a launching pad for students to explore multiculturalism within a community, whether that be in a school, neighborhood, town, or national or global setting (particularly for older students). It serves as a basis for following lessons examining particular cultures and is intended to assist students in seeking other perspectives in assessing situations. Ultimately this provides a tool for avoiding conflict stemming from misunderstanding and even misinterpreting events.

OBJECTIVES

1. When given a problem, students will be able to ask at least one question about it in order to receive further information.
2. After assessing a situation relevant to their lives, students will identify at least one impact of perspective on judging situations.
3. After assessing the situation students will identify at least one manner in which considering different perspectives is important in a community.

Arizona State Standards:

Social Studies Standard Strand 3: Civics/Government

Concept 4: Rights, Responsibilities, and Roles of Citizenship

Grades K-2

PO 2: Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, an idea of treating others the way you want to be treated.

PO 3: Discuss importance of students contributing to a community

MATERIALS

- The Blind Men and the Elephant (May be borrowed from the University of Arizona Center for Middle Eastern Studies.)
- Sunglasses of different tints (rub Vaseline on a pair, have some without lenses, etc)
Enough for each person in a group to have a different pair
- Miscellaneous unusual and unfamiliar items which are complicated in nature.

TIME

Part One: Approximately 40 minutes (8-10 minutes each center)
Part Two: Approximately 20-30 minutes

LESSON

Part One: Centers

Organize students into small groups. With younger students you may need volunteers to assist each center.

First Center-

Each group is tasked to focus on a particular aspect of an object that is unfamiliar to them. They may describe it according to touch, smell, etc. OR give each group a different piece or part of the object to describe. To challenge students have them create an analogy (it is hard like a rock). Have students write their thoughts, with assistance as needed. Kindergarteners may need to have their thoughts written for them.

Cycle through the entire class so that each student has had the opportunity within a group to describe a portion/aspect of the same object.

Second Center-

This group will put on a variety of sunglasses. Talk with students about how the color of the tint changes the way they see things in the room. They may exchange sunglasses.

Third Center-

In this center each group will write from a different perspective about the same topic. It could be about being hungry, going for a walk, being at home, etc.. The different perspectives could be as a baby, an ant, a dog, a parent, a fish, etc.

Fourth Center-

This group is presented a situation and they need to be detectives and come up with questions to try to figure out what is going on. These situations should be similar to problems students encounter in their daily lives, such as "Sam is sad because no one will play with him at lunch." Each student must come up with a question to try to get more information about the problem. The goal is not to just make Sam feel better, but to get more information. It would be helpful to have an adult at this center to provide more information about the problem as the students ask questions.

Part Two: Whole Group

1. Read "The Blind Men and the Elephant" to the class (or as a reading group with the appropriate copies of the book and readers at first/second grade reading levels).
2. Ask students which Blind Man had been correct. Students might assert that one was more correct than the others, but ultimately each of the men was correct. They each just had a different perspective of the elephant.
3. Bring out the unfamiliar object and have students share their perspectives of it. Point out that since we are not really sure what it is, all of these descriptions and thoughts about it are valid.
4. What is perspective? It is how we see things. It is like the glasses we put on to see life. Remind students of the sunglasses they wore and ask how their view of the classroom changed. Did the colors change? Did it get darker, lighter, harder to see?

5. Read some of the perspectives students had about the task or situation from the third center. Don't let the students know what perspective it represented and talk about how different the perspectives were of the same situation.
6. Ask students if they know exactly what someone else is seeing or thinking? We don't know for certain, we could make some predictions, but we aren't sure of what other people see.
7. Often there is more to a situation than we know about. Usually other people have thoughts we don't know. Ask students if they ever thought someone else was mad at them, only to find that they weren't actually upset with him/her. In the fourth center we tried to get more information about a situation so that we could figure out what the problem actually is. Sometimes we think we know what is going on, but we don't actually know
8. Ask students how it might help them to try to see things the way their neighbor might.
9. Conclude by asking students how trying to think about what other people are thinking could help solve a problem.

Extensions:

In order for students to really internalize this skill of applying the consideration for other perspectives it must be practiced and applied routinely. Here are some ideas to continue this practice:

As a class, show a picture of kids who are visibly upset about something. Tell students to write about the picture and explain what happened and what is going on. Share the different stories and discuss how a different people in that problem could have such different ideas of what happened that they don't really know the problem.

Examine perspectives and point of view in reading selections and have students write about a situation from the story from another perspective.

AZ State Standard Concept 9: Contemporary World (K-8)

PO 1 Describe current events using information from class discussion and various sources

Depending on your grade level, examination of current events may examine different issues, but could continue to practice the application of different perspectives. For younger students it could be current events or problems from the classroom or school which are discussed. For example, if there is a problem of students being too noisy in the halls, have students determine the possible perspectives of other students trying to work, the teacher, and other teachers. Then, once other perspectives are examined, work on determining possible solutions to the problem.