

Lesson Plan: Stars of Identity - Understanding Empathy and Symbols

Materials Needed:

- Book: *The Sneetches and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss
- Book: *The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark* by Carmen Agra Deedy (optional, but recommended)
- One large piece of yellow construction paper or felt, cut into a six-pointed star shape (about 6-8 inches across)
- One 9x9 inch square of paper or fabric (like felt or a cotton square) for each person
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Fabric markers or paint (if using fabric)
- Glue stick or fabric glue
- A notebook or journal for reflection

Lesson Overview

This lesson uses storytelling and a hands-on art project to introduce the difficult topic of the Yellow Star in an age-appropriate way. The focus is not on the horrors of the Holocaust, but on the core concepts of identity, prejudice, and the power of empathy and solidarity. The goal is for the student to understand how symbols can be used to divide people and to creatively express the importance of kindness and inclusion.

Step 1: The Hook - Understanding Symbols with a Story (15 minutes)

1. **Read Aloud:** Begin by reading *The Sneetches* by Dr. Seuss. Read it with expression, emphasizing the feelings of the different groups of Sneetches.
2. **Guided Discussion:** After reading, ask some guiding questions to check for understanding and introduce the main idea.
 - "What was the point of the stars on the Sneetches' bellies? What did they mean at the beginning of the story?" (*They showed who was in the 'best' group.*)
 - "How do you think the Plain-Belly Sneetches felt when they were left out?" (*Sad, lonely, angry, unfair.*)
 - "Did the star itself have any power? Or was it the meaning the Sneetches gave it?" (*It was just a star; the Sneetches gave it the power to include and exclude.*)
 - "What was the lesson the Sneetches learned at the end?" (*That what someone looks like on the outside doesn't make them better or worse.*)

Step 2: Activity Part 1 - Creating a Positive Identity Star (20 minutes)

1. **Introduce Positive Symbols:** Say, "The Sneetches used a star to separate each other, but symbols can also be very positive and personal. We're going to make a star that celebrates who YOU are."
2. **Create Your Star:** Give the student the large, yellow six-pointed star cut from paper or felt. Ask them to fill this star with words and small drawings that represent their unique identity.
 - **Prompts:** "What are your favorite hobbies? What is your favorite food? Who is in your family? What makes you laugh? What are you proud of? Fill your star with all the things that make you, YOU!"
3. **Share and Discuss:** Have the student share their star and explain the symbols they chose. Emphasize that this star represents their wonderful, unique identity that they chose to share.

Step 3: Connecting to History - The Story of the Yellow Star (15 minutes)

1. **Gentle Transition:** Hold up the positive identity star the student just made. Say, "This star is full of wonderful things, and you created it to show who you are. Now, I want to tell you about a time in history when people were forced to wear a star they did not choose, and it was used to hurt them. This is a sad story, but it teaches us why kindness is so important."
2. **Explain Simply:**
 - "A long time ago, during a war called World War II, a group in charge called the Nazis decided to treat Jewish people unfairly. Jewish people are people who share a religion and culture, just like people in any other group."
 - "The Nazis forced all Jewish people, even children, to wear a yellow, six-pointed star on their clothes whenever they went outside. It was called the Yellow Star."
 - "Unlike your identity star, this star was not about celebrating who they were. It was a label forced on them to separate them, point them out, and be unkind to them. It was a symbol of hate, not of pride."
3. **(Optional) Read Aloud:** If your student is ready for a more direct historical connection, read *The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark*. This story (which is a legend based on real events of solidarity in Denmark) provides a powerful and hopeful message about people standing up for their neighbors. Discuss how the King's (and the people's) choice to wear the star took away the Nazis' power to use it as a tool of separation.

Step 4: Creative Application - A Quilt Square of Kindness (25 minutes)

1. **Frame the Activity:** Say, "When we see that something is unfair, we can use our creativity to imagine a better way. We are going to make a 'quilt square' to show what a kind and welcoming community looks like."
2. **Create the Square:**
 - Give the student the 9x9 inch square of paper or fabric.
 - Have them glue their positive "Identity Star" into the center of the square.
 - Around the star, ask them to draw or write symbols of kindness, friendship, and belonging.
 - **Prompts:** "What does it look like when someone is included? Draw a picture of people playing together. What words make people feel good? Write 'Welcome,' 'Friend,' 'You Belong,' 'Kindness.' What are symbols of peace or friendship? (Hearts, doves, holding hands)."
3. **The Goal:** The finished product is a beautiful quilt square with the student's unique identity at the center, surrounded and protected by symbols of a kind and caring community. It creatively reclaims the star as a positive symbol.

Step 5: Conclusion and Reflection (10 minutes)

1. **Share the Art:** Admire the finished quilt square together. Talk about the choices the student made and why they chose certain symbols for kindness.
2. **Journal or Discuss:** Use these questions for a final reflection. The student can write answers in a journal or you can discuss them together.
 - Why is it important that we get to define who we are, instead of letting others label us?
 - How did the Sneetches and the people in Denmark show us how to be a good friend to someone who is being treated unfairly?
 - What is one thing you can do this week to make sure someone else feels included and welcome?