

Lesson Plan: The Unspoken Rules

A Sociology Experiment in Social Norms & Deviance

Subject: Sociology

Age Group: 11-13 years old

Time Allotment: 90 minutes (can be split into two sessions)

Materials Needed:

- Sociology Journal (a simple notebook) & pen/pencil
 - Whiteboard or large sheet of paper
 - Markers in different colors
 - Index cards or small slips of paper
 - Access to a public space for observation (e.g., grocery store, library, park, coffee shop) with adult supervision
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1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Define "social norm," "deviance," and "sanction" in their own words.
- Differentiate between different types of norms (folkways, mores, and taboos).
- Observe and identify social norms in a real-world public setting.
- Creatively design a mild, hypothetical social experiment and predict the potential outcomes based on sociological principles.

2. The Lesson Plan

Part 1: The Hook - What if...? (10 minutes)

Goal: To spark curiosity about society's unwritten rules.

1. **Engage with a Question:** Ask the student: "*What do you think would happen if you walked into a library and started singing your favorite song at the top of your lungs?*"
2. **Brainstorm Reactions:** On the whiteboard, jot down all the possible reactions people might have (shushing, staring, librarians asking you to leave, someone joining in!).
3. **Introduce the Concept:** Explain that Sociology is the study of people in groups, and sociologists are fascinated by the "unspoken rules" that guide our behavior and the reactions we get when we break them. You just acted like a sociologist!

Part 2: The Sociologist's Toolkit - Learning the Lingo (15 minutes)

Goal: To introduce and clarify core concepts in a simple, memorable way.

1. **Define Key Terms:** On the whiteboard, write and simply define the following terms. Use relatable
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examples.

- **Social Norms:** The invisible rules for how to behave. *Example: Waiting in line instead of pushing to the front.*
 - **Deviance:** Going against the social norms. *Example: Talking on your phone loudly in a quiet movie theater.*
 - **Sanctions:** The reactions we get from others. They can be negative (punishments) or positive (rewards).
 - *Negative Sanction Example:* Getting a dirty look for cutting in line.
 - *Positive Sanction Example:* Getting a smile and a "thank you" for holding a door open.
2. **The 3 Levels of Norms (Interactive Sort):** Explain that not all norms are equal. Write these on index cards:
- **Folkways:** Everyday customs. Breaking them is weird, but not a huge deal. (e.g., Facing forward in an elevator, saying "bless you" after a sneeze, wearing matching socks).
 - **Mores (MORE-ayz):** Morally important rules. Breaking them is a serious offense. (e.g., Don't steal, don't cheat on a major test, be honest).
 - **Taboos:** Rules that are so strong, even thinking about breaking them is disgusting to most people. (We can keep this G-rated, e.g., In most cultures, eating a pet dog is a taboo).
3. **Activity - Sort the Norms:** On other index cards, write various behaviors (e.g., "Wearing a swimsuit to a formal wedding," "Talking with your mouth full," "Lying to a friend," "Shoplifting," "Chewing gum loudly"). Have the student sort these cards under the correct heading (Folkway, More, Taboo) and explain their reasoning.

Part 3: The Main Event - The Field Mission (45 minutes)

Goal: To apply knowledge through observation and creative problem-solving.

Phase A: The Observation (25 minutes, at a public location)

1. **Become a Sociologist:** Explain that the student is now a sociologist in the field. Their mission is to observe people without being obvious. Their tool is their Sociology Journal.
2. **Observation Prompts:** In their journal, have them create a section called "Field Notes." They should try to answer these questions while observing:
 - What are 3-5 social norms you see people following in this space? (e.g., Speaking quietly in the library, putting items back on the correct shelf in the store).
 - Did you see anyone break a norm (even a small one)? Describe what happened.
 - What were the sanctions? Describe people's reactions. Did they use facial expressions, body language, or words?
 - What are the specific norms for *this* particular place? How are they different from the norms at home or at a park?

Phase B: Design the Experiment (20 minutes, back at home base)

1. **Safety First:** Emphasize that we are only *designing* this experiment. We will **NOT** actually do anything to make people uncomfortable. The goal is to think like a sociologist, not to cause trouble.
2. **The Challenge:** In their journal, have the student design a *mild* and *harmless* social norm "breaching experiment."
3. **Experiment Plan Template:** They should write out their plan using these prompts:
 - **The Norm I Will "Break":** (e.g., The norm of facing the door in an elevator).
 - **My Method (The Plan):** (e.g., "I would get in the elevator with one other person and stand facing the back wall silently until my floor.").
 - **My Hypothesis (What I Predict Will Happen):** (e.g., "I predict the other person will look

confused. They might glance at me a few times. They might move to the far corner away from me. I predict they will not say anything, but will walk out of the elevator very quickly when it stops.").

- **Predicted Sanctions:** (e.g., "The sanctions would be non-verbal: strange looks, creating physical distance. These are negative informal sanctions.").

4. **Other Mild Ideas for Brainstorming:** Standing a little too close to someone in line; asking for a food item at a store that they clearly do not sell (e.g., "Do you have any hot dogs?" in a bookstore); saying "I'll see you later!" instead of "thank you" to a cashier.

Part 4: Debrief and Reflection (20 minutes)

Goal: To solidify understanding and connect the concepts to the student's own life.

1. **Share Findings:** Have the student share their Field Notes from the observation. Were they surprised by anything they saw?
2. **Present the Experiment:** Let the student present their experimental design. Discuss their hypothesis. Why did they predict those specific sanctions?
3. **Connect to Daily Life:** Ask: "*What are some social norms that are unique to our family? What about in your group of friends?*" This shows that norms exist in all social groups, big and small.
4. **Final Journal Entry:** Have the student answer the big "So what?" question in their journal: "*Based on what you learned today, why do you think societies need social norms to function?*"

3. Assessment & Evaluation

- **Formative (During the Lesson):** Success in the "Sort the Norms" activity; quality of discussion and questions asked throughout the lesson.
- **Summative (End of Lesson):**
 - **Sociology Journal - Field Notes:** Assessed on the depth of observation and the ability to connect observations to the key concepts (norms, deviance, sanctions).
 - **Sociology Journal - Experiment Design:** Assessed on creativity, safety/appropriateness of the idea, and the thoughtfulness of the hypothesis and predicted sanctions. The focus is on the *thinking process*, not a "right" answer.

4. Differentiation & Extension

- **For Extra Support:** Provide a checklist of specific norms to look for during the observation phase (e.g., "Look for how people greet each other," "Watch how people wait their turn"). Work together to brainstorm the first part of the experiment design.
- **For an Extra Challenge:** Have the student research a social norm from a different time period or a different culture (e.g., dating norms in the 1950s, or bowing etiquette in Japan). They can then write a short paragraph comparing that norm to a similar one in their own culture.