

Tolerance

Grades 9-12

Segment Summary:

Trapped between two cultures, Rene Sanchez struggles to fit into the American way of life while still remaining true to his Mexican heritage.

Culturally, Rene Sanchez is pulled in two different directions. Being born in the United States to Mexican parents and having lived in the United States and Mexico, Rene doesn't feel like he fully fits into either culture. He says the Mexican-American community in his town doesn't accept his American lifestyle. People stare at his body piercings, his clothing style and his Caucasian girlfriend. Even Rene's mother has a problem with his American ways. She tells him he's "getting pale," meaning he's becoming too Americanized, when he dyes his hair different colors or talks about his white friends. Rene's mother was so ashamed that he was dating a white girl that she refused to send a picture of his girlfriend to Rene's grandmother. But Rene's problems go beyond the Mexican-American community. The intolerance of other Americans also makes him feel unwelcome. Rene's own neighbors harassed him by writing racial slurs about his family on the road outside his home. Despite the prejudice he faces from his community and even his family, Rene has found a diverse group of friends who accept him as an individual and value both his Mexican and American characteristics.

Discussion Questions:

1. Rene says other Mexican Americans are prejudice against him because he doesn't look or act they same way they do. Do you have prejudices against other people in your same racial or cultural group? What are these prejudices? What do you think is at the root of these prejudices?
2. Is Rene choosing his girlfriend over his mother? Explain.
3. Why do you think Rene's mother disapproves of his dating a white girl? Would your parents be pleased if you dated someone outside of your race? Would you stop dating someone your parents didn't approve of because of his or her race?
4. Rene was shocked that his own neighbors wrote racial slurs on the road outside his home. How well do you know your neighbors? Would you be surprised if you found out they discriminated against you because of your race, your religion or your culture? Why or why not?
5. Which do you think is more dangerous – blatant intolerance or hidden intolerance? Explain.
6. On a scale of one to 10, rate the diversity of your school, your neighborhood and your town. Give details to support your ratings.
7. How important do you think diversity is to Rene and his friends? Should Rene try harder to make friends with the Mexican-American students? Why or why not?
8. What things make a person more Mexican, more black, more white, more Asian, etc.? Where do the rules surrounding which characteristics define certain groups of people originate? Is it fair to judge people this way? Explain.

Vocabulary Words and Definitions

Coercion (n.)

Definition: the use of threats or orders to make someone do something they do not want to do

Context: Samuel was allowed to practice his religion free from coercion and outside influence.

Culture (n.)

Definition: the ideas, beliefs and customs that are shared and accepted by people in a society

Context: According to the beliefs of Panchi's culture, women are not allowed to hold a professional job outside of the home.

Discriminate (v.)

Definition: to treat a person or a group differently from another in an unfair way

Context: The referees discriminated against the visiting team by making calls in favor of the home team.

Diverse (adj.)

Definition: having many different types of people or things in something

Context: Hollis' diverse heritage is a combination of Mexican-American and Scottish influences.

Homogeneous (adj.)

Definition: consisting of people or things that are all of the same kind

Context: While Aron's school is racially homogeneous, his classmates practice different religions.

Irksome (adj.)

Definition: annoying; making one feel slightly angry

Context: Chewing bubble gum during class is one of Kari's irksome habits.

Perception (n.)

Definition: the way a person understands or thinks of something and his or her beliefs about what it is like

Context: He used his friendship with Marlene to manipulate her perception of the situation.

Pet peeve (n.)

Definition: something that a person strongly dislikes because it always annoys him or her

Context: One of Marisa's pet peeves is when her brother always gets the last word in every argument.

Prayer (n.)

Definition: a wish or hope, made to God or gods, that something will happen

Context: Each night, Duma says a prayer for the safe return of her brother, who is traveling abroad.

Prejudice (n.)

Definition: an unreasonable dislike and distrust of people who are different in some way, especially because of their race, sex, religion, etc.

Context: Meredith's prejudice against anyone who does not agree with her religious beliefs causes conflict at school and in her neighborhood.

Race (n.)

Definition: one of the main groups that humans can be divided into according to the color of their skin and other physical features

Context: While Christopher was born in Africa, he is a member of the Caucasian race.

Secular (adj.)

Definition: not relating to or controlled by a church or other religious authority

Context: According to the Constitution, public schools should be secular and remain free from religious influence.

Threshold (n.)

Definition: the level at which something starts to happen, becomes something or has an effect

Context: Mr. Landis' threshold for tolerance ends when his students don't complete the homework assignment.

Tolerance (n.)

Definition: willingness to allow people to do, say or believe what they want without criticizing them

Context: By exposing her students to the beliefs and traditions of different cultures, Miss Olereud hopes to teach them cultural tolerance.

Source: *Longman Advanced American Dictionary*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited. 2000.

Activity: Color vs. Culture

Objectives:

Students will be able to

- Identify the characteristics associated with race and culture
- Administer an opinion poll
- Recognize that cultural traits vary within racially homogenous groups
- Compare and contrast their own cultures to those of their peers

Materials:

- Pens, pencils
- Paper
- Chalkboard or overhead projector
- **Cultural Opinion Poll**
- **Cultural Connection** worksheet

Procedure:

1. Write the words “race” and “culture” on the chalkboard or overhead. Ask students to define both terms in their own words.
2. Ask students to give examples of the characteristics used to define race. Write students’ examples on the board under the word race. (The list for race may be relatively short.)
3. Ask students to give examples of things that shape culture. Write students’ examples under the word culture. (This list should be longer than the list for race.)

Note: Urge students to go beyond the usual characteristics of culture, such as food, music and nationality. Encourage them to consider items such as social class, religion, language, beliefs, values, family structure, gender and political affiliation.

4. Begin a discussion about the differences between race and culture by asking students the following questions:
 - When you first meet people, what characteristics do you look for to help you understand them? Do you look at their clothing or listen to the way they speak for clues about how to interact with them?
 - Do you think you react to people differently based on their race?
 - How do your perceptions about people from different cultures affect the way you react to them?
 - Does everyone who belongs to the same race share the same cultural background? Explain your answer.
 - Do you demonstrate tolerance of people who are racially different than you are? Are you tolerant of people who share your race but not your culture?
 - Which is more difficult for you: understanding people of a different race or understanding people of a different culture? Explain your answer.
5. Distribute two copies of the **Cultural Opinion Poll** to each student. and ask students to use one copy to answer the questions based on what they know about their own cultures.
6. Have students identify someone in their school who has a different cultural background than they do and assign them to survey that person using the second copy of the **Cultural Opinion Poll**.

Note: Since some students may be uncomfortable approaching other students whom they don’t know, consider sending your students out in pairs or in teams of three to conduct their surveys.

Note: The students have already discussed the ways in which people who are racially similar can have cultural differences. If your school is racially homogeneous, remind students of the less obvious cultural differences.

Examples:

- Some students may practice a religion and some may not.

- Some students may come from more affluent families than others.
 - Boys develop different perspectives and practices than girls of the same age.
7. When students complete their surveys, they need to compare their own answers to the answers given by their surveyed subjects. After comparing the two surveys, students should complete their **Cultural Connection** worksheets.
 8. Allow students to share their reflections and observations with the class.

Cultural Opinion Poll

Name: _____

Directions: Based on what you know about your own culture, write one or two sentences in response to each of the following items.

1. How would you describe or name your culture?
2. What kinds of foods do you eat at home?
3. Do you practice a religion? If so, which one?
4. What kind of music do you like?
5. Which three items from your home would best reflect your culture?
6. How would you describe your family (single-parent, two-parent, adopted parents, nuclear, extended, etc.)?
7. How do you celebrate special occasions?
8. Is your group of friends racially and/or culturally homogeneous? If so, how?
9. How would you describe your social class (lower, middle or upper)?
10. How do you like to dress?
11. What language(s) do you speak?
12. What are some stereotypes that other people have about you and others like you? Do you think these perceptions are fair?
13. What do you want other people to know about your culture?
14. What would it take for you to get to know someone from a different culture?

Cultural Connection

Name: _____

Directions: Answer the following questions based on what you learned by surveying a peer from a different culture.

<p>My initial perceptions of people who belong to the _____ culture:</p>	<p>Why I perceived the _____ culture this way:</p>
<p>What I learned about the _____ culture:</p>	<p>Things I have in common with people from the _____ culture:</p>