

# Stereotypes in Africa

Subjects: Social Studies

Suggested Grade Levels: 3–5

Time Frame: Variable

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## Overview

It is important that we as educators advocate a feeling of understanding and appreciating other cultures and societies. Often, we tend to judge other people's actions and ways of life by things we see in the media, movies we watch and books we read. In teaching about Africa, stereotypes and biases arise and students need to challenge preconceptions and reflect on the stereotypes they carry about Africa. This lesson is intended to open their eyes to the diversity of the African continent.

## Connection to Philadelphia World Heritage Tool Kit's Goal

Philadelphia is a World Heritage City. Thousands of people from all over the world call Philadelphia home. As a global city, we must educate children to hear others with openness and humility, to challenge stereotypes and to strive to truly understand human beings and their rich cultural heritages.

## Core Curriculum Standards

- CC.1.5.3.A
- CC.1.5.3.C
- CC.1.5.3.D
- CC.1.5.3.E

## Objectives

To raise students' awareness about stereotypes of Africa, help students understand the importance of authorship and sourcing when learning about another culture, help students practice identifying important details, making logical inferences, and drawing informed conclusions from visual documents, and give students an appreciation for the diversity of the African continent.

## Essential Question

How can stereotypes interfere with a global community?

## Materials Needed

Projector for video clips and images. Links to videos included in procedure.

## Procedure

**Activity One, Step One:** Write on the board, in capital letters, the following statements:

- GIRLS ARE BETTER READERS AND WRITERS THAN BOYS.
- GIRLS ARE CLEANER THAN BOYS.
- GIRLS LISTEN BETTER THAN BOYS.
- GIRLS ARE FUN TO BE AROUND.
- BOYS ARE BETTER AT MATH THAN GIRLS.
- BOYS CAN RUN FASTER THAN GIRLS.
- BOYS ARE TALLER THAN GIRLS.
- BOYS ARE FUN TO BE AROUND.

Discuss these statements as a class. Ask the students if they think they are fair statements. Ask them if they think they are always true. Point out examples that show that each statement has exceptions.

**Step Two:** Define stereotypes: Statements about a group of people that are unfair and don't tell the whole truth.

**Step Three:** "Let's see how fair you think these statements are about someone growing up in Philadelphia." Share some one-sided statements about Philadelphia. For example, "Everyone in Philadelphia lives in a two bedroom apartment with no yard." "Everyone in Philadelphia likes to eat pretzels." "Everyone in Philadelphia walks to school." "Everyone in Philadelphia has red hair and glasses." "Everyone in Philadelphia wears Nike shoes everyday."

Discuss how harmful it can be to talk about an entire group of people by using one person's point of view. Emphasize how unfair it would be if somebody learned about Philadelphia from these statements/pictures alone. "How can we learn about other places in the world; places that we may never see in person?"

**Step Four:** "What do you think we would see if we went to Africa?" Allow response from students and record on board. Refer back to "Philadelphia" discussion to prompt ideas for discussion.

**Step Five:** Look back at list of Africa and ask, "Do you think that's true about everybody in Africa?"

**Step Six:** Look at a variety of photographs/images and choose which ones we think could be from the continent of Africa. Every time an image comes on the screen, decide whether you think that image could or could not be from Africa. On a piece of paper, check "yes" if you think the image is from Africa and "no" if you think it is not. Try to write two or three words explaining why you said yes or no.

Why do you think so many of us said "no" when I asked if the image was from Africa? Where have you gotten your previous information about the continent of Africa?

**Step Seven:** Review the definition of stereotype in more detail. A stereotype is an idea or set of ideas that someone may have about a whole group of people (sometimes defined by their culture, skin color, age, features, etc.). These ideas rarely apply to all, most, or even some of the people of that group.

**Step Eight:** Brainstorm a list of places where students may have gotten their information. Encourage them to think of resources other than books, such as movies, posters, TV shows, etc. Include personal experiences, like visiting an African country or meeting someone from Africa. Record the list on the board or create a chart.

**Step Nine:** A lot of what you had both said and written earlier were stereotypes of Africa. If you look at the list we have made, you'll see that the different information we have received may or may not have been accurate. This is not bad because the first step to really learning about something new is to challenge the things we think are true. Where do we get these African stereotypes?

The following are possible answers:

- News media covers Africa only during crisis. Reporters often have no background in Africa. This is called parachute journalism.
- Entertainment media perpetuates negative images of helpless primitives, happy-go-lucky buffoons or violence and sickness.
- Books and media show Africa as nature and animals and very few humans.
- Safari Industry promotes an orientation to animals and exploitation of non-representative African cultures—like the Maasai.
- Theme parks in US that feature an African (nature and animals) theme.
- U.S Textbooks covering Africa often provide inadequate coverage and feature pictures of animals and exotica.

**Activity Two, Step One:** View video clip from *The Lion King* – “I Just Can’t Wait to be King”

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ywjX6AF6oVc>

Discussion: What can you learn about the continent of Africa from this clip? Do you think this any of this information is incorrect? Can you identify any stereotypes?

Note: Most actual Africans don't come any closer to wildlife than Westerners do. Millions of people on the continent have left their rural homelands for cities, where the only place to see wild animals is at the zoo; out on the countryside, meanwhile, poaching and environmental hazards have dramatically reduced the population of lions, elephants, and other wildlife.

**Step Two:** View YouTube video clip: Africa is not a country': Students' photo campaign breaks down stereotypes

- <http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/07/world/africa/africa-is-not-a-country-campaign/>

Discussion: How has your thinking changed after watching this video?

### Additional Activity: Looking for Biases and Stereotypes about Africa

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Stop Word</li><li>▪ Jungle</li><li>▪ Tribe</li><li>▪ Backward / Primitive</li><li>▪ Bush</li><li>▪ Savage / Native</li><li>▪ Witch Doctor</li><li>▪ Native Costume</li><li>▪ Pagan</li><li>▪ Juju / Superstition</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Substitute Word</li><li>▪ Rain Forest</li><li>▪ People / Ethnic Group</li><li>▪ Traditional</li><li>▪ Savannah</li><li>▪ African / Kenyan / etc.</li><li>▪ Herbalist</li><li>▪ National Dress</li><li>▪ Traditional Religion</li><li>▪ Faith</li></ul> |
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Originally developed and copyrighted in 1981 by Merry M. Merryfield, this is an updated version developed for the 1995 course, “Teaching about Africans and African Perspectives.”

### Outcome/Assessment

Students will recognize and challenge preconceived notions of Africa, identify the origins of their stereotypes/ preconceived notions, recognize the similarities and differences between their culture and community and other cultures and communities, and understand that representations made by the media are not always accurate.

### Additional Resources

#### Web:

The Africa They Never Show You: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLda2HvVHY0>

#### Print:

*Africa Is Not A Country*, Margy Burns Knight & Anne Sibley O'Brien. ISBN-13: 978-0761316473