

No Place for Hate® Activity Library

When Identity and Bias Impact Rumors and Gossip

Lesson Plan, Activity and Overview

Lesson Plan: [Gossip, Rumors and Identity](#)

Rumors and gossip are commonplace among tweens and teens and tend to spread rapidly in schools, communities and online. Gossip and rumors can be harmful for many reasons, including that they can spread untrue or private information about people. In our digital world, the amplification of that information often spreads far and wide. In addition, members of marginalized social identity groups may be more likely to be the subject of rumors and gossip in schools and online. Because these groups may have less power or be in the minority in school, it makes addressing the rumors and gossip even more challenging. At the same time, it makes it more likely that others will believe and spread lies about them.

Grade Level

Grades 6-8

Learning Objectives

- Students will explore what gossip and rumors are and how they impact others.
- Students will reflect on their own experiences with gossip and rumors.
- Students will consider how identity and bias impacts who becomes the subject of gossip and rumors and the extent to which it takes hold in a school or community.

Materials Needed

- Paper and art supplies for poster making
- [Quotes About Rumors and Gossip](#) (one for each student or written on large pieces of paper distributed around the room)

Words You Might Use

Bias: An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial judgment. Bias can be conscious (explicit or overt and intentional) or *unconscious* (implicit or unintentional and based on assumptions and “norms”), but both are potentially harmful regardless of intent.

Gossip: Information that is shared about the behavior and personal lives of other people. It may or may not be true.

Identity: The qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others.

Rumor: Information or a story about someone that is spread that has not been proven to be true.

Core Activity

First, ask students: *What is gossip? What are rumors? How are they different? How are they similar?* Then define gossip as and rumors as follows:

Gossip: Information that is shared about the behavior and personal lives of other people. It may or may not be true.

Rumor: Information or a story about someone that is spread that has not been proven to be true.

Invite students to silently think to themselves about a recent situation (without sharing aloud the specific names of anyone involved) where gossip or rumors spread. If they can't recall a real-life example, have them think about something they saw on TV, in a movie, or a situation they heard about. Ask these questions and have students jot down notes to themselves and explain they will only be sharing aloud what they choose to share.

- When was a recent time you heard or shared gossip? What happened? How did you feel?
- When was a recent time you heard or spread a rumor? What happened? How did you feel?
- What feels good or positive about sharing or hearing gossip and rumors?
- What feels bad or harmful about sharing or hearing gossip and rumors?
- How did social media or other digital apps/tools either add to the spread or help to stop rumors or gossip?
- Are there more rumors and gossip spread about people in certain identity groups? Please explain.

Divide students into small groups of 3-4 students each and have them take turns sharing their thoughts and responses to one or more of the above questions of their choosing. Reconvene the class/group and engage students in a discussion, using the following questions: *How do rumors and gossip impact the person who is the subject or target of those rumors? How do rumors and gossip impact others who may identify in the same way? How do rumors and gossip impact the school community?*

Next, talk with students about the ways in which gossip and rumors are impacted by identity and bias. Explain/ elicit that identity is “the qualities, beliefs, etc. that make a particular person or group different from others.” Explain that social identity groups include race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, age and generation, socioeconomic status, immigration status, religion, etc. People belong to multiple social identity groups. These social identity groups often represent the most significant aspect of identity and influence how people relate to each other, in communities and within society. Elicit and share with students that rumors and gossip can focus or revolve around someone’s social identity group. You could have a group of students at school who are well represented, like girls/young women, but who are more often the subject of gossip and rumors compared to boys/young men. You can also explain that rumors and gossip may take hold and “stick” more readily for people who are already socially vulnerable or marginalized. After this explanation, have students turn and talk with a person sitting near them and respond to the following questions: *Are there certain social identity groups in our school that are more often the targets of rumors and gossip? Are there certain identity group members who are more likely to be believed when they share rumors or gossip?* Remind students not to share specific names or situations. After talking in pairs, ask students to share their thoughts with the whole class. If you want to delve more deeply into identity and gossip/rumors, you can do the scenario activity in follow-up activities below (2nd bullet point).

Third, engage students in a process where they explore and then create a message they want to share about gossip and rumors to other students, school staff or the community at large. The message can either focus on: (1) the impact of rumors or gossip, (2) a commitment they will make when it comes to their own spreading of rumors or gossip, or (3) a call to action about what people should do about rumors or gossip. Using markers and other art materials, invite students to create posters that convey their messages in words and pictures/illustrations. When completed, hang them up around the school and consider making a video with students and their signs and then share on social media. If you want to extend this activity, have students elaborate on what they created with their posters by writing an essay.

Optional Follow-Up/ Going Further

NOTE: These additional activities can be done as follow-ups to the core activity and they can also serve as an additional NPFH activity if the core activity is completed first.

- Share the handout of quotes (see below) with students in one of two ways: either have them read the quotes on the handout, or in advance you can make large sheets of the quotes written out and place around the room. Have students choose one of the quotes that most resonates with them—either because they strongly agree or disagree with it or because they would like to discuss the quote further. Then invite students to move around the room and find that quote and talk with other students about the quote.
- Using the scenarios in the lesson plan [Gossip, Rumors and Identity](#), engage students in small group discussions, using scenarios that pose situations where the rumors and gossip were impacted by identity and bias. Divide students into small groups of 4-5 students each and assign a scenario to each small group. When students are situated and have their scenario identified, have them read their scenario silently and then discuss the scenario guided by the some or all of following questions: *What's happening in the scenario? Are there specific social identity groups that are impacted? How does identity or bias play a role in this scenario? What is the impact on the person who is the target/subject of the rumors and gossip? How are the gossip and rumors harmful to the person in the situation? How are they harmful to others? How are they harmful to the school community? What are other possible negative consequences of this situation? What could the people in this situation have done to stop the rumors or gossip?* Reconvene the class or group and have each group share with the class the substance of their discussion.
- Engage students in creating a short PSA (Public Service Announcement) and then have them share the PSA with others, in school and/or online. Explain to students that PSAs are short messages (usually 60 seconds or less and typically audio or video) that are shared with the public in order to raise awareness or impact public opinion about a social issue. Show students some sample PSAs as examples and engage them in a discussion about what was effective and why. Explain that in creating their own PSAs, they should first decide what the message will be (focusing on identity/ bias and rumors and gossip), who their audience is, write the script, create the storyboard, determine what people, props and visuals they need, practice and then create it. As a culmination, these PSAs can be shared with others in school and/or online. [This website](#) about PSAs might be useful.

NOTE: For all of these activities, make sure students do not use names of specific people or scenarios that reflect a real-life situation of bullying that could potentially hurt, harm or highlight a person at their school. While it's helpful to use real-life situations as inspiration for stories, it is important that those scenarios do not disclose names, people or situations that are too close to home.

Home Connection (optional)

Share ADL's Table Talk [What is Everyday Bias?](#) with families.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

Students will reflect on what rumors and gossip are and how, when the subject or target of rumors or gossip are members of marginalized groups, the impact can cause compounded harm and can be longer lasting. Exploring ways to address and reduce rumors and gossip will contribute to a safer and more inclusive and equitable school community and climate.

Quotes about Gossip and Rumors

Words are powerful. Don't let it be the knife that hurts someone.

We all need to be talked about once to learn how to “uncare” what others think of us.

Those who gossip with you will later gossip about you.

A coward talks to everyone but you.

Be less curious about people and more curious about ideas.

Most gossip is envy in disguise.

Rumor travels faster, but it doesn't stay put as long as truth.

Make it a habit of shutting down conversations that aim to tear others down.

What other people say about you is not the real you but a reflection of them.

A friendship built on gossip will end on gossip.

Rumors are mostly a projection of the individual who started them.

Never waste your time trying to explain yourself to people who are committed to misunderstanding you.

Rumors are the oldest form of mass media.

Fake friends believe in rumors. Real friends believe in you.

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