

No Place for Hate[®] Activity Library

What are Hate Symbols?

Lesson Plan and Overview

Lesson Plan: Swastikas and Other Hate Symbols

We see symbols every day in all aspects of our lives. Symbols are used to represent ideas, qualities, emotions, material objects, products, opinions and beliefs. However, symbols can also convey hate and bias. In recent years, we have seen an increase in hate symbol graffiti in public spaces, specifically the swastika, which in most circumstances is understood as an expression of anti-Semitism and has become the most notorious symbol of hate and white supremacy in Western culture. These symbols are displayed on school and college campuses, sidewalks, places of worship, online, on doors, buildings, doors of offices and residences, buses, school and public bathrooms, vehicles and other places. The proliferation of other hate symbols like the noose is also of increasing concern.

Grade Level

Grades 9–12

Learning Objectives

- Students will reflect upon the power and significance of symbols in our society.
- Students will learn about specific symbols like the swastika and noose, the impact it has on people and what can be done.
- Students will create their own symbol that reflects the opposite of hate, namely love, respect, diversity, inclusiveness, equity or justice.

Materials Needed

- Access to ADL's [Hate Symbols Database](#)
- Construction paper, markers and other art supplies for making symbols

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.

Discrimination: The denial of justice, resources and fair treatment of individuals and groups (often based on social identity), through employment, education, housing, banking, political rights, etc. Discrimination is an action that can follow prejudicial thinking. Discrimination can be legally sanctioned (de jure) or can exist despite nondiscrimination laws or policies in place (de facto).

Hate: An extreme dislike for something, someone or a group. If that hate is based on an aspect of someone's identity (e.g., race, religion, gender, gender expression/identity, ability, sexual orientation, etc.) it can result in interpersonal bias, discrimination, hate incidents, hate crimes and/or involvement in an organized hate group.

Core Activity

First, have a general discussion with students about symbols and the power of symbols. Show the symbols that are in the lesson plan or others that most young people would know. Elicit and explain that symbols “express, represent, stand for and/or suggest an idea, quality, belief, action or material object.” Explain that symbols can take the form of words, sounds, gestures, ideas or visual images. You can also describe how symbols can be positive (e.g. face blowing a kiss emoji), neutral (Snapchat logo) or negative (Swastika). Ask students to share examples of symbols and have them suggest whether the symbol is positive, neutral or negative. Explain that symbols can be very impactful, both negatively and positively, in terms of the message they convey and their impact on individuals and society.

Next, talk with students about specific hate symbols such as the swastika and the noose. Below are short explanations for those symbols. You can also look at the lesson plan or on ADL's [Hate Symbols Database](#) for more information about these and other hate symbols. Be careful not to distribute pictures of the hate symbols as they can be used in a negative way to perpetuate hate and bias, as opposed to your intent which is to educate students about hate symbols.

Noose: The hangman's noose has come to be one of the most powerful visual symbols directed against African-American people, comparable to the emotions that the swastika evokes for Jewish people. Its origins are connected to the history of lynching in America, particularly in the South after the Civil War, when violence or threats of violence replaced slavery as one of the main forms of social control that white people used against black people. The noose quickly became associated with the Ku Klux Klan.

Swastika: Since 1945, the swastika has served as the most significant and notorious of hate symbols, anti-Semitism and white supremacy for most of the world outside of Asia. Its display is prohibited in Germany and some other countries, leading some right-wing extremists to devise variants or alternatives to the swastika that would evoke a similar effect. In the U.S., the swastika is overwhelmingly viewed as a hate symbol that represents anti-Semitism and has become the most notorious symbol of hate and white supremacy in Western culture.

Have students talk in pairs (or groups of three) and respond to the following questions:

- *Have you ever seen a hate symbol and if so, what was it?*
- *What was the first thing you felt or thought when you saw it?*
- *How do you think it made others feel who saw it, especially the group targeted by the hate symbol?*
- *What impact do you think the hate symbol has on the targeted group, that community and society as a whole?*

After these discussions, bring students back together and ask if anyone wants to share their thoughts with the whole class.

Finally, have students think about a symbol they would like to create that expresses the opposite of hate—for example: love, respect, diversity, inclusiveness, equity or justice. Then give students construction paper, markers and/or other art supplies and provide time for them to draw those symbols. Staff can join in and create symbols as well. The symbols should be displayed around school in common spaces and potentially photographed and shared on the school's website or social media channels.

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.

- Have students conduct research about current and real-life situations in which hate symbols were found in public, private or online spaces (e.g., schools, colleges, cemeteries, places of worship, streets, buildings, dorms rooms, social media, etc.). Students can investigate what happened, the hate symbol(s) displayed, the group targeted, the community's response and outcome. In their research, they can also share their recommendations for what should be done. Their research can culminate in a research paper, PowerPoint presentation or news article and can be shared with the school and community.
- Have students write letters about their views on hate symbols and solutions to address the proliferation of them. The letters can go to someone in their life (friend, family, etc.), school or community newspaper, school administrator, media company, local or national politician, etc. In their letters, students should include a specific incident (if there was one), what their position is, background information about the hate symbol, reasons the hate symbol(s) should be challenged, what they propose to be done and what they are requesting. When students have completed writing their letters, they can be sent to the appropriate recipient and copies can be displayed around the school or they can make a video of each student reading excerpts from their letters and then share the video with the community.

Home Connection

Share ADL's Table Talk Hate Symbols with families.

How Activity Meets NPFH Requirements

All students will engage in discussions about the significance of symbols and will talk specifically about hate symbols, especially those displayed in public spaces including schools, and the power they have to cause harm to individuals and society. The creation and display of symbols of love, respect, diversity and equity will contribute to an inclusive school environment.