

Blend In / Stand Out

1

Main Goal

Students will understand conformity and nonconformity as it relates to interplay in human groups.

*Affective: Foster in students open-mindedness toward nonconformity.**

*EXPLANATORY NOTE: Promoting this open-mindedness does *not* equate to endorsing nonconformity. Please read and consider carefully the discussion of this topic provided you in the Introduction (on page 4).

Subgoal

To have students personally experience what the words “conformity” and “nonconformity” mean.

Lesson Context

Knowledge and Cultural Understanding		Skills Attainment and Social Participation	
X	<i>Historical Literacy</i>		<i>Basic Study Skills</i>
	<i>Ethical Literacy</i>		<i>Critical Thinking Skills</i>
X	<i>Cultural Literacy</i>	X	<i>Participation Skills</i>
	<i>Geographic Literacy</i>	Democratic Understanding and Civic Values	
	<i>Economic Literacy</i>	X	<i>National Identity</i>
	<i>Sociopolitical Literacy</i>		<i>Constitutional Heritage</i>
			<i>Civic Values, Rights, and Responsibilities</i>

Lesson 1

Blend In / Stand Out

Concept Building Objective

Given examples of a social group and its members, the students will be able to discern *conforming to the group* or *nonconforming to the group* with regard to appearance or dress.



Materials

Loud and bright tie or, better yet, a bow-tie (any highly conspicuous article of clothing will do)

A cooperating “helper” the class knows well (preferably a well-liked faculty or staff member)

(Optional) *per student*: Duplication Sheet 1—“**Work Sheet**”

Strategies

Advance Note: The day before the lesson, select someone the students know well who will cooperate by appearing before the class in extraordinary attire (e.g., an extremely oddball article of clothing much unlike the expected garb and ill-suited to the person’s customary capacity at the school). It is best if the individual is one who “pops in and out” often.

1. On the day of the lesson, the “plant” will casually enter the classroom with a customary manner of conduct despite possessing an extraordinarily “nonconforming appearance.” If students recognize the aberrant dress, play off of their pointing or comments. If they do not notice, bring the topic up yourself by saying something like: “Mr. Gardiner, that surely is an interesting item of clothing you are wearing today.”
2. Conduct a class discussion of the sort illustrated in the table below. Try to keep central the idea of appearance that is optional (in other words, clothing or accessories, rather than personal appearance that one cannot modify). If disability or racial category or some other unchangeable factor does get mentioned, you will want either to refocus discussion away from people who cannot change their appearance for physical reasons or to spend adequate time sensitizing students to that aspect. . Use your own ingenuity to guide the exchanges.

Question	Gist of Expected/Desired Answer
Why did we notice Mr. Gardiner?	<i>Appearance (out of the ordinary)</i>
Can you describe other people you have seen standing out from the crowd <i>because of appearance</i> ?	<i>Descriptions of people who dressed “strangely” or decorated their bodies</i>
Not all people who dress differently are “strange” people. They do it for various reasons. Can you think of a good word to describe people who <i>appear</i> to be different?	<i>Nonconforming (lots of other words may be suggested by students)</i>
(Provide or restate target word — nonconforming). What is the opposite word for it?	Conforming .

Question	<i>Gist of Expected/Desired Answer</i>
What it means to conform changes according to the reference group. Clothes that “fit” in one situation, such as when going to a concert, would look strange in another situation. Can you give some examples?	<i>Various examples will be given: e.g., swim suit attire blends in at pool (conforming) but stands out at library (nonconforming).</i>
Think about some event you have gone to (e.g., a movie, dance, sports event, concert). How many conforming people were there compared to nonconforming?	<i>Usually there are many more conforming, but it will depend on the event. At an airport there may be little or no conformity because of so much diversity of dress. At a pep rally or a funeral service, there may be lots more conformity.</i>
Can you think of various reasons a person might dress quite differently from the group he or she is in?	<i>Required by religion; cannot afford the expense of the clothing; wants attention (show-off); is a celebrity from a different country; has medical need (for comfort); mentally ill; favor certain apparel (e.g., western boots); and so on.</i>
Can you think of various ways people in the group might react to someone who is dressed quite differently?	<i>Varied answers such as: staring, shunning, pointing, laughing at, purposefully ignoring, applauding, slapping on back.</i>
Is nonconformity good? Is it bad?	<i>Can't tell without knowing why the person's appearance is different or what the effects are on the group and the individual.</i>

3. At an interim point in the lesson discussion, contrast the *process* of conforming with that of not conforming.

Conforming (in dress) = more typically involves conscious effort to blend in

Not conforming = may just as often be unintentional

=

Both may be incidental, but of the two, conforming is more likely to be intentional. This is particularly the case in the teen years, with the peer pressure to look, act, and think as one's companions do. A new student from another location may dress differently, but may not be trying to be different from the peer group. (In fact, the pupil would probably very much want the opposite!) Of course, nonconforming to a reference group may also be done quite clearly in a purposeful way so as to stand out from the crowd.

4. Before summarizing the lesson, you may wish to introduce additional affective factors so as to foster the lesson's main goal. For example, discuss how socioeconomic status influences ability to afford “hip”

clothes. Or, generate ideas about how one can help others to make the best of embarrassing situations. Etc. It is important to model for students being sensitive to persons who may dress differently out of lack of options, or for unknown reasons, or for reasons of their own. The affective aim of this lesson is greater tolerance for, rather than censure of, such persons. So, attempt (to the extent possible throughout) to nurture in students a desire to resist any inclination to form negative judgments of other people's dress based on superficial factors and without having cause other than the fact of mere nonconformance.

Appraising Student Understanding

1. Transfer: You can provide students a variety of situations other than the initiating event and ask them to explain the situation.
2. Assessment: As individual or group class work, you might provide a situation and a set of questions (see Duplication Sheet 1). The students will write answers to questions as evidence of performance.

Continuation Activities

1. *Brainstorming*: In whole class or small groups, students try to think of situations where individuals *must* conform their clothing to rules that govern a group. Examples are marching band, military, religious order, graduation, and so on.
2. *Exhibiting nonconformity of appearance*: Small groups can generate and demonstrate to the whole class their own invented situations in which *all* members of their group *except one* are clearly in conformance by appearance. For example: all members but one may wear caps. Or, all but one of a group wearing caps may position their caps front ways (with the exception wearing her cap backwards).
3. EXTENSION: *Mystery nonconformity*: Small groups can prepare a "mystery nonconformity" for presentation to the class at large and perhaps go a bit beyond conformity in appearance and into behavior, with the class trying to (1) recognize the "harmonious" aspect being displayed, and (2) identify the person with the nonconforming attribute

Work Sheet

Name _____

1. Someone comes to class wearing very unusual clothing. Which word is better for this person? (*circle it*)

conforming

nonconforming

2. Your class is going some place together. Everyone wants to be in style and wear what others are wearing. (*circle the word that better describes everyone.*)

conforming

nonconforming

3. Often when you go from one place to another, you must change clothes. If you do not change, you will not (*circle the better phrase*):

fit into the group

stand out from the group

4. **IMAGINE THIS:** You and your friends are going to a school dance later today.



- a) What will you wear if you want to **match** what your friends are wearing?

- b) What might you wear to the dance to **be noticed**? You'd like to "stand out" from your friends, and you want them to think: "*Hey, that's really cool!*"

- c) Suppose you **really don't care** what your friends think. Would you wear the same thing or something else?

- d) What might you wear to the dance if you want to **get your friends mad** at you for what you are wearing?

- e) What are you really **most likely** to do?

conform

not conform

Explain: