

Wisdom of the Ages

By Debi Conti

Television, magazines, video games and other mass media have become our leading storytellers. The stories they are telling carry many messages about how to behave, what to value and who to follow as role models. At a time when senior citizens rarely live with their children and grandchildren, it becomes all the more important to build bonds between the elderly and the young. As a starting point, this activity helps students think about senior citizens, analyze messages media portray of them, and create their own representations of seniors they admire.

Objectives: Students will be able to...

1. reflect on the different stages of life that humans pass through.
2. challenge common sense assumptions.
3. critically engage media representations of people at different ages.
4. understand that media have embedded values and points of view (ML Core Concept #4).
5. create their own representations of senior citizens they admire.

Materials/Preparation:

1. Magazines (preferable have students bring in magazines from home so you use the media that is around them, be sure they get permission to cut the magazines)
2. Scissors, glue, markers.
3. Chart paper

Teaching Strategies:

- I. Discussing Stages of Life
 - Begin discussing the stages of life and divide the stages into three or five categories with a range of possible ages for each (see chart).

- Focus discussion on the last stage of life, *senior citizens*. Ask:
 - ? Who lives with a senior citizen?
 - ? What are some things we know about seniors?
 - ? What do most people think about senior citizens?
 - ? What does the following saying mean? *When an old person dies, it is like burning down a library.* (Encourage students to consider how much knowledge and experiences each senior has learned and seen).

5 Stages	3 Stages
baby / infant (0-2)	Children
child (2-12)	Adults Seniors
teenager (13-19)	
adult (20-55)	
senior citizen (55 +)	

II. Investigate Representations of Seniors

- Create a large chart divided into sections of the stages of life. Leave room under each section to glue pictures.
- Have students look through magazines and cut out pictures of all the people they see.
- Students should glue the pictures of the people under the appropriate categories of age groups on the class chart.
- Study the chart they created and discuss what patterns they notice emerging from the data they gathered. Ask:
 - ? In which age groups are the most and the least photographs?
 - ? What are people doing in each group? List the *verbs* of actions you see in each category.
 - ? How are people portrayed differently? List the *adjectives* that describe the people in each category.
 - ? How do the majority of the images of senior citizens look?
- ∪ For older students ask ML Key Question #4: What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented or omitted in this message?
- ∩ For younger students ask ML Key Question #4, *Questions to Guide Young Children*: What does this tell me about how other people live and believe? Is anything or anyone left out?

III. Create Representations

- Discuss who are senior citizens that they know.
- Ask them if the images they saw in the magazines are similar to the real people they know.
- Return to the saying about the library burning down and explain how in some cultures senior citizens are the most valued members of the society. Have students analyze the photographs they found in the magazines and consider if most of the images portray respect and value the elderly.
- Plan on creating a book to celebrate the senior citizens in their lives. For students who don't have any seniors in their lives, this could be a good opportunity to reach out to seniors working at the school or living in the community.
- Depending on the developmental level of the students and the resources available, the book could be made with writing and drawings, photographs or video.
- Invite a senior citizen into the classroom to speak with the students.

California State Standards

Language Arts

Reading Comprehension

3.3 Determine what characters are like by what they say or do and by how the author or illustrator portrays them.

Writing

1.7 Use various reference materials (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, card catalog, encyclopedia, online information) as an aid to writing.

Listening and Speaking Strategies

Analysis and Evaluation of Oral and Media Communications

1.10 Evaluate the role of the media in focusing attention on events and in forming opinions on issues.

2.2c Make informational presentations: Incorporate more than one source of information (e.g., speakers, books, newspapers, television or radio reports).