

## ***Pictures Are Worth a Thousand Words***

(Adapted from: J. Thomas, City College of San Francisco)

**Objectives:** To explore how society makes assumptions about people based on their background and/or socioeconomic status. (This exercise can be used as a lead-in to discussions of stereotyping as well.)

**Audience:** Mature middle school and/or high school students

**Materials Needed:** Copies of “Pictures Are Worth a Thousand Words” handouts (Parts One and Two), file folders, pictures of personalities used in the exercise, biographical information on these personalities, and writing utensils

**Time Required:** One hour of preparation, two class periods for the exercise itself.

**Teacher Instructions:** Preparation work is required for this activity. First, pick 12–15 well-known people who have backgrounds that are unusual or unexpected (e.g., Hitler wanted to be an artist, etc.). Create a brief biographical profile on each. A profile of 12 such personalities is provided. Feel free to create your own profiles modeled after these examples.

Create a folder for each personality. On the exterior of the file folder, secure a picture of a personality, print that person’s name, and include an alphabetic identifier (e.g., Folder A, Folder B, etc.). The pictures chosen should be big enough to see from a distance. On the inside of the folder, secure a biography (see examples provided) or an article about the personality.

---

**Day 1:** Distribute Part One of the “Pictures Are Worth a Thousand Words” handout. Give students 10 - 15 minutes to read over the profiles and answer the questions on the handout. Next, transition into Part Two with these questions:

1. Do you think you know who any of these people are? Which ones? Who do you think they are?
2. Are there any specific profiles that you think sound particularly interesting? Why?
3. Who on this list do you think is the most successful?

Next, distribute Part Two of the “Pictures Are Worth a Thousand Words” handout. Display the file folders with the images of the personalities at the front of the classroom. Give the students 10 – 15 minutes to match the personalities to the faces/names using the letters printed on the folders (e.g., A = Malcolm X). Announce the correct answers and discuss the matches that were incorrect. Finally, split the students into groups of three or four people. Each group should be assigned one of the personalities used in the exercise. Their assignment for the following day will be to read the biographical information provided on that particular personality.

**Day 2:** Give students 10 – 15 minutes to get into their groups and create a two- to three-minute presentation to the class. Their presentation should address the following issues:

- What were some assumptions you made about this person before you knew who they were?
- Why did you make these assumptions?
- Were these assumptions proven to be correct or incorrect?

Questions that every group should answer are:

- Are assumptions like these positive or negative? Why and in what way?
- How do they affect the way that we treat others?
- What has this exercise taught you about making assumptions?

---

## **Example Personality Profiles**

### **Personality A: Malcolm X**

- Was sent to live in various foster homes and orphanages after mother was admitted into a mental hospital
- Wanted to be a lawyer, but was told by a teacher that those dreams were “unrealistic”
- Became involved in various narcotic, prostitution and gambling rings after moving to New York

For more information:

<http://www.cmgww.com/historic/malcolm/about/bio.htm>

### **Personality B: Jerry Springer**

- Child of Jewish refugees of the Holocaust
- Worked on Robert Kennedy’s presidential campaign
- Was mayor of a U.S. city

For more information:

<http://www.answers.com/topic/jerry-springer>

### **Personality C: Adolf Hitler**

- Was a good student for quite some time but grades began to slip in high school
- Had dreams of becoming an artist and, at age of 18, moved away from home to be closer to a major art school
- Worked odd jobs and was even homeless while trying to get into art school

For more information:

[http://www.netcomuk.co.uk/~lenin/ADOLF\\_HITLER\\_BIOGRAP.html#biog](http://www.netcomuk.co.uk/~lenin/ADOLF_HITLER_BIOGRAP.html#biog)

**Personality D: M.C. Hammer**

- Born into a very religious family
- Worked for the Oakland Athletics baseball team
- Wanted to play baseball for a living, but joined the Navy instead

For more information:

<http://music.uk.launch.yahoo.com/ar-301341-bio—MC-Hammer>

**Personality E: Al Capone**

- Quit school in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Worked in a bowling alley and a candy shop
- Is from a very close-knit family

For more information:

[http://flfl.essortment.com/alcapone\\_r tub.htm](http://flfl.essortment.com/alcapone_r tub.htm)

**Personality F: Oprah Winfrey**

- Grew up very poor and lived with grandmother on a farm in Mississippi
- Later lived with mother, but was rebellious and got into a lot of trouble
- Was a parent at the age of 14

For more information:

[http://ks.essortment.com/oprahwinfrey\\_rkcr.htm](http://ks.essortment.com/oprahwinfrey_rkcr.htm)

**Personality G: Bill Gates**

- Dropped out of Harvard
- Refused to do school work in Jr. High and High School
- Involved with building projects through Habitat for Humanity

For more information:

<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blbillgates.htm?once=true&>

**Personality H: Maya Angelou**

- After experiencing a traumatic event, completely stopped talking for almost four years
- Dropped out of high school
- Best friend was a brother named Bailey

For more information:

[http://project1.caryacademy.org/echoes/poet\\_Maya\\_Angelou/Angelou'sBiography.htm](http://project1.caryacademy.org/echoes/poet_Maya_Angelou/Angelou'sBiography.htm)

**Personality I: Drew Barrymore**

- Born into a family of actors
- Was a child star
- Abused drugs and alcohol beginning at a young age

For more information:

<http://allstars-online.net/Drewbio.html>

**Personality J: Cuba Gooding, Jr.**

- As a child, family lived in a car after being evicted from their home
- Started a dance group called Majestic Vision Dancebreakers
- Performed at the 1984 Olympic Games

For more information:

[http://www.biggeststars.com/c/cuba\\_gooding\\_jr.\\_biography.html](http://www.biggeststars.com/c/cuba_gooding_jr._biography.html)

**Personality K: Osama Bin Laden**

- Born 17th child out of 52 children
- Family owned a construction company
- Family was very wealthy; father was a billionaire

For more information:

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/osamabinladen.html>

**Personality L: Tupac Shakur**

- Was named after an Incan Indian who was a revolutionary
- Loved to write poetry and love songs
- Attended The Baltimore School for the Performing Arts; studied acting and ballet

For more information:

<http://www.computing.dcu.ie/computety/2005/lmoffa-cty/bio.html>

The foundation for this exercise can be found on the [CCSF Teaching Tolerance](http://www.ccsf.edu/Resources/Tolerance) website. Visit their website [www.ccsf.edu/Resources/Tolerance](http://www.ccsf.edu/Resources/Tolerance) for other classroom activities.