Challenging Stereotypes: A New Look at Old Age

OVERVIEW

As baby boomers transition into retirement and younger people are taxed to fund social security and services for the growing population of elderly people, intergenerational understanding is increasingly important. This lesson contributes to that understanding while also providing a writing opportunity that is especially appropriate for English language learners. In this lesson, students will use film clips from the documentary Ping Pong to examine stereotypes about senior citizens. As part of that examination, they will look at adjectives typically used to describe the elderly and write news stories reporting on the events they saw in the film clips.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

• understand what distinguishes adjectives from other parts of speech
• understand how journalists use adjectives and how writers’ choices influence readers’ beliefs
• understand the differences between journalism and other forms of writing (e.g., narrative, instructional, persuasive)
• write short news reports
• separate fact from fiction in stereotypes about the elderly and identify the sources of their own beliefs about senior citizens

GRADE LEVELS

8-10

SUBJECT AREAS

Anti-bias education
English/language arts (including ELL/ESL classes)
Health
Media literacy

MATERIALS

• Internet access and equipment to show the class online video and project student writing

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
One 50-minute class period, plus a short homework assignment

**FILM CLIPS**
The video clips provided with this lesson are from *Ping Pong*.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network.

Clip 1: “The Games: Overview” (53 sec.)
The clip begins at 17:43 with children waving hello. It ends at 18:36 with a shot of Ursula playing.

Clip 2: “Meeting Les” (1:25 min.)
This clip begins at 4:32 with the title “Wakefield, North West England.” It ends at 5:57 with shot of Les holding weights.

Clip 3: “Les Competes” (5:30 min.)
The clip begins at 22:50 with Rune walking into a stadium. It ends at 28:20 with Les and Rune shaking hands.

Clip 4: “Meeting Inge” (3:19 min.)
The clip begins at 13:41 with a slate identifying Inge. It ends at 17:00 with Inge saying, “So I can forget my illness.”

Clip 5: “Inge Competes” (2:55 min.)
The clip begins at 36:13 with the beginning of the match between Inge and Rikima. It ends at 39:08 with a close-up of Inge smiling.

**ACTIVITY**

1. As a class, quickly brainstorm a list of words that come to mind when you hear “senior citizens” or “the elderly.”

2. Take the list and, working in small teams, organize the words on the list into grammatical categories (i.e., group nouns, adjectives, verbs). Project one of the team’s answers and use it to let other teams compare and make any corrections necessary, explaining the differences in the word categories as needed.

3. To prepare students for the film, tell the students they will be watching clips from a British film called *Ping Pong* and they’ll be introduced to two athletes, Les and Inge. Also note that because the film is British, there may be some unfamiliar terminology (e.g., what in the United States would be called a “paddle,” the British call a “bat”). Let them know that after the clips, they will review their list of words and have an opportunity to make changes.
4. Keeping the students’ list of words where they can reference it, show the film clips in the order listed above. Pause after each clip to check for comprehension of vocabulary and, as time allows, invite reactions.

5. After the clips, ask students how the film affirmed and/or challenged their ideas about old people. Briefly discuss stereotypes that come up and invite students to comment on the sources of their ideas. Talk about who benefits and who is harmed by stereotypes. Begin to wrap up the activity by giving students a few minutes to re-examine their original list and add to it or delete words from it as appropriate.

6. Note how many of the class list words are adjectives. Then, as an assessment, give students the following homework assignment: Write two brief news reports about either Les or Inge. (In other words, both reports should focus on the same person.) One report must leave out adjectives. The other must use adjectives. If needed, describe how a news report differs from instructional writing (e.g., their assignment isn’t about how to play ping pong) or fictional narrative (e.g., you can’t invent dialogue). Make the film clips available so students can view them again as needed.

On the day that the assignment is due, spend five minutes reviewing what students learned about adjectives and writing from the exercise.

As an option, you could also use this as an opportunity for students to practice online research skills by telling them that their reports need to include some background information not available in the film.

EXTENSIONS

1. Have students post their news stories to a class wiki and invite them to look at the differences. Use the comparison as a springboard for discussing the concept of objectivity in journalism. Consider inviting students to follow the news closely for a week and bring to class examples of how reporters used adjectives.

2. Arrange for students to host a screening of the film and lead a discussion of it at a local senior center or nursing home. Alternatively, have students conduct and share oral history interviews with current or former athletes who are older than 80.

3. Use the lesson as a springboard for a health-class unit on healthy aging.

RESOURCES

Ithaca College Gerontology Institute
www.ithaca.edu/gerontology/schools/
The institute’s website offers reports on its research, as well as a variety of resources for teaching about aging.

Media College: How to Write a News Story  
This resource provides a handy list of basic tips.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films  
This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

USA Table Tennis  
[www.teamusa.org/USA-Table-Tennis.aspx](http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Table-Tennis.aspx)  
The website of the national table tennis team provides copious information about the sport, including the rules of the game.

**STANDARDS**

[Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

- **SL.9-10.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

- **SL.9-10.2** Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

- **W.9-10.1d** Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

- **W.9-10.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization and analysis of content.

- **W.9-10.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
Content Knowledge: (http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Language Arts, Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of The Teacher’s Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World (Corwin 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 150 independent films.