

# LESSON 7

## Misinformation and Rumors

### Goal

To explore ways that information can become distorted and lead to rumors; to explore some of the consequences of misinformation and rumors.

### Materials

Poster board or construction paper; assorted art supplies

### Key Words and Phrases

Rumor, perspective, intentional

### Process

1. Have students sit in a large circle. Tell them that they are going to participate in the "Telephone Game."
2. Ask a volunteer to think up a brief statement or story and whisper it into the ear of the person sitting to his or her right. Tell the person who has just heard the statement to whisper it to the next person. This procedure continues until everyone has heard the statement. Have the last student say aloud what he or she heard and then have the student who started the story tell what the original statement or story actually was. Have students compare the original to the final statement and note any changes.
3. Have the group explore ways that a story can change as it is retold and examine how this can lead to rumors. Use the following discussion questions as a guide:
  - a. What are some possible reasons why a story changes as it is repeated? (e.g., people tend to remember sharp details and forget those that were less clear; people fill in gaps to make a story more believable or closer to what they think it should be; people exaggerate to make a story funnier or more interesting than it really is.)
  - b. What influences how we hear and interpret information? (e.g., our experiences, interests, perspectives)
  - c. Do you think that there are times when people hear many different interpretations of the same story and begin to question which interpretation is accurate? Explain your thinking.
  - d. If everyone sees and hears something a little differently, how do we know when a story is accurate? How can we sort out the truth from the changes that can occur when a story is retold? What can we do to check the accuracy of a story? (e.g. look for first hand sources; try to get multiple perspectives)



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- e. What is the danger of not knowing the truth?
  - f. What is a rumor?
  - g. Do you think that some rumors get started innocently? Explain your thinking.
  - h. Do you think there are times when rumors are started intentionally to hurt someone or to start trouble? Give examples.
  - i. What harm can come from believing a rumor? What harm can come from repeating a rumor?
  - j. What situations might cause rumors to be spread?
4. Working individually or in small groups, have students design posters that alert others to the harm in spreading misinformation or rumors. Display posters in the classroom.
  5. Have students research some of the rumors that have spread following global world tensions, e.g. following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Have students report their findings to the class.

**Adapted from** *A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Anti-Bias Study Guide (Elementary/ Intermediate Level)*. 2000. New York, NY: Anti-Defamation League.

## Connection to Standards

Language Arts: Listening and Speaking

- Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Language Arts: Writing

- Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Language Arts: Reading

- Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

Life Skills: Thinking and Reasoning

- Understands and applies the basic principles of presenting an argument
- Understands and applies basic principles of logic and reasoning

Civics

- Understands the importance of Americans sharing and supporting certain values, beliefs, and principles of American constitutional democracy
- Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society

Behavioral Standards

- Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function

