

Think of a Bear...



Teacher instructions:

Invite students to think of a bear.

- Encourage them to really use their imagination...
 - What color is their bear?
 - What is it doing?
 - Where is it located?
 - Get specific!

Choose a few volunteers to share about their bear to the rest of the class. If students respond with simple answers (example: a polar bear), ask follow up questions to encourage specificity. As students answer, maintain curiosity and allow them to briefly elaborate.

Once several or all students have shared, transition into a larger conversation by explaining that the class could have had a superficial conversation about bears: they have fur, walk on all fours, have ears, but instead, we discovered that we were all imagining different bears.

Ask the class: “Why do you think you imagined the bear that you did when I asked? What determined the bear you thought of?”

- Invite answers. If students say that they aren’t sure, you might prompt them with these examples: “If you were just in a National Park and saw a black bear, that might have inspired you. Or, if you grew up loving the Berenstain Bear books, that could be an influence. So could watching a documentary about disappearing polar bear habitats in the Arctic.
- Guide students to understand that the bears they imagined were influenced by their experiences and what they know.



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Teacher instructions Continued:

Ask: "Would you think of a different bear if you were asked again another time?"

Highlight that experiences and knowledge are individual and different for different people. They also change over time, which is why we don't want to make assumptions about how people think or feel, but instead embrace the opportunity to practice curiosity and listening to learn more about others

Connect this idea back to the activity:

- Most people know what a bear is, but to grasp the precise bear that someone is thinking of in a moment, we'd have to ask and listen.
- Effective communication helps us prevent misunderstandings.

Connect this to popularity:

- Sometimes popularity dynamics and status can impact our ability to communicate in honest and straightforward ways.
- When we meet challenges in our relationships that include issues of status and influence among peers, it's important to remember not to make assumptions and make sure we understand each other.
- Take the time to wonder and ask about someone's bear (bear can stand for anything!) and consider if you're on the same page as someone else.

Ask students: "What kind of questions do you need to ask to get to know someone/their bear? What kind of questions are not as helpful or might lead to a misunderstanding?"



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Teacher instructions Continued:

Allow students to discuss, and then share these tips:

- To build connection and intimacy in a relationship, (friendship, deepening familial relationships, a potential romantic partner), it's a good idea to ask non-judgmental questions because set people up to share openly and honestly.
- When sharing an observation, start with an “I” statement, such as “I notice...”
- When asking clarifying questions in an effort to understand and get to know someone, start with open ended questions that lead with “how” or “what.” These questions encourage reflection and exploration, which encourages deeper sharing. Avoid “why” questions because these are often already rooted in a judgment.

Explain that active listening includes eye contact, open body language, focused attention, genuine curiosity, a desire to “get it” by asking non-judgmental questions.

Conclude the discussion with a summary statement such as, “Now, when you “think of a bear,” you will also think about effective communication and active listening can help us understand each others’ perspectives and build deeper relationships.

