

1 Unpacking my backpack

Introduction

This activity uses the metaphor of a backpack to help learners think about the things that make up who they are. It is based upon a relatively simple idea that we all carry an invisible backpack with us in our lives.

The content of our backpack is unique to us (though it may contain things in common with others). We have collected, and continue to collect, the content of our backpack through people, places, events, and experiences.



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Key Stage: All

Time: 60 mins

Learning Style: teacher-led
(+ individual)

Why should we think about this ?

Thinking about how we get on with each other, locally and globally, should begin with thinking about ourselves, and understanding how our identity influences what, how, and why we think what we do.

This is a great activity for learning more about ourselves and each other, and is especially good for drawing out commonalities (many of them not obvious) that we have with others.

It is also highly effective in supporting learners to become more comfortable with, and respectful of, differences. Exploring the diversity of our own backpacks deepens our understanding of diversity beyond skin colour or religious affiliation for example.

When should we think about this ?

As this activity deals with sensitive issues it might be best introduced using circle time, before breaking out to complete the drawing element and then bringing learners back together.

To allow discussions to develop, we suggest leaving a little more than an hour for this activity, for example between the beginning of the day and morning break.

This activity could be used to help a group of learners get to know each other at the beginning of a year, or perhaps before meeting a

Exploring identity can raise sensitive issues for learners and it is important we are able to deal with these as teachers. We recommend that you look at the **Time 2 Think** CPD materials on **Creating a Safe Space** and **Controversial Classrooms** before using this activity.

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school link partner, or writing to them. We have found it a great activity whenever it is used, and one that learners of all ages will visit again and again (with guidance) to help them in their understanding about identity and diversity.

Activities



What do I think about... IDENTITY ?

Ask your learners to think about who they are. What is it that makes up their identity? You might need to explain the word 'identity' if this is being used as an introductory activity. It is important to allow plenty of thinking time for this. You should be prepared to give examples from your own identity in order to encourage understanding and help learners feel more comfortable in sharing personal responses.



How can I develop my thinking ?

1. Introduce the idea of the backpack as a way of thinking about what makes us who we are. Make sure they understand that...

- ...we can (and do) add to our backpack (new events, people etc).
- ...we can unpack it to remind ourselves of what's in it.
- ...we can repack it as our experiences change who we are.

Explain that sometimes the content of our backpack is directly related to who we are such as being a boy or girl, but that it can also be indirect. Someone might love animals for example, because they have grown up with them. Understanding ourselves through cause and effect is a good skill to learn, but you may need to give some examples to help. For example:

- I really enjoy the outdoor life *because* I grew up in the countryside;
- I became a teacher *because* my parents both worked in schools;
- I love Indian food *because* my best friend is Indian and I often eat at their house;
- I am nervous of dogs *because* my grandad had one that used to growl at me when I was younger.

Teaching Tip: You might use a real backpack and objects as a stimulus to bring your explanation of cause and effect to life.

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2. Give each learner a large sheet of paper and ask them to draw a person with a large backpack on their back. Ask them to think about the things that make them who they are and add these to their backpack. This can be done directly onto the paper or using post-its. Pictures, sketches and symbols can be used as well as words. You could use the prompts or categories below to help learners engage with the task.

Gender -- Age -- Where you live? -- Family structure -- Skills --
Holidays -- Friends -- Relatives -- Languages -- Entertainment --
Siblings -- Clothes -- Ethnicity -- Faith -- Food -- Hobbies -- Pets

3. When they have finished their backpacks, learners can be supported to share them with each other. This sharing should include discussion and not simply be about lists. You may want to manage this in small groups rather than as a whole class activity.

Learners should be encouraged to add to their own backpack as they share ideas with others - reflecting on themselves through understanding others is a useful skill.

You could make this more creative by prepping your learners in advance to bring in things that represent their identity - photos, magazine cuttings, food packaging etc.

What do I think now ?

Come back together as a group and allow learners to feed back on how their thoughts may have changed during the activity.

You may need to model some phrases for them, for example, “*At the beginning I thought that my identity was.. but now I think...*” or “*I hadn’t really thought about ... being part of my identity, but now I can see that it is.*”

Encourage students to challenge themselves, and praise those who are brave enough to change their minds or talk about the way their thinking has developed as this can encourage others to also share.

Why do I think this ?

At this point you can introduce more sensitive (even controversial) ideas to discussing identity, and support learners to go one step further in their thinking.

Asking learners about their thoughts and supporting them to trace those thoughts, beliefs, opinions or ideas back to their backpacks can help them to understand how we form our views, and how they might change or develop.

As teachers we need to learn how to be the facilitator, devil’s advocate and challenger to learning rather than the instructor. For advice on developing these skills see the **Time 2 Think** CPD materials **Facilitator Skills** and **Critical Thinking** as support to this activity.

It is important that learners become more conscious of where their ideas, beliefs and perhaps prejudices come from. This deeper understanding is the main aim of this activity.

For example, connecting your attitude towards dogs to the life event (the thing that is in your backpack) that caused this is to engage with the deeper consciousness that underpins our identity. This is a gentle example, but applying the same principle to understanding why someone might have racist or sexist opinions for example could be very powerful.

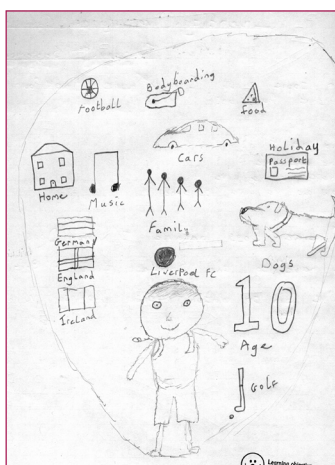
Extension ideas

➔ Where can we take this thinking ?

With older learners you could extend this to discuss questions such as 'Can we get rid of contents in our back pack?' 'How can we deal with contents we are uncomfortable with?'

With careful introduction this activity could form the basis of a linking activity with a UK link school. Learners from partner schools could use their backpacks to explore individual identity and to compare who they are as individuals. They could look for the commonalities and differences that they find. Why might these be?

This activity could be used for international link work, but we would suggest only if staff have an established link and have received training around learning through school links, such as that provided by Lifeworlds and other providers.



If you have used this activity in your classroom and have any examples you would like to share or would like to provide any comments or feedback as a teacher then we'd love to hear from you.

We want **Time 2 Think** to evolve into a community of practice to further develop ideas and organise events and opportunities, but for this we need the involvement of users such as yourself.

Send any contributions, or contact us to find out more, at ask@lifeworldslearning.co.uk