

Idols (?) of our times

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Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

Background and keywords:

Every society has always had and continues to have their idols, heroes and "stars". As László Hemrik (2008) stated rather blasphemously, the most important idol and icon of all times has been Jesus. No other person has exerted such an important influence on mankind and no other individual has been portrayed in so many paintings as Jesus Christ. It was not by chance, that Hemrik's opinion was widely acknowledged internationally following the *Jesus Christ Superstar* Rock Opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber.

In the past, historically important kings and emperors, heroes such as important warriors were role models and filled the function of idols. Nowadays, these roles are filled by certain persons who are "pushed" by the media, who often become internationally famous stars uniquely thanks to "publicity". What role model and what values do they pass on to children and young people? *What* makes certain persons the stars and idols of our times, anyway? Which idols do boys choose and which ones girls? Do children and young people even actually have a *choice* or are their idols *imposed*?

Similar topics:

Media influence; personal and physical traits of male and female idols and stars; a reflection about your own values and character traits; self-evaluation.

Materials:

- Worksheet 1: Make a collage entitled "*Our Stars*".
- Worksheet 2: Working in pairs, prepare a *TV interview with a famous person*.
- Bring from home: as many as possible colourful youth newspapers and magazines such as: Bravo, Bravo Girl, Bravo Sport, PopCorn, etc.), billboards, posters and other colourful magazines to cut out from.
- Large packaging paper or cardboard paper to make the collage.
- Multi-coloured felt-tip pens.
- A pair of scissors, glue, Blue-Tack adhesive.
- If possible: Internet access with printing possibilities.

Duration:

About one class session including a variation (for variations/continuation, it could be extended to two class sessions)

Number of participants:

Feasible with any class size

Age:

- About 9 year olds and onwards (third grade)

- Well suited for various classes (i.e. mother tongue or foreign language instruction, natural and social science class and manual training, art class, multimedia classes, etc.), afternoon supervision, youth activities

Aims:

- To promote social skills (pair work and group work);
- To develop skills in describing individuals (appearance, personal traits);
- To formulate expectations;
- To draw a comparison (idols vs. myself/ourselves);
- To improve oral communication skills (greater fluency in expressing personal opinions freely);
- To express agreement/disagreement;
- To reduce clichés related to "idols", "stars" from the media;
- To work with stereotypes (to reduce stereotypes).

(Short) Explanation:

In a homogenous small group, the children are to make a collage (a poster) with pictures of their "stars" and "idols", before they list their personal and physical traits. Using a snowball procedure, they should discuss their experiences and collect common traits in pairs, then in two groups of two, then in four groups, etc. and finally with the entire class.

Activity steps:

1. For this class period, the children and teachers should bring from home the largest number of colourful youth magazines such as: Bravo, Bravo Girl, Bravo Sport, Popcorn, etc.), posters, billboards and other colourful magazines for the purpose of cutting out of, as well.

The children should spontaneously choose a partner that they would like to work with. It is important that homogeneous, small groups are developed. If possible, there should be access to the Internet with printing possibilities for this class period.

2. Working in pairs, the children should make a collage with pictures of their idols and stars (one idol per child) in about 20 minutes. They may either cut pictures out of newspapers and magazines or print pictures from the Internet. The children should paste the pictures on sheets of paper (or cardboard) and discuss together about why they have chosen these stars and write as many as possible *personal and physical traits* (adjectives) of the stars chosen. (Worksheet 1)
3. After 20 minutes they should discuss their experiences and collect common physical and personal traits of their stars using the snowball procedure in two all-girl or all-boy groups of two and then in four-groups, etc. and finally with the entire class.
4. Lastly, all of the posters are posted on the wall and the children are requested to reflect on this activity in class discussion.

Reflection:

The results from the collages and posters can be compared and discussed along the lines of the following aspects:

- Look at the poster again and compare:
 - Which star was selected by several of you in the class? Where did you first hear about that star? What is his/her profession?
 - What are the personal traits of this star?

- Why do you like him or her? Why are they likeable?
- Does he/she also have some negative traits? Which ones?
- Have more males or females been chosen?
 - What personal and physical traits do males/females have? Compare them.
- Do you want to be like the star on the poster? Give reasons for your answer.
- Choose two traits that you would also like to have. Give reasons for your answer. Why are those important traits?
- Think about a person (i.e. a family member, relative, a friend (girl or boy), an acquaintance...), that you know well, you like very much and that you could adopt as a role model.
 - List the positive traits of this person.
 - Compare his/her traits with those of stars. What did you notice? Do they have anything in common or not? Why?

Variations (continuation):

Suggestion 1a:

One child at a time (and possibly in another class session) can present his/her star or another star of their choice, speaking in the first person (i.e. "I-form"...) and describe a "typical" day for them. The participants are to guess which star they mean. The one who guesses correctly, takes their turn next and can choose a new star.

Suggestion 1b:

The star chosen can also be acted out or presented in a role play or a pantomime and then guessed.

Suggestion 2:

A child comes up to the front of the classroom or sits in the middle of a circle. He/she thinks about a star or a famous person from the past or present. The other children have to try and guess who this person is by asking questions. Answers can only be given with "yes" or "no". The child that guesses correctly comes next and thinks about the name of another famous person.

Suggestion 3:

This activity can be supplemented by having the children prepare a TV Interview in pairs (see Worksheet 2) using role cards A und B. One child plays the role of the reporter and asks the other partner (i.e. acting as the famous person) about his/her profession, family, plans for the future, etc.