

UNDERSTANDING SELF-STIGMA THROUGH ART



Grade 4

Understanding Self-Stigma Through Art

Career Education, Arts Education & Physical and Health Education

Purpose of the Lesson:

“Personal acceptance and agreement with stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs held against oneself, is called self-stigma” ([Courtney Beard, PhD, Psychology Today](#)). The experience of self-stigma can deeply impact one’s mental health. Understanding that the stigmas that exist in society can impact our self-image is the first step to shedding that self-stigma. This lesson plan unpacks the concept of self-stigma and provides an opportunity for students to express themselves and the things they judge themselves about through a visual art activity. They will also explore the work of artist Amy Frank, who shares her experiences with bipolar disorder through her art and shows how art can be a coping tool for mental health challenges.

Curriculum Competencies:

Health and Physical Education

- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being.
- Describe factors that positively influence mental well-being and self-identity.

Career Education

- Identify and appreciate their personal attributes, skills, interests, and accomplishments and their growth over time.
- Recognize the need for others who can support their learning and personal growth.
- Demonstrate respect for differences in the classroom.
- Appreciate the influence of peer relationships, family, and community on personal choices and goals.

Arts Education

- Create artistic works collaboratively and individually using ideas inspired by imagination, inquiry, experimentation, and purposeful play.
- Choose artistic elements, processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, techniques, and environments using combinations and selections for specific purposes in art making.
- Observe, listen, describe, inquire, and predict how artists (dancers, actors, musicians, and visual artists) use processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, techniques, and environments to create and communicate.

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- Reflect on creative processes and make connections to other experiences.
- Connect knowledge and skills from other areas of learning in planning, creating, interpreting, and analyzing works for art.
- Express feelings, ideas, and experiences in creative ways.
- Describe and respond to works of art and explore artists' intent.

First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

Video

[Using Art to Challenge the Stigma of Mental Illness - Janssen Global](#)

Guiding Questions:

- How did this artist use her experience with stigma and mental illness creatively?
- How can creative expression support mental wellness?
- What did the artist do to reduce stigma through art?
- How can self-expression support the way we see ourselves?

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Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Preparation: Queue up video/set up projector

1. Have the students watch the video “Using Art to Challenge the Stigma of Mental Illness” This can be found [HERE](#).

2. Pose the guiding questions found above to your class after watching the video.

3. Share this definition of self-stigma with your class: “Personal acceptance and agreement with stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs held against oneself, is called self-stigma” ([Courtney Beard, PhD, Psychology Today](#)). Ask your students to reflect on what this definition means. Explore any words that may be new to them (such as stereotypes and prejudice) to facilitate a deeper understanding.

4. Have your students reflect on the concept of self-stigma by coming up with examples. To help them conceptualize self-stigma a little more deeply, get your students to brainstorm some examples of what self-stigma can look like. To get them started, you can use the example of someone with a learning disability thinking they’re not smart due to the stigma that exists in our society around having a learning disability.

5. Discuss with your students how, like in the video, art can be used to express what is going on in our minds. For many people with mental health challenges and mental illness, the thoughts they have can be harmful to them and create a lot of challenging emotions. One way that some people cope with these difficulties is through artistic expression. Like the artist in the video, art as a coping technique is taken up by many people with mental illnesses and mental health issues or folks who need a creative outlet for their emotions.

6. Show your students the work of artist Amy Frank (you can find her website [here](#)). Have your students explore Amy Frank’s work by displaying her artwork on a projector or smartboard, or have them look at her artwork individually on computers or tablets. Explain to them that Amy lives with bipolar disorder and she has used art as a means to not only cope with her mental illness, but to express how her mind feels internally in an external way. These visual representations of her mind help her to work through her experience with mental illness and help others see that folks with bipolar disorder are capable of creating beautiful works of art, which can shed some of the stigma that exists surrounding mental illness.

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7. Have your students reflect on Amy Frank's art. Organize your students into small groups of two and have them do a think-pair-share about how Amy's art impacts them. They should reflect on the art on their own, work with a partner to share their thoughts, then share their discussion with the larger group. They can discuss how they interpret her art in the context of self-stigma and mental illness or simply what they like about her artwork. Once they have had a chance to share with a partner, facilitate a group discussion about Amy's art and what they discussed in their pairings.

8. Explain the curriculum connections to your students. Tell your students that they will be creating their own art pieces on the topic of self-stigma. One of the first steps to overcoming self-stigma is acknowledging the internalized beliefs we have based on prejudices, judgements, and negative stereotypes that society imposes on us based on different parts of our identity. Let your students know that these art pieces can be as abstract as they want. However, if they need some structure for their piece, suggest that they draw an image of themselves and write the words they feel about themselves based on their self-stigma around the image.

9. Follow-up Activity. If your students are comfortable doing so, have them share their art pieces with the class. A fundamental way we can reduce stigma is by talking about our differences and our experiences. Sharing their artwork can be a great first step to reducing stigma within the context of your classroom.

10. Lesson Closure. Share with your students that self-stigma can contribute a great deal to people's negative experiences with mental health. When we believe the stereotypes, prejudices, and judgements society imposes on us, we can start believing that these are things that are wrong with us that we need to change about ourselves. What is important to acknowledge is that we are not the problem: stigma is. Once we can shed the self-stigma, we can work towards living a more Stigma-Free life in general!