

Euro-rail “à la carte”

None of us is a racist but... This activity is about looking at prejudice using an everyday situation: travelling together on a train.



Issues addressed

- Prejudice and limits of tolerance.
- Images and stereotyping about different minorities.

Aims

- To challenge participant's stereotypes and prejudice about other people and minorities, and about the images and associations the text raises.
- To reflect on the perceptions different participants have of minorities.
- To raise self-awareness about the limits of tolerance.
- To confront the different values and stereotypes of the participants.

Time: 90 minutes - 2 hours.

Group size: Minimum 5, maximum 40.

Preparation

- Copies of activity sheet, one per participant.
- A pencil for each participant.

Instructions

1. Give a copy of the activity sheet to each person.
2. Briefly describe the scenario and tell them to read the descriptions of the people travelling on the train.
3. Now ask each person individually to choose the three people they would most like to travel with and the three they would least like to travel with.
4. Once everybody has made their individual choices, ask them to form into groups of four to five and to:
 - Share their individual choices and the reasons for them.
 - Compare their choices and reasons and check where there are similarities.
 - Come up with a common list (the three pluses and the three minuses) by consensus.
5. In plenary, ask each group to present their conclusions including the reasons for their common choices. They should also say in which “cases” there was most disagreement within the group.

Debriefing and evaluation

The debriefing and discussion will be based on the group's reports. Comparing the different results is a good way to introduce the discussion.

You may continue by asking questions such as:

- How realistic are the situations presented?
- Has anyone in the group experienced a similar situation in real life?
- What were the major factors that determined your individual decisions?

- If the groups did not manage to reach common conclusions, why was this?
- What was most difficult?
- What factors prevented you coming to a consensus?
- Which stereotypes does the list of passengers evoke?
- Are the stereotypes in the descriptions given or in our minds and imagination?
- Where do we get these images from?
- How would it feel to be in a situation in which nobody would want to share a train compartment with you?

Tips for the facilitator

Be aware that the list of passengers enclosed is very long and makes it difficult for the groups to come up with a common list, consequently you may require more time for both the individual and the group part. If you wish, you may reduce the list to a maximum of 10-14 passengers and adapt it to the local or national situation of the group you work with. It is very important that some of the passengers' descriptions correspond to minorities which are familiar to the group including "invisible" minorities such as homosexuals, people with disabilities, someone who is HIV positive etc.

In many cases the groups will not manage to come up with a common list. Do not emphasise this aspect of the activity especially as it may lead to a false consensus. It is equally interesting to check why it is difficult to reach a consensus on a matter like this.

It is important for everyone to respect each other's opinions and not attack people for their personal views. If some choices seem doubtful it is more relevant to discuss the reasons which lead to a particular choice rather than to question personal decisions. In fact both the participants and you, the facilitator, will be in difficult positions: it's very easy to turn this activity into a condemnation session! For this reason beware not to let the discussion develop into "who's got the least prejudice?" but rather to work on the fact that we all have prejudice.

It is also important to discuss and explore the fact that the description of the passengers is very brief, we know little about the personality or background of people. But isn't that the way we normally react to information in newspapers and television, and in conversations or when meeting people for the first time?

Suggestions for follow up

This activity may be followed up by another dealing with images such as 'First impressions' (page 83) or 'What do you see?' (page 176). Alternatively, ask yourselves questions about what you really know about what it is like to be a refugee or an immigrant and face prejudice and discrimination using the activity 'The Refugee' (page 151).

THE SCENARIO

You are boarding the “Deer Valley Express” train for a week-long ride from Lisbon to Moscow.

You are travelling in a couchette compartment, which you have to share with three other people. With which of the following passengers would you prefer to share?

1. A Serbian soldier from Bosnia.
2. An overweight Swiss financial broker.
3. An Italian disc-jockey who seems to have plenty of dollars.
4. An African woman selling leather products.
5. A young artist who is HIV positive.
6. A Roma man (Gypsy or traveller) from Hungary just released from jail.
7. A Basque nationalist who travels regularly to Russia.
8. A German rapper living a very alternative life-style.
9. A blind accordion player from Austria.
10. A Ukrainian student who doesn't want to go home.
11. A middle-aged Romanian woman who has no visa and a 1-year old child in her arms.
12. A Dutch hard-line and aggressive feminist.
13. A skinhead from Sweden ostensibly under the influence of alcohol.
14. A wrestler from Belfast apparently going to a football match.
15. A Polish prostitute from Berlin.
16. A French farmer who speaks only French and has a basket full of strong cheese.
17. A Kurdish refugee living in Germany who is on his way back from Libya.

Instructions

1. **Individually** select your three first choices of the people you would most like to travel with and the three you would least like to travel with. You have 15 minutes to do this.
2. **In groups**, share your choices of the 3 best and the 3 worst companions, and discuss the reasons which led to your decisions.

Then try to come to a consensus on a common list of the three most favoured and the three least favoured companions. You have 45 minutes for this part of the activity.

3. **In plenary**, each group presents its conclusions followed by a debriefing and evaluation of the exercise.