

Personal Heroes

We all have respect and admiration for people who inspire us. Sometimes they serve as role models. By exchanging feelings about their personal heroes, whether they are living or dead, participants can grow to know each other better and get an insight into different cultures.

Issues addressed

- Heroes as elements and symbols of socialisation and culture.
- Different readings of history and different personal preferences and tastes.
- The differences and the things held in common between people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds.

Aims

- To make participants aware of the differences and similarities within the group.
- To raise participants' curiosity about other people's heroes.
- To get to know each other in the group.
- To be self-critical about one's ethnocentrism (understanding the dominant cultural model vs that of the minority).
- To reflect about the role of history teaching and the media as makers of heroes.

Time: 90 minutes

Group size

Any size between 10 and 40 participants

Preparation

- Flip chart and markers
- Paper and pencil for the participants.

Instructions

If the group is large, divide the participants into groups of 5 to 6 people.

- Ask people to start by thinking on their own about three people who are their personal heroes.
- After about five minutes invite the participants to share their choices and to say what they admire in those people. Allow sufficient time for a real exchange and questioning.
- Ask each group to list on a flip chart the names of the heroes, their nationality and, if appropriate, the areas in which they became famous e.g. sports, music, culture, politics...
- In plenary, ask each group to present its flip chart to the other groups.



Debriefing and evaluation

You should note down which heroes, if any, are mentioned more than once or appear frequently. Then invite the participants to say if they enjoyed this activity and then to discuss the following questions:

- Were there any surprises or any heroes who were unknown to anybody? Say why.
- Was there a trend in terms of, for example, nationality or sex? If so, why are most heroes from the same nationality, cultural background or gender? Are they nationals or foreigners?
- What is it that makes us appreciate some heroes rather than others?
- Do you think your heroes are universal? Why or why not?

Tips for the facilitator

This activity can be made more exciting, if the participants are briefed beforehand so they can bring photos, records or newspaper cuttings of their heroes. As an alternative, collect together magazines or newspapers, especially youth magazines, and leave them for the participants in the room.

The principle behind the activity, that our choices of heroes are relative and depend on our culture, works better if the group is multi-cultural. Age and gender differences in the group will also prove interesting.

This activity may seem very similar to “National Holiday” (page 131). However, a careful look will reveal significant differences in the way the aims are approached.

Suggestions for follow up

Identify a hero, either local, national or international, who you think should be celebrated. Prepare a celebration and invite others to come. The hero could be someone who has shown great strength of character or achieved something special combating racism, xenophobia or anti-semitism, or could be someone you have identified as having contributed to the fight against another issue such as intolerance against people with AIDS.

People who have been heroic in the face of prejudice and discrimination have had to show great courage to say what they think. Have you got the courage to say what you think? What do you think about things? Do you have an opinion? Have a go at ‘Where do you stand?’ (page 178).

