

## LESSON

# Examining Identity and Assimilation

Examine identity and assimilation with an activity that asks the essential question: Was there ever a part of your identity you had to hide?

**Grade Level** 3-5, 6-8

Topic: Race & Ethnicity, Immigration

Subject: Reading & Language Arts, Social Studies

Social Justice Domain: Identity

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In the essay "Magic Carpet," Mitali Perkins writes about learning to see her rich heritage through critical colonial eyes as a young girl in New York and her struggle to reclaim her history as an adult.

## Get Started

1. Download the essay, "Magic Carpet," and distribute a copy to each class member.
2. Explain that the essay describes the author's experience of boundaries within her own identity.
3. Use the following discussion questions and writing activities to help your students explore identity and assimilation in the essay and their own lives.

## Discussion Questions

1. Describe the author's childhood experience of cultural boundaries. How did she respond to these boundaries? How would she respond differently now? What might have happened to cause her to write about these experiences?
2. Have you ever been made fun of because of a cultural trait, such as your home language or traditional clothing or food? Describe the experience.

3. Have you ever made fun of someone — or witnessed others doing so — because of a cultural trait? Describe the experience.
4. What situations can you think of that force or encourage people to give up parts of their identity? Explain.
5. What does the author mean by "magic carpet"?
6. Do you have a "magic carpet" that you and only a few others share? What are the qualities of that "magic carpet"? With whom do you share it? What would enable you to share this secret part of your identity with more people?

## Writing Activities

1. Share the essay with a parent, grandparent or other elder and discuss questions 1-6 with them. Prepare a written report on what you discover.
2. Choose one of these two topics:
  - a. Have you ever tried to hide your home language, religion or any other aspect of your family's culture from your friends or classmates? If so, why? Write an essay describing the experience, how it felt, and what, if anything, about the situation you would change if you could.
  - b. Have you ever discovered that one of your friends or classmates has been hiding some part of his or her cultural identity from you? If so, write an essay describing how the discovery felt, how you responded, and what, if anything, about the situation you would change if you could.
3. Imagine that a trait you "disown" now (a physical feature, a custom, a bit of family history, personal ties) will be gone forever at the end of today. Write a story, song or poem to say goodbye to this part of yourself. What do you remember about "it" and its role in your life? Describe your feelings. What advice would you offer to someone who feels forced to give up a part of his or her identity?



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