

WHAT MAKES A GENERATION?

Inspired by



Goal:

In this activity, students will explore the concept of generations, how they are formed, and how one differs from another. They will also complete a social studies activity that reinforces research, analysis, and data visualization skills.

Materials Required:

Worksheet 1, pen or pencil

Instructions:

- 1. Ask** students two or three “would you rather?” questions, such as: *Would you rather send a letter or use a chat app? If you could only have a TV or a tablet, but not both, which one would you choose?*
- 2. Explain** to students that their answers to the “would you rather?” questions might have a lot to do with the generation they belong to.
- 3. Ask** students: *What is a generation?* Have them name several different generations, if they can. Write their answers on the board.
- 4. Explain** that a generation is a group of people born around the same time and who have gone through similar life experiences. Each generation has a name or label that helps describe them. Members of a generation were born during a specific time frame, usually within 10 to 20 years of one another. *Baby Boomers were born between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s. The following generation—Generation X—was born between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s.*
- 5. Discuss** with students how historical or cultural events (or both) create similar life experiences for the members of a generation. Major historical changes such as industrialization, the Great Depression, or wars help form group identity. A generation might also be united by cultural or social trends, such as changing civil rights or shifts in technology. Not every generation has an equally strong group identity.
- 6. Refer** back to the “would you rather?” questions. Ask them how they think the experiences of their generation might influence their preferences.
- 7. Write** the following generation names on the board and share the following details:
 - Baby Boomers (1940s–1960s):** grew up during a strong economy; had many opportunities; enjoyed a high standard of living; embraced rock and roll and youth culture;
 - Generation X (1960s–1980s):** grew up with less adult presence than Boomers; embraced alternative music and causes such as environmentalism;
 - Millennial Generation (1980s–2000):** more tolerant of others than previous generations; confident and upbeat; heavily parented; comfortable with technology and social media;
 - Generation Z (1990s–2010s):** shaped by war, terrorism, and the Great Recession; feels uncertainty about economy; first “digital natives,” comfortable with technology.
- 8. Have** students read and analyze the *What It Means to be a Millennial vs. Gen Xer?* Students should notice generational differences and similarities in the bios. What stands out most about how the bios reflect different generations? Do you think they are correct?
- 9. Distribute** *Worksheet 1*. Guide students through the creation of a timeline of generations. Remind students that a good timeline has facts, rather than opinions.
- 10. Direct** students to online resources for research. Advise students to start their research with the Smithsonian Institution. Remind them that generations are shaped by both historical events and cultural changes. *Historical events include: Baby Boomers—Vietnam War, killings of JFK and MLK, Jr., walk on the moon; Gen X—Challenger disaster, Persian Gulf War; Millennials—9/11, Iraq War, crash of 2008; Gen Z—war on terror and the Great Recession.*

Source: pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/

Extension Project—Generation Profile

Have students, individually or in a small group, create a brochure, flyer, or PowerPoint presentation that profiles a historical generation of their choice. The projects should include the dates of the generation, the major historical and cultural events that happened during that generation’s lifetime, and notable expressions of the generation—including clothing, music, self-expression, or technology. Encourage students to consider profiling historical generations, such as the Greatest Generation. Students should include images where possible.

HOW DOES A GENERATION INFLUENCE IDENTITY?

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Goal:

In this activity, students will investigate what one can learn about a person from his or her generation. Students will study techniques of interviewing and conduct an interview on a member of an older generation.

Materials Required:

Worksheet 2; pen or pencil; recording device (optional)

Instructions:

- 1. Explain** that attitudes can shift from one generation to the next. Since each generation grows up with different experiences, its members have different worldviews than the others. For example, if your generation grew up during a period of economic wealth, you might have different ideas about the economy than those who grew up during a depression (a period of widespread poverty); you would be optimistic about the economy, while the others might be cautious or fearful. Knowing about a person's generation can give you clues about that person's attitudes.
 - 2. Have** students watch the trailer from Episode 1 of *Survivor: Millennials vs. Gen X*. Please be aware that *Survivor: Millennials vs. Gen X* is rated TV-PG due to some intense language. After watching the trailer, ask students for their impressions of the members of each generation. Are they surprised by the differences presented between the generations—keeping mind in
- that these differences are based on the cast members' perceptions of their own and other generations? Do the differences seem natural?
- 3. Ask** students which generation, Millennials or Gen Xers, they believe will be more successful on the show and why?
 - 4. Tell** students they will conduct their own interviews to learn about other generations. Discuss techniques of interviewing. An interviewer must establish trust with the subject and be nonjudgmental, must ask questions that are open-ended in order to give the subject the freedom to talk, and must be well-prepared with questions. He or she must also listen closely in order to ask follow-up questions.
 - 5. Distribute** *Student Worksheet 2*.
 - 6. Have** students watch Jeff Probst, host of *Survivor: Millennials vs. Gen X*, discuss how to conduct an interview.
 - 7. Instruct** students to schedule their interview with a parent, grandparent, or older friend of the family. On the day of the interview, students should use *Worksheet 2* for prompts, questions, and to take notes.
 - 8. Have** students use the interview responses to write a compare/contrast essay that provides thoughts from their generation and the generation of the person they interviewed.

Extension Project—Classroom Debate

Lead students in a lighthearted generational debate. Divide students into groups according to the generation of their interview subjects. Tell students that they will be debating in the voice of their interview subject. They should review their interview notes and their interview subject's generation in order to argue from their point of view. Explain to students that formal debates begin with a resolution. Have students choose a resolution based on the generation they will be representing as well as the answer to the following question: What is the best way to communicate—writing a letter, sending an email, or using a chat app? Groups will develop a written debate position from the perspective of their interview subject and their subject's generation. Each position paper should begin with an opening statement, respond to possible rebuttals, and incorporate closing statements.