



## Theme: Who Do You Think You Are? – Identity

### Section 3: We and the others; how identity includes and excludes

What is part of me and what is not, who is part of the group and who is not? This section prompts students to reflect on the sensitivities of such a statement and explore how in the construction of their identities they make distinctions – they choose to include some things and exclude others. While processes of identification and distinction are important and contribute to making us who we are, we always need to be vigilant that the act of distinguishing is not in fact excluding and demeaning others.

*Warning: Note that this unit contains links to websites such as YouTube. Content on external sites is subject to change and should be monitored to ensure suitability for students.*

#### Learning outcomes of this section

Your students will be able to:

- Assess the difference between distinction and exclusion in the formation of identities
- Realise how sensitive the issue of identity can be when a set view of it is imposed and how easily it can be instrumentalised by politics
- Understand how citizenship incorporates diverse identities and a flexible sense of national belonging

#### Resources provided

- Resource 10 Article (with audio recordings) on the ethnic Russian minority population living in Latvia
- Resource 11 Extract from Destrées' 'Letter to the King', the Francoist sign about the Spanish language; article about the French language
- Resource 12 Mostar postcards and map, World War I postcard, Soviet propaganda poster; video interview on Alsace identity
- Resource 13 Extract from a book on Jewish life in Nazi Germany; pictures of human zoos

#### Class Activity 1: The things that make us belong (Part 1)

Perceptions and understandings of what gives us a national identity is usually complex and varies from person to person. Such differences of opinion can be particularly challenging between different ethnic communities within the same country. With your class, watch the section of the following video clip that runs from 6:52 to 10:00 minutes about the ethnic Russian minority population living in Latvia. This extract will introduce your class to this complex situation which they will then analyse in greater depth in the next activity.





Source: Deutsche Welle

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGQm\\_OKRcLI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGQm_OKRcLI)

## Group Activity 1: The things that make us belong (Part 2)

Break your class into small groups, ask them to read the article extract in Resource 10 and listen to the audio recordings. Ask the groups to answer the following questions which also feature in the resource:

- What are the main challenges faced by the ethnic Russians in Latvia?
- How has history contributed to the current situation in the country?
- What has the Latvian Government's response been to this situation?
- What suggestions would your students make to resolve some of the issues?

Ask the groups to share their answers during a class discussion.

## Class Activity 2: My language, my identity?

How much does the language we speak define who we are? Organise a class discussion on the topic of linguistic diversity with your students and whether it has importance in their lives. Do they speak a different language at home than they do in the classroom? How easy or difficult is this situation for them and does this have any impact on their family or friends?

As an extension of this activity get your class to come up with a set of questions that they could use to interview family members about their experiences of linguistic diversity. The interviews could be recorded and played back in the classroom so that students could compare and contrast the issues that arise.

You can also use the historical examples in Resource 11 to deepen the students' reflection on the relationship between language and identity. Assess what your students think of the historic examples in these resources – what are their thoughts on linguistic diversity within countries? Reflect on the situation within your own national context.

## Class Activity 3: Passing the test: do you really belong?

Does your country have 'citizenship tests' similar to the Latvian example we explored in Class Activity 1? You should explain to





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your students that while ‘citizenship tests’ are usually directed towards immigrants, in other instances, such as in Latvia, these tests can also apply to people born and raised within a country from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Such tests do raise questions – how appropriate are they? Do they respect people’s diverse identities? What effects might they have on co-existence in multinational and multicultural states?

To help your students reach their own conclusions on these questions, organise a classroom simulation and role-play scenario of a citizenship test. You will need to find an original example of such a test used in your country. Allow your students to familiarise themselves with it and then divide them into groups. Have them prepare different sets of arguments they will then have to present to the other groups. The role-play characters consist of:

- The state officer addressing immigrants
- The state officer addressing the country’s minority population
- The immigrant addressing the state
- The national minority representative addressing the state

The students’ arguments should address the following questions:

- What does this test consist of?
- Why should it be taken?
- Why should it not be taken?

At the end of the activity, assess how your students now feel about how a country might accommodate different nationalities?

### Historical examples

To deepen student reflection on the relationship between citizenship and nationality, have them look at the examples in Resource 12 where these concepts have sometimes functioned smoothly alongside each other and at other times clashed. Use the following explanations and questions which are also included in the resource:

- The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a long-lasting political entity (1867-1918) consisting of many different nationalities that were ultimately replaced by new nation states in the early 20th century. What kinds of cultural and ethnic diversity are evident in the postcard of Mostar from around 1900 and the World War I postcard?
- In the former Soviet Union, propaganda was used to give the idea of a federation of all nationalities within a common Soviet identity. This poster shows youthful citizens of the Soviet Union from many ethnicities. What message is this poster trying to convey? Do you think a political regime can create a new identity for a state and make a whole population adhere to it?
- Alsace is a region at the heart of Europe located between France and Germany. Its history has been turbulent and often tragic owing to its strategic position between these powerful nations. As a territory it has changed nationality four times over the past 150 years. Watch the following video clip of an elderly man speaking about the history of Alsace and consider how successive changes have affected people’s lives and sense of belonging.





## **Class Activity 4: How is identity sometimes used as an instrument to divide people and trigger hate?**

Organise a discussion with your students on the topic of social exclusion and help them identify and characterise the different stages of a process of exclusion based on identity. Help them to visualise this process by drawing a linear progression between the different stages from a lower to higher level of intensity:

- distinction (or identification of the other)
- separation, segregation (or isolation)
- discrimination
- extermination

For each stage, ask students to find one contemporary example and one historical example. They could draw upon topics they have studied and/or cases presented below. You could also take one single example – like the extermination of European Jews by the Nazis – and identify the concrete measures that were taken for each of the stages (i.e. yellow star, ghettos, deportation, etc.).

Suggestions for contemporary cases could include: ghettoised cities, discrimination of Roma in certain EU countries, prejudice against gay and lesbian people, anti-immigrant extremist movements, on-going ethnic conflicts. Think about examples of social exclusion in your country and use these in your classroom discussions.

Use Resource 13 with your students to examine some source-based historical cases of identification, segregation, discrimination and extermination of people because of their identities. Get your class to consider the following questions in relation to these resources (the questions also feature in the Resource):

- In which sense does Rita Kuhn’s experience illustrate the fact that an identity is sometimes imposed upon a person or a group? What are the consequences in this case?
- What does the practice of ‘Human Zoos’ say about Europeans’ representations and treatment of colonised peoples?

### **The Jewish Genocide**

Description of a school scene in Nazi Germany where a teacher asks who is Jewish and young Rita Kuhn is unsure of what to answer:

‘School was not only a daily trial but also the site of where some children learned of their “Jewish” identity according to Nazi law. Five-year-old Rita Kuhn, whose father was Jewish and mother Christian, was uncertain of her own religion. In school “teacher had to ask the whole class who’s Jewish. I looked around the classroom and nobody raised a hand....I wasn’t really sure whether I was Jewish....I raised my hand, because.....I knew I had something to





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do with being Jewish". After that, of course, she had no chance of joining the League of German Girls. When her teacher asked who wanted to join, "I raised my hand, I mean, who doesn't want to be part of a group?" Her teacher explained, gently, that she could not belong. "I couldn't understand what was the matter with me", she recalled.'

*Source: Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany, Marion A. Kaplan, 1998*

In what sense does Rita Kuhn's experience illustrate the fact that an identity is sometimes imposed upon a person or a group? What are the consequences in this case?

