



Theme: Who Do You Think You Are? - Identity

Section 1: What's my identity?

What factors make us who we are? This section gets us to take a look at ourselves and attempt to identify the people, places and things that help us create a sense of self.

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:

- Define identity as not fixed but malleable
- Realise that diverse identities are something to be appreciated and respected
- Understand that every nation has methods or tools of creating so-called 'collective' identities
- Develop their own considered opinions about the idea of European identity/ identities

Resources provided

Resource 1	Russian doll templates
Resource 2	Maps of Europe and 'Europa' painting
Resource 3	Euro coins
Resource 4	Caricatures of Europeans

Class activity 1: What makes me who I am?



Source: © Shutterstock



Have a discussion with your students about what they understand by the word 'identity'. Do they feel there is any one thing that sums up who they are? Or are there many elements and characteristics that go into making them the people they are today? Is identity individual or collective? Can it even be both? Identity is often used in association with terms such as 'nationality' and 'citizenship', but also in relation to characteristics such as 'physical', 'socio-economic', 'religious' and 'cultural', amongst others. To get them thinking about these questions, you can use literary sources such as extracts from biographies or autobiographies: a very useful example is the first paragraph of Amin Maalouf's book *Les Identités meurtrières*, which has been translated into many languages.

Ask your students to think individually about these elements and characteristics that make them who they are, bearing in mind some of the concepts mentioned above. Encourage them to introduce additional elements that were perhaps not discussed. Get your students to think about the answers to this question by writing or drawing their responses within the Russian doll templates in Resource 1 and giving their reasons why. The largest doll represents the identity the student most identifies with and the smallest doll the least. Then enter their answers on the classroom board or on an online feedback tool such as [AnswerGarden](#), noting how the most popular terms grow in size. They should write their names on the back of the dolls as they will get these back for the last activity in the section. Be sure to emphasise that exploring the different characteristics that make up the students' identities is a positive thing – a reflection that identity is not simply one single specific concept but consists rather of different aspects.

Group activity 1: Create your own state!

Break your class into groups of roughly equal size. Get the students to imagine that they have been asked to build a brand new state to which all citizens feel they belong. How can citizens of a state with very different identities, customs and beliefs all co-exist peacefully? This very task has been a challenge in the past and is still a challenge to countries today. Get the students to work out some ideas using the following as guidance:

- Common experiences
- Common political/legal history
- Common rituals (e.g. elections)
- Common ideologies/common rights
- Common symbols (e.g. flag, anthem, passport, currency)
- Ideals of respect and intercultural understanding

As the groups develop ideas for their new state, they should compare and contrast it with those of the other groups and with the workings of their own country. Make sure you explain to your students the difference between a 'state' and a 'nation' by referring to the definitions at the start of this section. Maybe your students can come up with even better ways of building a more inclusive state!



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Group activity 2: Is it possible to define a European identity?



Source: © Shutterstock

The idea of national identity is something most people are familiar with, but is there such a thing as a common European identity? Many Europeans are now part of an economic and monetary union, but do these elements alone bestow a 'common' identity across a continent of peoples? Is the idea of a shared European identity even possible in a continent of such diverse heritages and cultures? Just as personal identities shift and move, notions of European identity both past and present also change and morph into something else; something new.

Divide your students into small groups and distribute Resource 2. Ask the groups to compare and contrast the maps of Europe from different centuries in order to understand how Europe has been a place of constantly changing borders directly affecting the identities of those living on the continent. They will also look at the painting *'Europa: Work in Progress'* from the House of European History permanent exhibition and question its meaning in relation to the maps. Ask them to answer the following questions which also feature in Resource 2:

- What do you see when you compare the three maps of Europe from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the 20th century? Are you surprised in any way?
- In the painting *'Europa: Work in Progress'* the geographical contours of Europe are thick brush strokes: what kind of impression does this technique create? What do you think the artist has tried to say about the European Union by using this technique? What are the similarities and differences between this image and the three maps of Europe you looked at just before?
- Do these different maps make you think differently about your own national or European identity?

Then organise a class discussion and ask the groups to share their answers and give feedback to each other.





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Group activity 3: Are Europeans really ‘United in Diversity’?

Bulgarian: Единство в многообразието
Croatian: Ujedinjeni u različitosti
Czech: Jednotná v rozmanitosti
Danish: Forenet i mangfoldighed
Dutch: In verscheidenheid verenigd
English: United in diversity
Estonian: Ühinenud mitmekesisuses
Finnish: Moninaisuudessaan yhtenäinen
French: Unie dans la diversité
German: In Vielfalt geeint
Greek: Ενωμένοι στην πολυμορφία
Hungarian: Egység a sokféleségben
Irish: Aontaithe san éagsúlacht
Italian: Uniti nella diversità
Latvian: Vienoti daudzveidībā
Lithuanian: Suvienijusi įvairovę
Maltese: Magħquda fid-diversità
Polish: Zjednoczeni w różnorodności
Portuguese: Unidade na diversidade
Romanian: Unitate în diversitate
Slovak: Zjednotení v rozmanitosti
Slovene: Združeni v različnosti
Spanish: Unida en la diversidad
Swedish: Förenade i mångfalden

Source: [European Union website](#)

‘United in Diversity’ is the motto of the European Union, which you can see here in the different European languages. It acknowledges the enormous diversity of peoples, cultures and traditions across the continent, but also suggests that there are things that these peoples and countries have in common. Another illustration of this duality is the euro coin, which has one common side and one national side that differs for each country of the euro zone. Divide your class into small groups and have them look at the reproductions of euro coins in Resource 3 and answer the following question which also features in the Resource:

- Do you think the designs of the euro coins are a good illustration of the EU motto? Give reasons why or why not



Source: © Shutterstock





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Ask the groups to share their feedback in a class discussion. Then help your students realise, using the example of the national sides of the euro coin, how history and memory sometimes play an important role in the definition of a collective identity and the way a nation or a state defines itself. Ask them to think about what this means at the European level: memories of historical events, both good and bad, are often seen as elements that bring Europeans together. Do your students agree or disagree with this idea? What kinds of past events do your students think might create a sense of a shared European identity? Get them to consider why some people might not feel part of a 'shared European' identity and why this might be the case.

To further assist your students on the topic of the idea of a common European identity, check out this blog. It could be used as preparation material for a class or in a class session.



Do you feel part of a common European identity?

Started 25/10/2013 Future



Viviane Reding, Vice President of the European Commission, often speaks about her belief that stronger "political union" will be needed if the EU is to survive the coming decades. During a series

Source: [Debating Europe website](#)

It is important to point out to your students that stereotyped views of different European identities have always existed and still feature in public consciousness. Intended to be humorous by their creators, caricatures can cause offence and hurt people. Distribute Resource 4 to your students and discuss together in class their reactions to the portrayal of European identities as they appear in the two images. Make them look at the differences and similarities between them: by comparing and contrasting the historical and contemporary examples, they will develop a better understanding of the meaning of caricatures in general.





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The Czech artist David Černý has also created a controversial work that plays with ideas of European identity and age-old stereotypes. His sculpture 'Entropa' was displayed at the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels in 2009. Look at the following images of 'Entropa' with your students and get their feedback about the artwork and what they think the artist might have been trying to say about being European.



Source: [Sebastien Pirlet/Reuters](#)

Class activity 2: Layers of identity

Ask your students to imagine they are in the following situation: you have left Europe and are visiting another continent. Someone asks you where you come from. How do you respond? Would you mention your region, town, nationality? That you come from Europe or something else?

Also, make them look again at the answers they wrote down on the Russian dolls in Class Activity 1. Had they mentioned Europe as one element of their identity at that stage? If so, how did they





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prioritise it in relation to the other elements? After having reflected on and discussed the topic of European identity, would they give it more importance?

Use the answers to this activity to hold a debate around how much students see their identities as being connected to their home country, but also to Europe in general. Do they feel they have links to a wider European identity and, if so, what might these links be? If not, why not?

