



TEACHING TOLERANCE

A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

Cliques in Schools (Middle Grades)

Activities will help students:

- recognize the cliques at their own school
- explore ways to integrate all students and form new friendships
- learn how to communicate with people outside of their friendship group/cliques

Essential Questions

- What is the difference between a friendship group and a clique?
- Are cliques positive or negative forces in a school community?
- How can cliques be controlling?
- How can it be powerful to make friends outside of your clique?

Glossary

clique | kleek, klik |

(noun) a friendship group that often exerts control over its members

Materials

- [Clique Survey](#)

Activities

1. Who are the people in your friendship group? Write a list of your friends' names. What do you all have in common?
2. Define the term *friendship group*. What does it mean to have a circle of friends?
3. While friendship circles can be healthy and made up of people who share common interests, a clique can be something entirely different. (Note: You may wish to record this definition of clique on the board or on chart paper.) A **clique** is a group of friends that often has the following characteristics:
 - extreme control over the members of the group (“We only wear brand-name clothing.”)
 - strict rules about who is allowed into the group (“We don’t hang out with people like THAT.”)
 - inflexible exit from the group (“If she hangs out with THAT girl, we’re not going to be friends with her.”)
4. Are there cliques at your school? Take a moment to work on your own to think about the different groups that surround you in class every day. Make a list of the clique nicknames (“jocks,” “preps,” etc.) in your school community.
5. Share your list with your classmates to create one class list of the cliques at your school. (Note: You may wish to record this class list on the board or on chart paper.)
6. So what is so wrong with being in a clique? Because cliques are so exclusive, they can be really restricting. In the “real world,” or life after middle school, you will have to communicate with many different kinds of people, especially in college or at work. Learning to talk to people in different cliques can help you in the future. Also, you might just make a new friend in the process.
7. Look at your class list of cliques. Record at least one positive thing about each clique. What could you learn from that clique? How could you reach out to that clique?
8. Now think back to your own group of friends. Take a moment to complete the Clique Survey on your own. Do you think you are in a clique?
9. As a class, choose one of the following activities to help cliques mingle:
 - Write an anonymous letter to someone in another clique. In your letter, write about the following:
 - how you see that clique
 - whether or not you would want to be friends with anyone in that clique and why (or why not)
 - Pull a name out of a hat and become penpals with that person. Write that person a letter that
 - tells them about yourself and your group of friends

- asks them about their group of friends
- *(Note: Alternatively, learn about students' friendship circles and purposefully pair students from different cliques together.)*
- Set up an anonymous box where anyone can drop a letter about any issues with a clique. Once a week, have your teacher read the letters in the box and share them with the class. Discuss the issues in each letter together as a class to come to a resolution to any problems.
- Start a campaign to integrate cliques. Consider using activities from Teaching Tolerance's [Mix It Up Day](#).