

Challenging Your Assumptions

Read the following sentences and identify the assumptions inherent in each regarding age, ability, appearance, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social/economic class, power or status.

Identify the “norm” (a standard of conduct that should or must be followed; a typical or usual way of behaving, usually said of a certain group) and discuss how the assumptions reflect this norm.

Discuss how these assumptions operate in your cultural situation. How are you affected by cultural assumptions about the “norm”?

1. Our founding fathers carved this great state out of the wilderness.
2. Mrs. Imoto looks remarkably good for her age.
3. Fashion tights are available in black, suntan, and flesh colour.
4. Someday, I intend to visit the third world.
5. We need more manpower.
6. Our facilities all provide handicapped access.
 7. Our boys were having a rough time of it, and the black regiment was, too.
 8. How Neanderthal man existed for so long is a mystery. He must have had the ability to adapt to his environment.
 9. I see she forgot to sign her time sheet. She’s acting a little blonde today.
 10. Mitochondrial DNA testing should help us determine when our race split off from the lower creatures.
 11. Confined to a wheelchair, Mr. Garcia still manages to live a productive life.
12. Pat really went on a warpath when the budget figures came out.
13. I won’t be associated with you and your pagan behaviours!

14. The Academy now admits women and other minorities.
 15. We have a beautiful daycare center where women can leave their children while they work.
16. See if you can Jew him down to \$50.
 17. I completely forgot where I put my keys. I must be having a senior moment.
 18. Win a fabulous lovers' weekend in Hawaii! Prizes include a day at the spa for her and a relaxing game of golf for him.
19. That's not a very Christian attitude.
20. We welcome all guests, their wives, and their children.
21. May I speak to Mr. or Mrs. Williams?

Source: Janet Lockhart and Susan Shaw, Writing for Change: Raising Awareness of Issues of Difference, Power, and Discrimination, www.teachingtolerance.org