



Character Counts

Grade Range:

3–5

Overview:

Students begin this activity by considering how they view their peers and choose their friends. Through watching a video, they are introduced to the concept of obesity bias and consider if this implicit bias plays a role in their friend selection. After discussing the effects of obesity bias, students ultimately create fliers that teach younger students about the importance of choosing friends based on their character and not their appearance.

Timing:

60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

- Analyze their own biases when selecting friends
- Consider the effects of these biases on overweight youth
- Create a campaign that encourages their younger peers to overcome implicit weight biases make well-reasoned decisions when it comes to choosing friends

Materials Needed:

- *Create-a-Friend* handout, one per student
- Device with the ability to project a video
- Video: [Study Finds Children Carry Implicit Bias Towards Peers Who Are Overweight](#) (until 1:19)
- How to Choose a Friend Flier handout, one per student
- Blank printer or construction paper, one per student
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils, for the class to share



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Procedure:

1. **Warm-Up:** Distribute one *Create-a-Friend* handout to each student and tell the class that they will have about three minutes to complete Part 1. During this quick-draw activity, students should sketch a picture of someone with whom they would want to be friends. Reassure students that there is no right or wrong answer to this prompt. They should simply draw the first image that comes to mind!
2. Once a few minutes have passed, divide students into small groups of three or four. Instruct each student to share their drawings and explain why they drew their “friend” this way. Then encourage students to compare and contrast their sketches. How are their “friends” similar and how are they different?
3. Now that the class has thought more about the friends they created, instruct them to fill out Part 2 of the handout and think more carefully about the physical characteristics and personality traits that they would like this person to have. Students should be able to complete this independently, but they may bounce ideas off their peers if need be.
4. Bring the class back together, and explain that you are going to play a video clip that discusses a recent study performed among nine-, ten-, and eleven-year-old children. As the students watch the video, they should think about connections they can make between the study and the handout that they just completed.
5. Play the video [Study Finds Children Carry Implicit Bias Towards Peers Who Are Overweight](#) from the beginning until 1 minute 19 seconds.
6. When the video is complete, ask students to Think/Pair/Share (think individually, discuss with a partner, and then share with the class) about whether their friend sketch aligns with the study’s findings.
7. Explain that obesity bias and stigma are negative attitudes, stereotypes, beliefs or behaviors that are directed towards people simply because of their weight. This bias can be implicit, which means that a person has these thoughts without really thinking about them. However, these implicit thoughts can then result in unkind actions that take many forms: from staring and name-calling to being left out of social activities.

Share that weight teasing and bullying is even more common than teasing about race/ethnicity, physical disability, or religion.



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8. Explain to the class that being overweight is a health issue. Just like some students need glasses, some have trouble paying attention, and others have asthma, having too much weight is a health issue too. And—just like these other health issues—someone’s weight does not define who they are.
9. Lead your students in a full-class discussion that helps them consider the varying effects that this bias may have on overweight children and teens. Questions to discuss may include:
 - Think of a time you were stared at or teased. How did it make you feel?
 - Imagine that you were left out of something. Perhaps you were the only one who couldn’t find a partner during a class activity or everyone around you was planning to do something fun after school and you weren’t invited. How would this make you feel?
 - Now imagine that this happens over and over again: You are constantly being judged by others before they get to know you. How do you think this would affect you? Do you think these effects could continue as you grow up and become an adult? Why or why not?
 - Is it okay to assume that people will be a certain way or act in a certain manner because of how they look? Why or why not?
 - How can we try to make sure we don’t act on the biases we may have?
10. Bring the discussion back to the central idea that obesity is a health issue that does not define *who* a person is. Rather, one’s personality, behavior and choices define a person.
11. Instruct each student to return to the t-chart that they began in Part 2 of their *Create-A-Friend* handout. Instruct students to think more carefully about the personality traits that they would want a friend to possess, and give the class a few moments to independently add to their charts and elaborate on these characteristics.
12. Next, introduce the culminating activity. Explain that since obesity bias can begin during childhood, student will be responsible for creating a flier that could be displayed at their school that promotes the importance of choosing friends based on their character and not their appearance.
13. Pass out the *How to Choose a Friend Flier* handout and review the instructions provided. Allow students to decide whether they would like to work individually or in pairs, and then have them get to work!



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14. **Wrap up:** When there are about five minutes left in the instructional period, ask the students to clean up and display their fliers on their desks. Encourage students to walk around the classroom and view each other's work before the period comes to an end. Those students who have not yet entirely completed their flier can do so for homework!

Optional Extensions:

- Display the students' fliers around the school. Have students work together to write a blurb for the school's morning announcements that explain the message behind the fliers and why they were created.

National Standards:

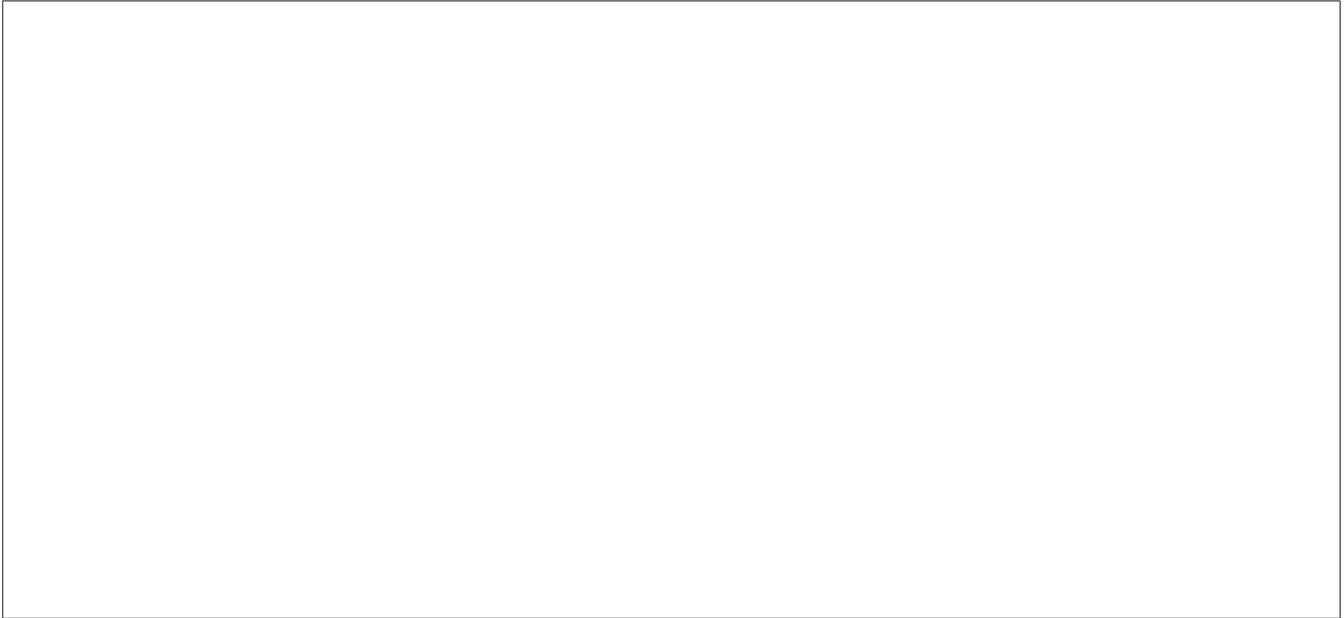
Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

National Health Standards

- 1.5.2 Identify examples of emotional, intellectual, physical, and social health.
- 2.5.2 Identify the influence of culture on health practices and behaviors
- 2.5.3 Identify how peers can influence healthy and unhealthy behaviors.
- 2.5.5 Explain how media influences thoughts, feelings, and health behaviors.
- 8.5.1 Express opinions and give accurate information about health issues.
- 8.5.2 Encourage others to make positive health choices.

Part 1: In the space below, sketch what comes to mind when you picture an ideal friend:



Part 2: Using your sketch as your guide, consider the physical characteristics and personality traits that you associate with an ideal friend:

My ideal friend looks like....	My ideal friend is and/or acts like...

How to Choose a Friend Flier

Directions: Use the space below to create a rough draft of a flier that will other elementary students about the importance of choosing friends based on their personality and not their appearance.

How you design this message is up to you, but your flier must:

1. Appeal to your peers/classmates.
2. Be sensitive to everyone's feelings.
3. Share a message that teaches others that character is more important than appearance.

Once you have sketched your idea below, use a blank piece of paper to create an in-color final version!

