DiversityEdu

Undergraduate Discussion Guide

Office for Inclusion and Diversity
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Virginia Tech

DiversityEdu introduces Virginia Tech students to the university's Principles of Community that guide how we engage with and respect one another as Hokies.

DiversityEdu also supports Inclusive VT, the university's collective commitment to Ut Prosim, That I May Serve, in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence.

Research shows that university-mediated diversity initiatives play a meaningful role in reducing prejudice, stimulating rich dialogue across different lived experiences, and improving the overall learning environment for all students. (Hurtado et al, 2003; Chang et al, 2004; Milem, 2003) This discussion guide provides you with guidelines for using Diversity Edu to facilitate in person conversations around diversity and inclusion at Virginia Tech.

Format:

This guide is set up in four parts~

1. Preparing for discussion uses principles from inclusive pedagogy to create a safe and welcoming environment necessary for productive conversation.
2. Prompting discussion provides a series of open-ended questions that correspond to the Diversity Edu content.
3. Creating Connections links you to activities for engaging personally with particular content topic. These activities assume a level of trust among the participants.
4. Exploring further lists additional resources for advancing dialogue around diversity and inclusion.

Let us know how you use this discussion guide.

Preparing for discussion

Virginia Tech is committed to the free and open expression of ideas. In order to foster a climate of learning that appreciates the diversity of opinion, experience, and perspective in the room, it is vital to establish a safe and welcoming space. Doing this includes establishing guidelines for good dialogue and being prepared to navigate "hot" moments that may arise when addressing issues or beliefs that evoke strong feelings.

Setting the space

We want participants to talk to one another. The organization of the physical space makes a difference in how engaged participants will be.

Look around the space you are using: Is the room accessible for all participants? Are there enough seats for everyone? Are the seats comfortable? Can participants make eye contact? Is there good lighting and air circulation? Is the location free from distractions such as outside noise or piped-in music?

After conducting a visual assessment of the space, determine if it is the appropriate setting for the kind of discussion you want to have. If the space is problematic, consider changing locations. If changing locations is not an option, consider what you can do to improve the physical environment by rearranging furniture or creating more privacy.

Establishing guidelines

Begin the discussion by establishing guidelines that build trust and community in the group. Clearly defined and communicated guidelines provide tools for participants to listen and respond with civility. Be specific and, if necessary, demonstrate what you mean by each guideline. Frame the guidelines in positive language. Invite participants to contribute their own ideas for having good conversations. Some examples are in the chart to the right.

What would you add to this list?

Use "I" language--"*In my experience…*"—rather than generalizing or provoking language—"*But don't you think…*"
Listen with the goal of understanding and building connections.
Speak for yourself and not for others, including groups of which you are a member.
Critique ideas, not individuals.
Pay attention to your personal impact on the group:
Making eye contact, acknowledging the person speaking, and listening actively creates positive impacts.
Dominating discussions, rambling, and interrupting, texting, and having side conversations creates negative impacts.
Respect the confidentiality of the group.

Handling "hot" moments

Discussion about diversity can evoke strong emotions, especially when connected to controversial topics. Your community guidelines are in place to help you navigate challenging or difficult conversations. If tensions become too high for productive dialogue there are some strategies you can take to handle the moment.

- Take a moment to decide if you want to address the issue immediately, handle it at another time, or address it individually.
- If you feel unprepared to deal with the question, comment, or topic in the moment, indicate so. Make a point to revisit it when you feel more prepared.
- Remind participants of the discussion guidelines.
- Give participants time to process the moment by asking them to write individually about their thoughts or reactions.
- Where appropriate, seek to **clarify the participant's point**: "*What do you mean by X?*" Or "*I heard you saying Y; is that what you meant to say?*"
- Try to depersonalize insensitive or marginalizing statements while modeling appropriate responses: "*Many people share this perspective. What might their reasons be?"* Then: "*And why might others disagree or object to this position?*"
- When appropriate, validate the participant's contribution by saying*, "I'm glad you raised that perspective because it's one that needs thought about carefully."*

(Michigan Center for Teaching and Learning)

Breaking the silence

What do you do if no one talks?

You can still prompt good discussion if your group is reticent. Consider how you can help participants build their confidence in order to enter more fully into robust dialogue. There is value in beginning with simple questions that allow for brief answers, or in asking participants to write out their thoughts before stating them in front of the group. Keep in mind that some participants take longer to formulate their thoughts. Be mindful of the space these participants need in order to contribute.

The following page offers some strategies that build participants' confidence with interactions and ensures broad participation in discussion.

Think-Pair-Share

This simple strategy works well with groups of all sizes.

Propose a question to your group:

Describe a time when you felt that you belonged.

Ask everyone to take two minutes to consider a response. Then, have participants pair up to share responses with one or two others.

After the pair-share is completed, invite three to five volunteers to report their conversation to the large group.

As each volunteer reports out, ask the large group if they heard similarities with their own conversations. Participants can nod and raise their hand, and then be encouraged to say more about the similarities.

1-2-3

This strategy works well if you want participants to respond to a speaker or a reading, or to summarize the whole of a classroom experience.

Ask participants to write:

1. *What is one thing I learned?*
2. *What are two questions I still have?*
3. *What are three things I will do / think differently? [Because of this experience / reading / etc.]*

After, you can ask participants to share out their learnings, questions, and new actions.

Alternatively, you can ask that they write them on the board or in digital forums. Writing out the responses then provides a visual prompt for noting patterns or distinctions across participants.

In addition to engaging participants, this strategy provides some useful data on what was learned and next steps.

Circle Schemes

Having participants seated in a circle makes for better discussion. Circle settings are also useful for getting the conversation started. Go around the circle and ask everyone to say one thing in response to a prompt—
"*Tell me one thing you do to make people feel included*."
Everyone listens without commenting.

After everyone has a chance to say one thing, open the circle to cross talk, encouraging participants to ask one another to say more about their response.

Sometimes, facilitators use props, such as tossing a ball of yarn to someone who responds, who then tosses the yarn to someone else until everyone has a bit of string in hand.

The Office for Inclusion and Diversity has a soft ball with diversity prompts: Catch the ball and answer the question that is on top. It adds some fun to the exercise, making it easier for most people to get involved. (You can borrow the diversity ball by emailing inclusivevt@vt.edu.)

What schemes have worked for you? Let us know so that we can build a database of ideas.

Prompting Discussion

Inclusive VT, Ut Prosim, and the Principles of Community

Inclusive VT is the commitment by the university and each of its individual members to Ut Prosim (That I may serve in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence). The university has adopted a set of Principles of Community as a guide for putting Inclusive VT and Ut Prosim into practice.

(View the Principles of Community video at https://www.inclusive.vt.edu/Initiatives/vtpoc0.html).

When you hear the Principles of Community, what words or statements stand out to you?

Are there any parts of the Principles of Community that you do not understand or agree with?

Why do you think Virginia Tech has a Principles of Community?

What do you know about the aspects of the Virginia Tech "legacy that reflected bias and exclusion"? How do we reverse that legacy?

How do you see yourself fitting into the individual and institutional commitment to *Ut Prosim*?

Discuss your thoughts about the connection between diversity, inclusion, and the motto *Ut Prosim* (that I may serve).

VIRGINIA TECH PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY

Learning from the experiences that shape Virginia Tech as an institution, we acknowledge those aspects of our legacy that reflected bias and exclusion. Therefore, we adopt and practice the following principles as fundamental to our on-going efforts to increase access and inclusion and to create a community that nurtures learning and growth for all of its members:

We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.

We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.

We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status.

We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.

We pledge our collective commitment to these principles in the spirit of the Virginia Tech motto of Ut Prosim *(That I May Serve)*.

Prompting Discussion

Defining Diversity

Diversity is described as all of our differences and all of our similarities. How does this definition compare with the way you think about diversity?

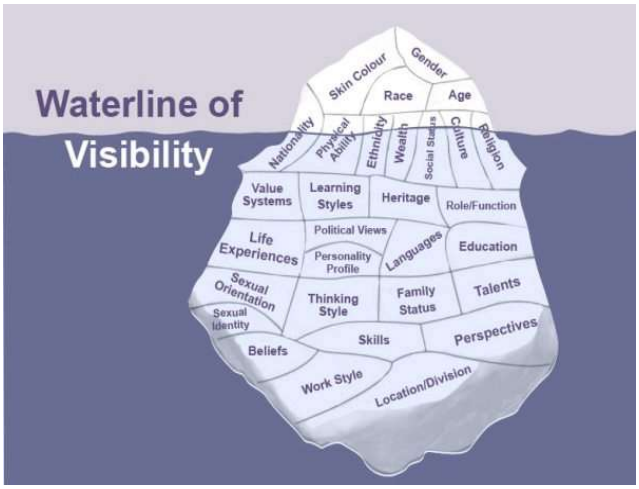
Do you think the definition of diversity is too broad? What would you add to the definition to reflect your own experience of "diversity" in daily life?

Some people compare diversity to a fruit salad with lots of different flavors coming together to make a delicious dish. Others describe it as an obstacle course because it is difficult to navigate.
Choose a simile for diversity by completing the sentence:
"Diversity is like a _____."
What simile did you choose and why?

Revisit the Iceberg Model presented in the DiversityEdu module.

What are examples of differences and similarities that might be above the waterline? At the waterline? Below the waterline?

What does the Iceberg Model teach us about human diversity?



The Iceberg Model is a helpful way to envision diversity.

Above the waterline are differences and similarities that we can see right away.

At the waterline are differences and similarities that are partly hidden, but might be evident to some people.

Below the waterline are the differences and similarities that people can't see right away

Prompting Discussion

Engaging Comfortably With Difference

Everyone you meet at Virginia Tech has a rich set of identities. It is likely that each person has something in common with you that is not immediately evident, as well as things that are different. Engaging comfortably with the differences is an important first step to making the most out of your college experience.

Why is it important to become comfortable with difference?

Are there any particular differences that make you feel uncomfortable or awkward?

Why do you think you feel uncomfortable or awkward about this particular difference?

What are examples of courageous choices you can make to engage with difference?

Carry out one of the following courageous choices this semester:

- Choose a partner who is not among your typical group of friends for assignments or projects;
- Make a point to invite people who are often left out to join study groups;
- Attend events that introduce you to other cultures or worldviews;
- Go out socially with someone whose interests are different than your own;
- Have a conversation with someone from another country, even if their accent requires you to listen closely.

Sometimes people take the attitude that they do not see difference, or that difference does not matter to them. They may intend to send a message about being open and unprejudiced. However, the impact can make some people feel that their actual, lived experiences are being ignored.

What are some examples of how people ignore differences?

What's the disconnect between intention and impact?

Do we create more distance when we acknowledge our differences? Why or why not?

How might respect and acknowledgement of differences build inclusion?

Prompting Discussion

Examining Assumptions

It is normal to make assumptions about people based on what we see or know "above the waterline." However, making assumptions based on limited information reinforces stereotypes, which are oversimplified ideas about a person based on their group membership.

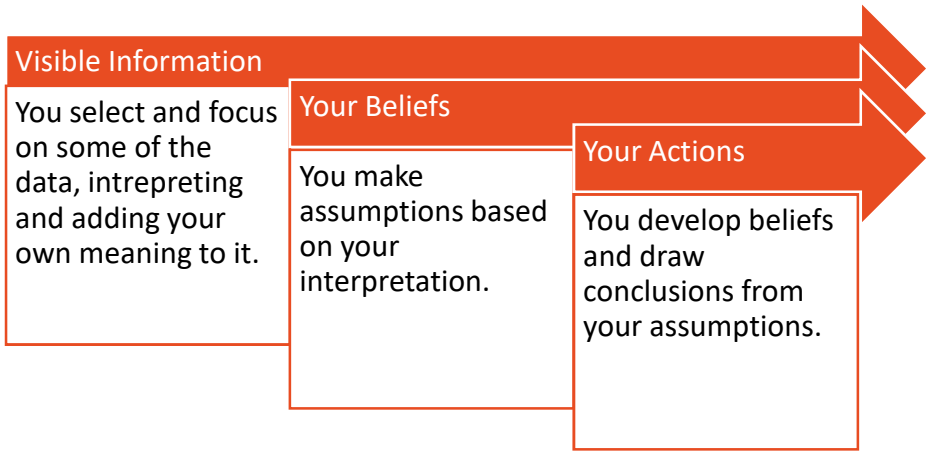
When has someone made a false assumption about you?

What did you want to say back to that person?

Are stereotypes harmless?

What are the real world impacts of stereotypes?

The Ladder of Inference



DiversityEdu describes a thinking process called the ladder of inference. We climb the ladder of inference using data that we filter and select based on our experiences. We subsequently draw conclusions and form beliefs. At the top of the process, we draw upon our beliefs to make decisions and take action.

Consider what happens when you filter data using stereotypes. What are the possible outcomes?

Can you recall a time when you made a poor choice because you used a false assumption?

Prompting Discussion

Searching for Similarities

Some ways to examine assumptions and avoid stereotypical thinking include engaging with people in order to gain a fuller understanding of who they are, and expand your database in order to talk to people from diverse backgrounds. This begins with finding similarities.

Describe a time when you found common ground with someone different from yourself.

What happened to make the connection?

How did your relationship change once you found common ground?

What did you learn through the connection?

What are some strategies for connecting with people you don't know or are very different from you—especially if you are a little shy?

Anticipating Impact

People who know you or share your background typically understand what you **mean** to say or **intend** to do. This is because they already have a lot of information about you and use that information to fill in the blanks to understand your intention. In a diverse community, especially a new one, your peers do not have all that information about you. Consequently, anticipating impact matters.

Were you ever in a situation where something you said or did offended another person?

Conversely, were you ever in a situation where someone said or did something that offended you?

How was the situation resolved?

Sometimes people think that it is better to avoid interactions because it is too easy to make a mistake. What do you think about that approach?

We need to use accurate and current terminology when speaking with one another. However, identity terms and the impact of their usage are changing all the time. It is necessary to stay alert and responsive to change, and to commit to continually learning.

What are some resources you can draw upon to support your commitment to continuous learning?

If you are not sure of a term, what do you say?

What should you do if someone points out that you have used a term incorrectly?

Prompting Discussion

Microaggressions and Their Impact

Microaggressions are minor statements, behaviors, and environments that communicate exclusionary or denigrating messages. Usually they are directed to someone based on their membership in a marginalized identity group. The negative messages are subtle, and the sender may be unaware of them. This is why it is important to focus on **impact** rather than **intent**.

What are some examples of microaggressions?

What are the subtle messages contained in these statements?

Sometimes people reject the idea of microaggressions by saying that people are being too sensitive. What do you think?

How is a microaggression different from an insensitive comment that you overlook?

What are the cumulative effects of experiencing microaggressions?

DiversityEdu describes how microaggressions are both verbal and environmental.

Have you ever been in an environment that felt hostile or unwelcoming? Describe what made it feel unwelcome or hostile.

Microaggressions not only convey verbally. Sometimes an environment—like a classroom—can send a hostile or exclusionary message.

What are some examples of environmental microaggressions?

What would be a hostile or exclusionary environment for you?

Describe an environment where you feel welcomed and included. What are the qualities of this space and place?

Responding to microaggressions

What should you do if you experience a microaggression?

What should you do if you think you sent a microaggression?

Creating Connections

The Diversity Wheel

Provide students with a paper copy of the Diversity Wheel. Ask them to describe themselves according to each component of the wheel. Hand out index cards with one of the primary diversity dimensions listed on each (ex: race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, and so forth). Once each participant has a card, ask them to switch it up—what if that one dimension of diversity listed on the index card was different for them. How would their life change?

The Iceberg Model

Provide students with a paper copy of a blank Iceberg. Ask them to fill it out, showing elements of their identity that are above and at the waterline, as well as those elements that are below the waterline. Invite students to share at least one item that is below the waterline that is most salient to their identity.

The Ladder of Inference

Review the ladder of inference model. Provide a paper copy of the model to participants. Ask that they evaluate a stereotype they once held (or currently have) about a particular group, using the ladder of inference to think through how the incomplete information results in potentially discriminatory results.

Visual Thinking Strategies

Visual thinking strategies were designed to engage students with works of art such as paintings, sculptures, and photographs. Here, we use it to engage participants with mediated images related to group-social identities. Show an evocative image—it could one found in a newspaper or magazine, or it could be a stock photo used in association with an article. Ask participants the following open-ended questions:
What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?

Where I Am From Poem

Ask students to fill in the poem template. Then, ask students to share their poems with one another in small groups or one-on-one. Be sure to write your own poem as a demonstration and be the first to read it aloud to the group. Give participants the option to forego reading their poem aloud, or to have someone else read for them. This can be an emotional activity, but it has proven to be powerful in building connections.

Exploring Further

Ask Big Questions

Ask Big Questions, a project of international Hillel, engages participants in reflective community conversations about purpose, identity, and responsibility. These conversations build trust, strengthen community, and deepen understanding across lines of difference.
http://askbigquestions.org/

The Civil Conversation Project

The Civil Conversations Project (CCP) is a series of podcasts and online resources for beginning new conversations in public life at every level with the goal of healing our fractured civic spaces.
http://www.civilconversationsproject.org/

The Evolving Language of Diversity

A paper by Kathy Castania, Cornell Cooperative Extension, that explores common language uses, gives general rules, cites misused terms and terms that simply do not work. The paper has been used nationwide for diversity and inclusiveness training.
https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/2665

I Am From Project

The I Am From Project helps people of all ages and backgrounds use the "Where I'm From" poem as a prompt to write about the experiences that shape them and to bring their voices together in community.
https://iamfromproject.com

Interfaith Youth Core

Interfaith Youth Core is a campus-based movement that views religious and philosophical traditions as bridges of cooperation. The site provides resources for creating positive, meaningful relationships across differences, and fostering appreciative knowledge of other traditions.
https://www.ifyc.org/

Make It OK

Make It OK aims to stop the stigma around mental illness through conversation. The site provides resources for sharing stories, learning about mental illness and stigmatization, and knowing what to say to help. The site include interactive online learning experiences.
http://makeitok.org

Microaggressions - Power, Privilege, and Everyday Life

Microaggressions is a Tumblr blog established as a site where people can LEARN from one another. The project is a response to the statement, “it’s not a big deal.”
http://www.microaggressions.com/

More Than Words Inclusive Language Campaign (Macalester College)

The More Than Words Inclusive Language Campaign was created to bring awareness to how we use language and its impact. The site includes public awareness posters, videos, and links to similar campaigns that address the evolving language of diversity.
http://www.macalester.edu/morethanwords/

The Race Card Project

Started in 2010 by journalist Michelle Norris, the Race Card Project encourages people to condense their observations and experiences about race into one sentence with just Six Words. Since then, the Project has received tens of thousands of Six Word stories from all over the world.
http://theracecardproject.com/

Are there resources you have found especially helpful?
Let us know so that we can add them to our list.

Appendices

The Diversity Wheel

The Iceberg Model

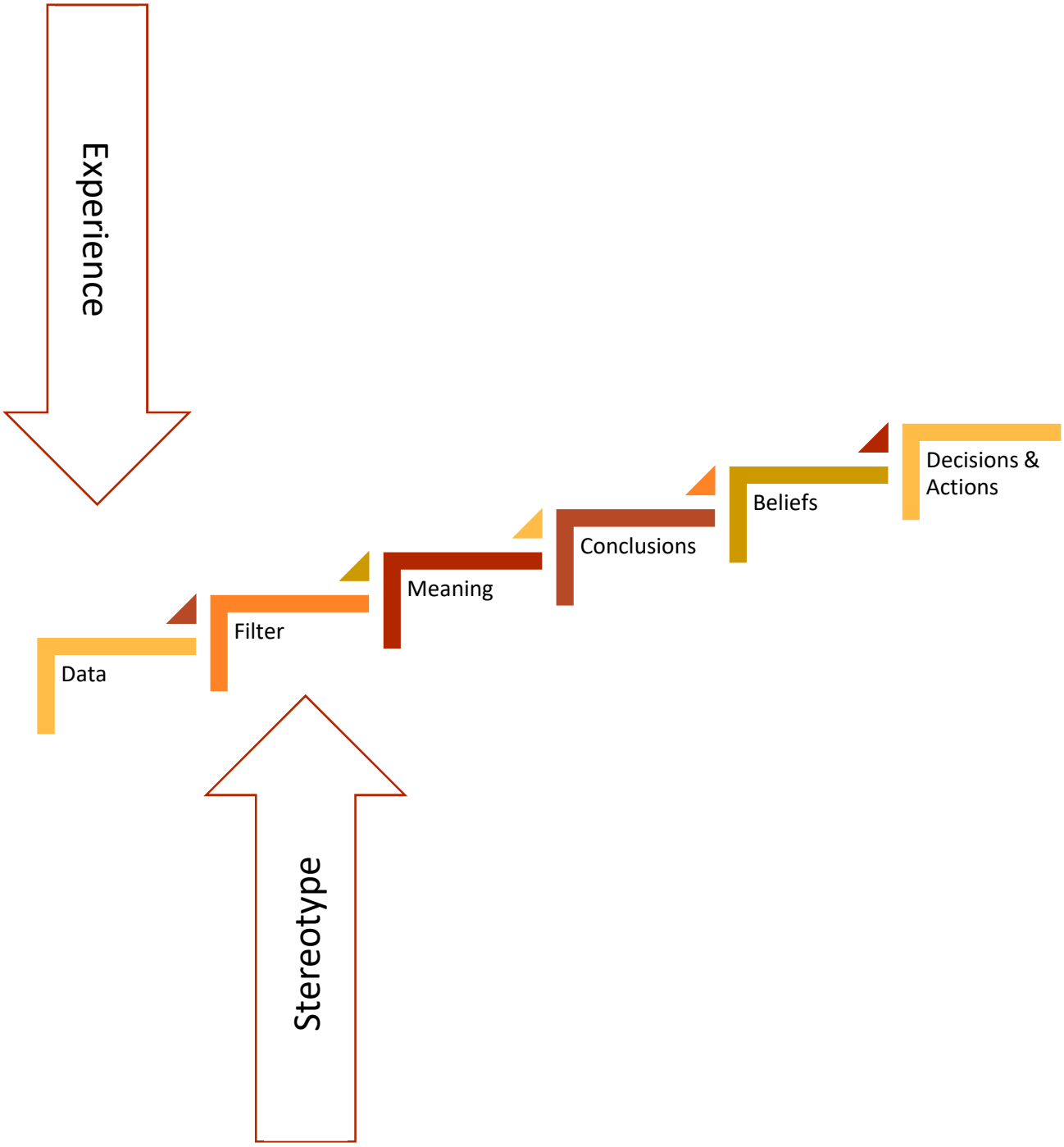
The Ladder of Inference

Where I Am From Poem Template

Education
Political Belief
Work Experience
Age
Race / Ethnicity
Family
Appearance
Gender Identity or Expression
Mental / Physical Ability
Gender
Sexual Orientation
Organizational Role
Religion
National Origin
Language and Communication Skills
Income

Waterline of Visibility
Skin Colour
Gender
Race
Age
Nationality
Physical Ability
Ethnicity
Wealth
Social Status
Culture
Religion
Value Systems
Learning Styles
Heritage
Role/Function
Political Views
Life Experiences
Personality Profile
Languages
Education
Sexual Orientation
Thinking Style
Family Status
Talents
Sexual Identity
Skills
Perspectives
Beliefs
Work Style
Location/Division

The Ladder of Inference



Where I Am From Poem Template

I am from *(specific ordinary item)*_____

From *(object/product)*_____**and** *(another object/product)*_____

I am from the *(home description)*_____

*Adjective that describes the above home description*_____

It *(tasted, sounded, looked, felt like:)*_____

I am from the *(plant, flower, natural item, built object:)*

_____

The *(plant, flower, or natural item, built object:)*

_____

*(Description of above:)*_____

I'm from the *(family tradition*)_____**and** (*family trait*)_____

From (*name of family member*)_____and (*name of family member*)_____

And (*another name*)_____

I'm from the (*description of family tendency*)_____**and**

(*another family tendency*)_____

From (*something you were told as a child*)_____**and**

(*another thing you were told as a child*)_____

I'm from *(representation of religious or spiritual beliefs or lack thereof)*_____

(further description of spiritual beliefs)_____

I'm from *(place of birth and family ancestry)*_____

*(Two food items that represent your ancestry)*_____**and**_____

From the *(specific family story with a detail about a specific person)*_____

_____

The *(another detail of another family member)*_____

(Location of family pictures)_____

I am from (*general statement with details about who you are or where you are from*:)

_____

Based on the poem by George Ella Lyon: http://georgeellalyon.com