Assumptions: Is it Really What You Think?

What is an assumption?
Making an assumption is when you make a decision about something or someone without having all of the facts.

We tend to rely on cues and signals from others to figure out what they are thinking. Eventually we become convinced that our guess is fact without proof. This is indirect communication. It encourages you to fill in the blanks on your own and make assumptions about others. It is easy to fantasize what others are thinking and doing. This can eventually lead to gossip and misunderstandings between friends.

GOAL: The following activity will help students think about and understand how quickly and easily assumptions are made.

Directions: Read the following scenario and answer the corresponding questions.

Scenario
Amy is upset over her math grade. At lunch she avoids looking at her friends in fear she might show that she is upset. She doesn’t want anyone to know how badly she is doing. Her friends ask her what is wrong but she just shakes her head and says nothing. One friend in particular, Jenna, who is sitting right next to Amy, feels like Amy has been giving her the cold shoulder all day and decides, “She must be mad at me.” Instead of asking if Amy is mad at her, after lunch Jenna pulls aside their other girlfriends and discusses why Amy would be mad at Jenna. When Amy walks by them out of the lunch room the girls fall silent. The rest of the day Jenna and the other girls ignore Amy. Amy doesn’t understand why everyone is being mean to her and is confused and feels even more stressed because now not only is she almost failing math, but all of her friends are mad at her.

Because Jenna made the assumption that Amy was mad, a cycle has started and not only will the other girls start making assumptions, but Amy is now left to start assuming why the girls are mad at her.
Map the situation:

In each box, write what each person does and assumptions they make that contribute to making the situation worse?

Follow-up questions

Amy

1. What did Amy do that was okay? What could Amy have done differently and why?

2. What could Amy have done after she realized her friends were mad at her?
1. What assumptions does Jenna make and why? Why are these assumptions wrong?

2. What happened when Jenna made these assumptions?

3. What could Jenna have done as soon as she felt Amy was giving her the cold shoulder?

The bystanders

1. What did the other girls in the group do right? What did they do wrong?

2. What could the other girls in the group have done differently?
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Because Jenna made the assumption that Amy was mad, a cycle has started and not only will the other girls start making assumptions, but Amy is now left to start assuming why the girls are mad at her.
Map the situation:

In each box, write what each person did and assumptions they make that contribute to making the situation worse?

Amy
- Amy gets a bad grade on her test, she is upset and doesn't want to talk.
- Amy begins to wonder why her friends are mad at her instead of just asking them.

Jenna
- Jenna sees that Amy is not talking and assumes Amy is mad at her.
- Ignores Amy.
- Talks to the rest of the girls about Amy.

The group
- The groups discusses why Amy is mad at Jenna.
- Ignores Amy.

Follow-up questions

Amy
1. What did Amy do that was okay? What could Amy have done differently and why?
   - Amy was allowed to feel upset about her math grade and she was allowed to eat lunch in silence, but when her friends asked her what was wrong, she could have said:
     - She was upset over something that happened in math.
     - She was upset over a grade she received.
     - Told them the whole truth.
     - Told them she would talk to them about it later but she just didn’t feel well.
2. What could Amy have done after she realized her friends were mad at her?

- Called Jenna later and confronted her about the situation.
- Sent Jenna a text, asking her if she was mad and what was wrong at lunch.
- Told Jenna that she was there for her to talk to when she was ready.

Jenna

1. What assumptions does Jenna make and why? Why are these assumptions wrong?

- Jenna thinks that Amy is mad at her because she is not talking to her. They are wrong because Amy is not mad at her.

2. What happened when Jenna made these assumptions?

- Jenna is now mad at Amy. Instead of talking to Amy about it, Jenna gets the other girls involved and now they are all ignoring Jenna.

3. What could Jenna have done as soon as she felt Amy was giving her the cold shoulder?

- The antidote to assumptions is information.
  - Ask Amy if she is mad.
  - Ask how her day is going, if anything happened.
  - If she doesn’t feel comfortable asking Amy:
    - Know when you are making an assumption.
    - Catch yourself making assumptions in the moment instead of too late.
    - Question the assumption.
    - Are there any other reasons why Amy might be acting this way?
    - You need to be 100% sure the assumption you came up with has to be true.
    - Try thinking about the assumptions that were made.
    - Say in your head “I wonder if Amy is mad at me, or if she is having a bad day.”
    - This makes the assumption not absolute.
    - Do not involve others in your assumptions.
The bystanders

1. What did the other girls in the group do right? What did they do wrong?
   - Jenna was the only one who assumed Amy was mad, but once Jenna brought it up, the others agreed with her without getting the facts.

2. What could the other girls in the group have done differently?
   - In the lunch room
     - Ask Amy questions. She is obviously feeling bad and may want to talk.
     - If she responds with a short “nothing” or “I am fine” but you know she is not.
       - Ask her if she has had a bad day. She may answer yes and you can leave it at that.
     - Ask what happened.
     - Ask her why she is not talking much.
     - Tell her that if she wants to talk you are there for her whenever.
     - Give her a compliment.
   - Do not ask around about what might be wrong.
     - This will let others know that Amy is upset.
     - This will invite rumors and gossiping.
   - Tell her Jenna she is making assumptions.
   - Do not partake in the assumption making.
   - Change the subject.
   - Tell Jenna that they can all talk to Amy about it later.
   - When Amy walks by, leave the group and walk with her.