

National Holiday

By exchanging information about their national heroes, participants can get to know each other better and have an insight into their different cultures and histories.

Issues addressed

- Heroes as elements and symbols of socialisation and national culture.
- Different readings of history.
- Differences and links between people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds.

Aims

- To help participants become aware of different perspectives on shared historical events and the heroes associated with them
- To raise participants' curiosity about the history and heroes of other cultures
- To be self-critical about one's own national history
- To work towards a universal vision of history
- To reflect about history teaching and the role of heroes

Time: 90 minutes

Group size Any size between 10 and 40 participants

Preparation

- Flip chart and markers.
- Paper and pencil for the participants.

Instructions

If the group is large, divide the participants into groups of 5 to 6.

Start by asking people individually to think about their most important national historical heroes, particularly those whom they personally appreciate or are proud of. It is important to stress, especially if the group is multi-cultural, that the heroes do not have to be of their present country of residence, but that they can be of their country of origin or of their parents' country of origin. Allow five minutes for this.

Now ask the members of each group to share their choices and to say why those people are or were important for their countries. Allow sufficient time for a real exchange of information and questioning.

Ask each group to list the names of the heroes, their nationalities and, if appropriate, what was their most important achievement on a flip chart.

In plenary, ask each group to present its flip chart to the other groups.

Debriefing and evaluation

You should note down which heroes, if any, are mentioned more than once or appear frequently. Ask people to say if they enjoyed this activity and then focus the discussion around the following questions:



- Was anyone surprised by any of the heroes mentioned? Why?
- Did everyone know of all the heroes who were mentioned?
- What are national heroes usually famous for? What human values do they stand for?
- What makes us, or leads us to, appreciate some heroes rather than others?
- Where did we learn to respect them, and why?
- Do you believe that if they lived today their values and actions would make them heroes?
- Do you think the heroes listed are universal heroes?
- Do you think that everyone would see them as heroes?

Tips for the facilitator

If the group is multi-cultural it may be interesting to compose the groups according to the origin of participants.

Secondly, if time allows and the atmosphere is suitable, the groups can make a short sketch of some historical event which made somebody famous. An element of competition can be added by asking the other participants to guess the identity of the hero.

The principle behind the activity, that heroes exist mainly within a specific national or cultural framework, works better if the group is multi-cultural. Age and gender differences in the group will prove also interesting.

You may contribute to the activity by doing some fact-finding about some well-known national heroes. Since many historical heroes are associated with some war or battle, it is always interesting to present the image of the hero from the point of view of the other side.

It might happen that most of the named heroes are men. If so, it will be interesting to ask why, and to link the evaluation with issues about sexism, both historically and at present.

Variations

A very interesting variation would consist of sharing the different national holidays in different cultures and countries. Why is a particular day a national holiday? The debriefing could follow as above.

Suggestions for follow up

Other activities which explore related issues are 'The History Line' (page 91) and 'My Story' (page 129). If you work with 'Personal Heroes' (page 147) you can compare present day heroes with historic ones.

Alternatively if you want a different sort of activity try the board game 'The path to development' (page 138) and explore the economic and political forces which are making history at the moment.