

TRY THIS

Discovery / identity lesson

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This lesson might fit into a unit on identity or it could even be an example of a related text for Discovery. The process of discovering about family and the reactions of the participants give insight into the importance of discovery for individuals.

Resources – television series:

Finding your roots

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZM3mVkiKhQ>

Who do you think you are?

<http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/whodoyouthinkyouare>

Programs exploring identity are becoming very popular, especially when they reveal different cultural ancestry. Celebrities are interviewed about their family's past and through historical research and travel to other places many unknown stories are discovered about their past and the cultures they came from.

The American series *Finding Your Roots* goes even further and employs DNA research to locate the percentage of different cultural groups' genetic material in each person's DNA.

What we see is that identity is often about the stories we are told and these stories are framed by particular contextual prejudices – for example, in the past convict or Aboriginal heritage were hidden where nowadays they are important acknowledgements of belonging.

Activity

- Ask students to interview each other in pairs and share stories about their family identity. Ask them to report to the class on the person they interviewed. (I have found in one class that two students had ancestors on the second fleet to Australia). Ask them how they could check on their family histories.
- What do the titles *Who do you think you are?* and *Finding your roots* evoke?
- Watch an episode of *Finding your roots* or *Who do you think you are?*
- What cultural groups does the interviewee identify with?
- What does the historical evidence reveal?
- How do they react?
- What does the DNA evidence reveal (only in *Who do you think you are?*)? How surprising is this?
- Has any element of that person's past been hidden and if so, why?
- How does the information about the past affect the person's self-perception?
- Consider the way the program is organised as a mystery. How is this supposed to affect the audience? What evidence is used? How is it filmed? What is the role of experts? How is the interviewee filmed? (think of camera, editing and sound) What is the program saying about individuals and cultural identity?
- Why do you think such a program is so popular?
 - What does the series say about identity?
 - Why is discovering identity so important? What does it say about the way humans interact and see themselves?
 - What does the series say about Discovery?
 - Go to the Discovery rubric and match statements in the rubric with elements of the film.



SBS *Who do you think you are?* website banner. Source: <http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/whodoyouthinkyouare>