

The Empathy Algorithm: Decoding Bias

(Year 9 - Ages 14-15)

Lesson 2 of 9

Teacher Preparation

Introduction for Teachers

Adolescents live in "Tribes" (peer groups). They are biologically wired to care deeply about their In-Group and be suspicious of Out-Groups. Lesson 2 challenges this wiring. We explore Unconscious Bias—the mental shortcuts our brains take to categorize people.

- The Problem: In donation, bias stops us from registering. "Doctors won't save people like me." Or "My religion doesn't support it."
- The Solution: "Debugging" the code. We use logic and empathy to dismantle these barriers.

Safety and Sensitivity Considerations

- Stereotypes: When discussing cultural views, ensure we don't reinforce stereotypes. Use phrases like "Some people in this community might feel..." rather than "All X people believe Y."
- Religious Views: Be clear: All major religions in Australia support organ donation as an act of charity. The "barrier" is usually personal interpretation or lack of specific guidance, not the doctrine itself.
- The "Privilege" Discussion: Acknowledge that mistrust of the medical system is often valid for some groups (e.g., Indigenous Australians) due to historical trauma. Empathy means validating that fear, not dismissing it.

Teacher Resources

- Video: "Jane Elliott Blue Eyes Brown Eyes" (Short clip).
- Resource: "The Bias Deck" (Profile cards detailed below).

The Alchemist's Data: The Diversity Gap (Year 9)

The Matching Problem Organs are matched by blood type and tissue type. These markers often correlate with ethnicity.

- The Issue: We have a shortage of donors from diverse backgrounds (Asian, Middle Eastern, Indigenous).
- The Result: Patients from these backgrounds often wait longer for a transplant because there are fewer compatible donors.
- The Fix: We need diversity in the donor pool to save the diversity on the waiting list.

The Religious Consensus

- Christianity: "Sacrifice for others." (Supported)
- Islam: "Saving one life is like saving all humanity." (Supported - with conditions).
- Judaism: "Pikuach Nefesh" (Saving a life overrides other laws). (Supported).
- Buddhism: "The highest act of generosity." (Supported).
- Fact: No major religion has a total ban on donation.



Key Concepts & Language for Teachers

1. In-Group vs. Out-Group Bias

- In-Group: People we identify with (My school, my race, my team). We feel automatic empathy for them.
- Out-Group: "Others." We feel cognitive empathy (we have to think about it) or indifference.
- Donation Context: We are more likely to donate if we see the recipient as "one of us." The goal is to expand "Us" to mean "Humanity."

2. The "Halo Effect" & "Horns Effect"

- Halo: If someone is like us, we assume they are good/smart/safe.
- Horns: If someone is different, we assume they are bad/wrong/dangerous.
- Activity Link: This explains why some communities fear the medical system—they view it through a "Horns" lens due to history.

3. Debugging (Active Listening)

- To fix the code, you must listen to the error message.
- Technique: "It sounds like you are worried about..." (Validation).
- Correction: "Actually, the facts say..." (Correction).

