

SEL Activity

Misunderstood Monsters



grades 6–8



35–40 minutes

Objectives

- Students explore their ability to change their own minds.
- Students reflect on how assumptions have held them back in the past.
- Students explore how being wrong can be an opportunity for learning.

Essential Questions

- How can we challenge ourselves to do things that feel “scary”?
- How have we challenged our assumptions in the past?
- How does challenging our assumptions open us to new experiences?

Vocabulary

Assumption: noun; something you accept as true without question of proof.

Perspective: noun; a particular way of viewing things that depends on one’s experience and personality.

MATERIALS + MEDIA

Poem: “Monsters I’ve Met” ([PDF](#))

Worksheet: My Misunderstood Monster ([PDF](#))

Worksheet: Monsters Around the World ([PDF](#))

Chart Paper or whiteboard

Video: [Monsters I’ve Met](#) (0:35)

SEL CORE COMPETENCIES

Self-awareness: Growth mindset

Self-awareness: Examining biases

Social awareness: Perspective-taking

Before you Begin

- Print the Worksheet: My Misunderstood Monster ([PDF](#)) (1/student).
 - Prepare to display and/or print a few copies of Monsters Around the World ([PDF](#)).
 - Prepare to display and/or print the Poem: “Monsters I’ve Met” ([PDF](#)).
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Program Connections

This activity focuses on perspectives—a theme that runs through our core programs. To learn more, visit our [PROGRAMS](#) page.

THINK • GIVE

Ask: Have you ever felt scared or nervous about something new—a stranger, a new experience, or something unfamiliar—but later realized it wasn't as scary as you thought? What did you think would happen? What really happened?

Offer an example if students are struggling to think of something. For example: feeling nervous about a new teacher who turned out to be kind; being afraid to try a new activity that ended up being fun; or thinking someone was unfriendly before getting to know them.

As students share, write their examples on the board or chart paper.

Watch: [Monsters I've Met](#) (0:35) and/or display the Poem "Monsters I've Met" ([PDF](#)) by Shel Silverstein. This short poem is about a character who makes assumptions that turn out to be wrong. Watch the read-aloud and/or read the poem together as a group, having each student read one line at a time.

Discuss:

- How did the author expect the monsters to act? Why?
 - What is a "monster" in this poem? Do you think the monsters see themselves as monsters?
 - Can you think of a time you made assumptions about someone or something too quickly and were wrong?
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CONNECT + CLOSE

Activity: Misunderstood Monsters

Explain: Think back to someone or something that seemed scary or intimidating at first, but later turned out not to be so bad. Now look at the list of "monsters" you made earlier.

Ask: What do you notice about our monsters? [Guide students to notice that many things felt scary at first, but didn't stay scary.]

Hand out the [Worksheet: My Misunderstood Monster \(PDF\)](#) (1/student). Display or share a few copies of the [Monsters Around the World \(PDF\)](#).

NOTE: You can display this sheet or pass around a few copies. It's just meant to help students get ideas. If students think of monsters from movies, books, or video games, encourage them to use those ideas too.

Explain: You'll use this worksheet to think about a "monster" in your life—something you thought would be scary or hard. It doesn't have to be a big fear. Small, everyday worries work just fine.

Walk through the worksheet together.

Ask: What was your monster? It could be a neighbor's dog, a coach at basketball tryouts, or being asked to babysit your younger sibling. Write it down.

Give students a minute to respond.

Explain: Now, let's give your monster a name! You can choose one from the [Monsters Around the World \(PDF\)](#) or make up your own.

Give students a minute to respond.

Ask: Why did this monster make you nervous? What did you assume the monster wanted? Maybe you thought the dog wanted to bite you, the coach wanted you to fail, or your parents wanted to prove you couldn't handle the responsibility. Your answers can be serious, simple, or even silly.

Give students a minute to respond.

Before the final question, introduce perspective.

Explain: Perspective means trying to see things from someone else's point of view. We can't always know what others are thinking, but when we imagine their perspective, we can challenge our assumptions.

Ask: In the end, what do you think the monster really wanted? Maybe the dog wanted to play, the coach wanted you to work as a team, or your parents wanted you to spend time with your sibling. Again, your answer can be simple or creative, or big and metaphoric—this is your monster.

Explain: In the last box, draw your monster asking for what it really wanted. Try adding a speech bubble to show its true goal. (Optional: Share the [Monsters Around the World \(PDF\)](#) for students to cut out and use.)

Post the finished monsters on a bulletin board.

Read the **Poem: "Monsters I've Met"** ([PDF](#)) aloud again. Then fit the students' monsters into the poem's pattern. Model first: "I met a [MONSTER NAME], but they didn't want [ASSUMPTION]. They only wanted [REAL WANT]."

Have each student read their stanza aloud.

Discuss:

- What did you notice about the assumptions you made?
- How did your perspective change when you considered what the monster really wanted?
- How could this help you when meeting new people or facing things that make you nervous?

ACTION

Explain: In the coming days, pay attention to times when you feel nervous or scared. Try to be brave by asking yourself what assumptions you might be making, and practice seeing the situation from your "monster's" point of view. You can also share this experience with someone you trust. Listen if they share something they were nervous about, too.

REFLECTION

Lead a discussion or allow students to journal. Use the following questions as a guide:

- When you feel nervous about something new, what kind of assumptions do you usually make?
- How can you remind yourself in the moment that your assumptions might not be true?
- What new experiences might be possible when you challenge those assumptions?