



# DOES POPULARITY MATTER?

*We might be seeking the wrong sort of connection.*



## OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore the type of connections they seek
- Students will reflect on the nuances of popularity

## MATERIALS

- Ability to show [TEDtalk](#)
- Writing/Notetaking supplies

## TIME

- 45 min

## LESSON INTRO

This lesson is best with older students.

“Psychologist Mitch Prinstein talks about why we are biologically programmed to care about what others think of us, why teenagers first become addicted to popularity, and why being “cool” in high school may be bad for our long-term happiness and success. For the first time in the history of the human species, Prinstein argues, we have become confused about two distinct types of popularity, and many of us may unwittingly be focused on the wrong one.” [https://www.ted.com/talks/mitch\\_prinstein\\_does\\_our\\_high\\_school\\_popularity\\_affect\\_us\\_today](https://www.ted.com/talks/mitch_prinstein_does_our_high_school_popularity_affect_us_today)

## LESSON STEP BY STEP

1. Instruct students to divide their paper in half and sketch an image of a “popular” person on one side and a “likeable” person on the other.
2. Students pair-share their ideas. What are the differences between these two types of people, what are the similarities?
3. Watch the video [Does Our High School Popularity Affect Us Today? | Mitch Prinstein | TEDxUniversityofNevada](#) (10:30)





4. Ask: “The psychologist in this video shares his ideas that we are seeking a certain kind of popularity. He says, ‘*We are seeking status more than ever before.*’ What do you think of this idea? What examples do you see of status-seeking around you or in the larger world?”
5. Compare your initial ideas on “popularity” and “likability” with the ideas that the speaker presents. How are they similar or different?

## VARIATIONS

1. Small groups (3-4students) compile lists: Characteristics of someone who is status seeking, and characteristics of someone who is trying to be likable.
2. If your students are familiar with a discussion routine such as a Socratic Seminar, consider using this TEDtalk as the basis for a peer-discussion.
3. Use this Pulse Check from [Character Lab’s Social Intelligence Playbook](#) to asses if your relationships are healthy:  
Think about yourself. How many of these things are true?
  - I have a lot of relationships that are mutually beneficial, enjoyable, and supportive.
  - Most of the time, I can tell how other people feel and have a good idea about how to respond appropriately.
  - My relationships make me feel good about myself.
  - The people in my life help me be my best.

## FACILITATOR TIPS AND NOTES

Consider watching the video twice, back-to-back. This lets the dense content of this talk sink in more. Before the second showing, prime students with the discussion questions you’ll be using.

## REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. Read the last paragraph of the TEDtalk aloud: “In today’s society, we have confused status and likeability. We spend more time and energy thinking about how to make ourselves stand out within the herd, rather than how to create real, authentic, close communication and connections with others. Or how to develop a sense of community. This is a big concern for all of us. But it might especially be a concern for today’s teenagers who know of no other world than the one that we have given them... We have a basic human instinct that makes us interested in how other people think about us, and every day we have an opportunity to make a choice. Science tells us that the best way to achieve happiness and success is not to make the choice to try and increase our standing above all others in our society, but to do what we can to make everyone feel welcome and included in our herd.”



**Reflection options:**

- Rewrite/restate idea in your own words
- Make two lists: one listing how it feels to attain high status, the other list how it feels to make others feel welcomed and included. What are the similarities and differences of the two lists?

2. Close by asking students to consider any takeaways or personal application from this discussion. Allow for personal journaling or class share-out.
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**NOTES**

- **Source:** <https://characterlab.org/resources/ted-talk-popularity/>
- **Educational Standards:** CASEL: Self Awareness, CASEL: Social Awareness, P21: Social and Cross-Cultural Skills, CCRS:SL3 Evaluate Perspective and Evidence