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## THE COOL FACTOR

**Grades:** 7 through 12

**Time:** 90-120 minutes

**Materials:** People papers for each group (tan paper with an outline of a generic person on it); art materials (magazines to cut up, colored pencils, scissors, tape, etc.); photos of different kinds of people (see below); statistics about “cool” in teens (see below); black/white board and chalk/markers; examples of fads that used to be considered cool (either the real things or photos); a list of character qualities (see below)

**Relevant Subjects:** Social Studies, Language Arts, Psychology, and Art

1. Say: “Today we’re going to explore coolness and talk about defining ourselves....”

Divide students into groups of about four. Pass out the People papers and art materials.

2. Tell the groups that they’re going to have a chance to make someone cool: “You have a person there on the paper. You have 15 minutes to make him or her cool. Please provide him/her with everything s/he needs to be cool. You can draw the things, paste them from the magazines, and/or you can write the names of the things or qualities....”

**Alternative:** Have each student create their own “cool” person.

3. Ask for volunteers to share what they’ve done & briefly share why what they included is cool.

4. Show students a series of photos of people – some are beautiful, thin, well-dressed; some are plain, average; some are obviously poor; some from other countries. For each photo, ask:

“What can you tell about this person?” (Accept all answers.)

“Is this person cool?” (Have students collectively decide whether someone is cool or not. Divide the pictures into a “cool” and “not cool” pile, based on student response. For the sake of time, go with the majority answers.)

At the end of the exercise, show the students which people they said were “cool” and which weren’t.

5. Share a couple of statistics about the importance of cool in relation to teens. (You can usually find news articles discussing this.) “So being cool seems to be really important in our society. Why do you think that is?” (Accept all answers.)
6. Lead a brief discussion about “Who or what decides what’s cool?” (Write answers on the board.)
7. Show students either actual items or pictures of items that were once considered “cool” (pet rocks, leg warmers, disco suits, hairstyles, etc.). (Note: This exercise is more effective if you can actually wear or use the objects.) Ask them to discuss: “Is this stuff cool? Why or why not?”
8. Show a list of qualities (on poster board, chalk board, etc.) and ask: “Which ones are important?” (Mark the ones considered important—unless the consensus is “all of them.”)

The list might include qualities such as: honesty, humor, compassion, integrity, respect, responsibility, wisdom, kindness, patience, cooperation, joy, trust, creativity, perseverance, etc.

Ask: “How do these relate to being cool?” (Accept answers.)

9. Lead a brief discussion about a possible **different** definition of what it means to be cool—about finding cool through who we are, and what’s special about us, rather than what we wear or own, etc.
10. Give each student a People paper. Have them create a representation of what they most love about themselves – what’s special, what’s important to them, what makes them **them**. Provide an opportunity for volunteers to share.

### **Extensions:**

1. Have students briefly discuss: How can we find the “cool” in everyone....? (Refer back to some of the “uncool” photos from that previous activity.)
2. Divide students into groups of about 6-8. Give each student a stack of plain recycled index cards and some art supplies. Ask students in each group to write down on each index card one thing that’s cool about each person in their group and decorate the card (ask them to focus on intangibles – like the list of qualities—rather than on material or physical things). Encourage them to share what they wrote down within their group and then give each card to the appropriate person for them to keep.

### **Activity by Marsha Rakestraw (HECP Graduate)**