

## 1. WHO AM I?

## WHO ARE YOU?

### EXPLORE YOUR IDEAS

1. As a new student in the class, what is important to Jeanne?
2. Why did the blond girl assume that Jeanne was a foreigner who did not speak English?
3. Would the girl have made the same mistake if Jeanne had had blond hair and blue eyes?
4. Why was Jeanne “stunned”?

### YOUR VIEW

To **assume** something means to suppose that something is true, without checking it.

Have you ever had an experience where someone assumed something about you based on what they saw or thought they saw?

What did they see, and what did they assume about you and people who look like you?

Were they correct or incorrect?

How did you respond?

If you had the chance to change the way you responded, what would you say? What would you do?

### What to Do

Read the introduction and excerpt below, then write your thoughts on the facing page.

*How do I see myself? How will others see me?* These are common questions we think of when we meet people for the first time.

But is what we see who we really are? Are we only the sum of what people can see—face, clothes, hair, and nothing more? Or are we really more than the way we look? How do people learn about things they can't see, like our families, our friends, our pets? Or the things we enjoy, like sports, games, school, pizza?

Below is an example of how what we see when we meet someone new—our first impressions—may not always give an accurate picture of someone's identity. In her book *Farewell to Manzanar*, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston tells her real-life story of what it was like to be a Japanese-American in California during the 1940s. In 1945, when Jeanne's family moved to Los Angeles, she started sixth grade in a new school.

That afternoon, during a reading lesson, [the teacher] finally asked me if I'd care to try a page out loud. I had not yet opened my mouth, except to smile. When I stood up, everyone turned to watch. Any kid entering a new class wants, first of all, to be liked. This was uppermost in my mind. I smiled wider, then began to read. I made no mistakes. When I finished, a pretty blond girl in front of me said, quite innocently, "Gee, I didn't know you could speak English."

She was genuinely amazed. I was stunned. How could this have even been in doubt?

