

Power and Privilege Activity Instructions

Age: Junior High (grades 5-8)

Objectives:

- Basic understanding of privilege, oppression, and 6 isms achieved
- Ability to identify forms of oppression in students' lives developed
- Introduction to allyship and ways to harness privilege for good

Table of Contents

Paper Throwing Privilege Activity 2

Ism Spaces Activity 3



Paper Throwing Privilege Activity

Time: 5 minutes

Materials:

Enough scrap paper for each student to have one piece

Recycling bin

Instructions:

Instruct each student to take one piece of scrap paper and crumple it up into a ball. Tell them that the game is simple – that they all represent Canada’s population and that everybody has the chance to become wealthy. To get rich though, the students must throw their ball of paper into the recycling bin at the front of the class without getting out of their seats. Allow the students to all have their one shot.

Debrief:

After everybody has thrown their piece, ask who had it easier? (anticipate some complaints from the back rows about it being unfair).

Explain that as we could see, the closer you were to the recycling bin, the better your odds were at getting it in (and getting rich in our scenario): this is what privilege looks like.

Those who were sitting in the front row probably did nothing specific to earn their spot there, it is just where they sat down when they came in the room, so they had the advantage of getting rich easier simply because of the way things are. Privilege is kind of like this also, those who have privilege may not have done anything specific to earn it; our society just allows them to have it.

We are going to talk about how we can be better aware of our privilege today, and how we can support those who don’t have the same privilege as us, like those who were seated further back in the classroom for this activity

Congratulate those who were sitting close, and send your ‘condolences’ to those at the back, maybe better luck next time. Ask if there are any questions before moving on.

Ism Spaces Activity

Time: 10-15 minutes

Materials:

6 pieces of paper with the recently reviewed isms largely typed or written on them

6 scenario sheets

Instructions:

Place the six pieces of paper with the isms written on them around the room or on six different tables. Split students up into six groups, provide each group with a scenario sheet. Ask them to read over the scenario in their small group, then go to which ism sheet matches their scenario, and then discuss the questions on the sheet in their small group.

After each group has found the right ism sheet, and had the chance to chat for a couple minutes, ask each group one by one to read out their scenario and explain the ism that they thought was exemplified in the scenario. Include debrief comments in the students answers.

Debrief:

1. *Omar, a grade 12 student decides not to go to university after graduating because it is too expensive and he can't afford it.*

By not being able to afford post-secondary education, Omar's ability to get a higher paying job in the future will be impacted. Because post-secondary education in Canada is very expensive, this is classist. Somebody who might experience privilege in this scenario would be somebody who is able to pay for post-secondary education (and not worry about going into debt because of it).

2. *Matt and Isaac, who have been dating for a few months receive violent threats from their classmates after they were seen holding hands outside after school.*

Because Matt and Isaac are not in a heterosexual relationship, they are experiencing threats of violence. This is often how heterosexism looks like – people who are not 'straight' are oftentimes the target of violence. The security that those in heterosexual relationships experience is a privilege.

3. *Jasmine is told she is being overly emotional and isn't taken seriously by her guy friends when she speaks up about a sexist joke that made her feel uncomfortable*

This is something that women hear a lot – “you’re being too emotional”, “you’re just being sensitive”, “you’re just on your period”, and it can get incredibly frustrating when young women hear over and over that their feelings aren’t valid simply because they are a girl. This is where the guys in the class can step up to stop this kind of sexism.

4. Basel and his family just moved to Canada from Syria as refugees and he has found it hard to fit in at school. His classmates only ever want to talk to him about how hard it has been for him to move to Canada and the challenges that he has faced coming to a new country as a refugee, yet they never ask him about the things he likes to do in his free time or take the time to be his friend.

Although Basel’s classmates were not being openly mean to him, or saying racist things to him, they embodied racist attitudes in the way that they interacted with Basel. They only saw him as a refugee, not as somebody who had unique parts to him that they could get to know more. It is important to not reduce people down to one part of their identity.

5. Pierre’s grandpa recently moved to an extended care facility where he lives with other people his age. He recently told Pierre that he doesn’t like it because the staff never let him make his own decisions about where he wants to go during the day even though he is capable of doing so.

Older folks are often treated in a way that does not respect their independence, because we assume that once someone gets really old, they are unable to make their own decisions. Those of us who are still young and have our independence respected are able to advocate for older people in our lives who might be thought of as less independent.

6. Jesse was diagnosed with depression a few months ago and has been having a hard time finding the right medication and counselling service that fits her needs. Sometimes when she is having a really hard day and finds it hard to get to school on time, her friends tell her to just be happy and stop being such a drag.

Many times, we forget about less visible disabilities, and are less willing to accommodate folks who live with disabilities that we cannot see. It’s important to remember that people’s experiences are unique, and that we should try our hardest to be kind and understanding when our peers are living with mental health concerns.

Group 1

Omar, a grade 12 student decides not to go to university after graduating high school because it is too expensive and he nor his family can afford it.

What ism is happening in this scenario?

Why is it important for all people to be able to have access to a university or college education?

Group 2

Matt and Isaac, who have been dating for a few months receive violent threats from their classmates after they were seen holding hands outside after school.

What ism is happening in this scenario?

What are some ways that heterosexual ("straight") couples have privilege?

Group 3

Jasmine is told she is being overly emotional and is not taken seriously by her guy friends when she speaks up about a sexist joke that made her feel uncomfortable.

What ism is happening in this scenario?

Do you think a guy would be taken more seriously if he stood up to the sexist joke?

Group 4

Basel and his family just moved to Canada from Syria as refugees and he has found it hard to fit in at school. His classmates only ever want to talk to him about how hard it has been for him to move to Canada and the challenges that he has faced coming as a refugee, yet they never ask him about the things he likes to do in his free time or take the time to really be his friend.

What ism is happening in this scenario?

What happens when we stereotype people who have a certain experience or identity?

Group 5

Pierre's grandpa recently moved to an extended care facility where he lives with other people his age. He recently told Pierre that he does not like it because the staff never let him make his own decisions about where he wants to go during the day even though he is capable of doing so.

What is happening in this scenario?

How do you think we can help elderly people to feel independent?

Group 6

Jesse was diagnosed with depression a few months ago and has been having a hard time finding the right medication and counselling services that fit her needs. Sometimes when she is having a really hard day and finds it hard to get to school on time, her friends tell her to just be happy and stop being such a drag.

What ism is happening in this scenario?

How do you think we can support people who have less-visible disabilities?