

Teaching Anti-Racist Lessons from *Open Minds to Equality* Remotely

What a challenging time it is for social justice educators. We do our best to deal with the pandemic, often by teaching remotely. We try to educate our students to better understand the history and dynamics of structural racism — most visible now in police violence, health care, the criminal justice system — and the outpouring of resistance to it. These are complicated ideas and necessitate careful and challenging teaching to address news that can be frightening and confusing to students.

Open Minds to Equality (4th edition, 2014) is a valuable resource for addressing these challenges. It provides a sequential series of learning activities to educate students about racism and other forms of discrimination so they can respond with understanding and critical perspectives to current manifestations of white supremacy and be more able to act for change in developmentally appropriate ways.

- Do some of your students believe that the “Black Lives Matters” movement contradicts the idea that *all lives matter*?

- Do some of your students feel that bias is part of many people’s experience, including their own, and not particular to Black people?

Below are two lessons from *Open Minds to Equality*, adapted for remote learning, that can address such students’ concerns and feelings. While lessons in the book are developmentally appropriate for students from grades 4-8, the ones highlighted here are particularly appropriate for grades 6-8. If these activities are too advanced for your students, earlier lessons in the book provide more basic understandings.

We hope two lessons will pique your interest. If you don’t already have *Open Minds to Equality*, we encourage you get it as a resource for your ongoing teaching as we continue to teach so that Black Lives Matter.

Adapting *Open Minds to Equality* Lessons for Remote Teaching

OVERALL GUIDELINES:

Supplies: Students will need some basic school supplies at home, the same kinds as for other school work, e.g., paper, crayons, or colored pencils.

Break-out Rooms: Many of these lessons depend on the use of break-out rooms on Zoom so that children can work in cooperative small groups and the teacher can circulate among these.

Sharing student work: These lessons use several sharing features, e.g., *chat* where students can post their own written work and photos of visual work such as illustrations. Also screen sharing where each student can share their work with the whole class. A third option is shared electronic documents where they can each add their own pieces.

Taking classroom notes: The Zoom whiteboard can be used just as you would use a classroom whiteboard (or blackboard) to take notes during whole-class discussions.

Whole-class Zoom discussions: Your class community will need to develop a culture for Zoom discussions. Likely you will want to *mute* everyone since background noise is amplified on Zoom. People can unmute themselves when they want to contribute. You may need to be careful in that Zoom will automatically go to the loudest voice. One straightforward way to handle this is virtual hand raising which is easy to do. Another is for students to sign up on chat when they want to talk. If someone before them says what they were going to say they can remove their name from the stack rather than repeating what was already said. A little experimenting can have major impact.

When some students believe that the “Black Lives Matters” movement contradicts the idea that *all lives matter*, teachers can help them understand the legacy and impact of 400 years of racial oppression on descendants of people who were enslaved, why the continuation of white supremacy can generate rage and why that legacy of anti-Black racism requires a focused response like “Black Lives Matters.” This lesson addresses that legacy through family stories.

A LEGACY OF RACISM*

*Although this particular lesson focuses on descendants of people who were enslaved, Indigenous people have suffered similar, long-term, historical legacies of racial oppression in the United States.

OBJECTIVES

To help students understand, through families’ stories, the legacy of 400 years of racial oppression on the descendants of people who were enslaved

MATERIALS

Access to the following books: *Nettie’s Trip South* by Ann Turner, *Pink and Say* by Patricia Polacco, and *Show Way* by Jacqueline Woodson. These are three excellent books geared for upper-elementary students, with powerful content for this age group as well as middle school students, when the purpose of using picture books is explained to them. Students in grades 6 through 8 accept reading children’s books if you are straightforward about their value and aren’t apologetic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7658EN6QMIs> *Pink and Say* by Patricia Polacco

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXHmz-JESQM> *Nettie’s Trip South* by Ann Turner

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1r8Rtu2PLJ0> *Show Way* by Jacqueline Woodson

If you have access to the print copy of Mildred Taylor’s book, *The Friendship*, you could consider reading it to your students for this lesson. It is a powerful story her father told her about his life in the segregated South.

IMPLEMENTATION

Ask students to think about a similarity and difference between the experiences of Black people who are descendants of people who were enslaved and other people of color who have immigrated here more recently. They will likely point to the similarity that both face racial discrimination today. They might point to the difference that African Americans suffered racial oppression for 400 years while recent

immigrants of color don't have that historical legacy of racial oppression in the United States.

After they have discussed this, tell them that by using literature for young people, they will further understand the legacy of racial oppression of African Americans in the United States. Introduce the literature by explaining that each of the stories they will hear has come from the author's own family history.

Nettie's Trip South was inspired by Ann Turner's great-grandmother's diary of her trip to the South in 1859 when she was a young woman. There she witnessed a slave auction and returned home a committed abolitionist. Patricia Polacco's great-great-grandfather, Sheldon Russell Curtis, passed down through the generations the story told in *Pink and Say*. Jacqueline Woodson's story traces the Woodson family through decades of racism since slavery.

The extent of historical context you may want to provide will depend on the needs of your students. These books will make the most sense to students if they have some knowledge about slavery, the Civil War, and segregation in the South. Explain that *Nettie's Trip South* describes slavery, endured by many Black people in the United States for 250 years before the Civil War. *Pink and Say* takes place during the Civil War. *Show Way* is an historical telling of how quilting ties together many generations of women in Woodson's family, through decades of racism, dating back to slavery and continuing through the civil rights movement to today. Tell students they will be looking for the ways in which racism affected Black people in these periods in U.S. history. They are just three examples of an ongoing history of racial oppression.

You can choose to read these books aloud to your class during synchronous teaching time or assign students to listen to them on youtube for homework or for asynchronous classroom time.

Discuss with them the force of a system of oppression, and how power is used to keep one group of people subordinate to another group of people — in this case, Black people subordinate to whites. Ask them to listen for ways this system of anti-Black racism was maintained as they listen to the stories.

DISCUSSION

After reading each book, ask students the following questions:

1. What were ways in which racial oppression toward Black people was manifested in the story?
2. How did that oppression affect them?
3. What were examples, if any, of humanity, hope, and resistance in the face of oppression?

After reading and discussing all three stories with students, discuss the following:

Dominant groups maintain oppression by keeping the subordinate group powerless and dehumanized.

4. What were some of the similarities in the ways Black people were kept oppressed in all three stories?
5. What kind of effect might this history of racial oppression — that still continues in similar and different ways — have on descendants of enslaved people over generations?
6. People from what other groups have experienced a history of racial oppression in the United States? How has this affected them?

When some students feel that bias is part of many people’s experience, including their own, and not particular to Black people, teachers can help them understand the ways people perceive and react to prejudice or discrimination is often related to the degree of privilege they have. This lesson can help students consider the differences in the impact of the experience of occasional prejudice compared to the experience of long-term discrimination.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF BIAS: DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES

OBJECTIVES

To have students realize that empathizing with someone who has been the victim of discrimination is not just thinking about how the experience would be for them, *but understanding how it may be for the victim.*

To help students think about the differences in the impact of the experience of ongoing discrimination compared to occasional prejudice.

To have students understand that how people perceive and react to incidents of bias is often related to the degree of privilege and power they have in society.

MATERIALS

One copy of “Worksheet: Let Me Tell You About My Experience,” p. 221, for each student. Three copies of “Worksheet: Different Kinds of Bias: Different Experiences” for each group of three students; one large copy of this worksheet on your Zoom whiteboard.

IMPLEMENTATION

Discuss with students how people experience bias differently. Discuss the concept of social identity — the combination of aspects of one’s identity including race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, ability, religion. Because of social inequality individuals and social groups are advantaged or hurt because of aspects of their social identities. See pages 29-32 in *Open Mind to Equality*.

Most times people experience discrimination for a characteristic for which they are disadvantaged in society, like being gay. Sometimes those who are privileged experience prejudice because of an aspect of their social identity, like being white or being male, that usually gives them advantages. Use ideas from the box “Subtle Distinctions in Experiencing Bias,” (see below) in your discussion in ways appropriate to your students.

After a general discussion on this issue, work as a whole class on the first scenario from “Worksheet: Let Me Tell You About My Experience.” Have one student read this aloud. Then discuss the scenario and complete the worksheet collaboratively on Zoom.

After this, divide students into breakout room groups of three. Give each group one copy of “Worksheet: Let Me Tell You About My Experience” and three copies of “Worksheet: Different Kinds of Bias: Different Experiences.” Circulate among the rooms to support students to deepen their thinking as they consider these situations. After groups have completed the worksheets, bring the break out room groups together for a whole class synchronous discussion.

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the questions on “Worksheet: Let Me Tell You About My Experience.”
2. a. In what important ways did all of these children have *similar* experiences?
b. In what important ways were these experiences *different* from each other?

3. What impact does our own experience of bias have on how we can understand others' experiences with this?
4.
 - a. Think back to a time you have been a victim of bias. What aspect of your social identity was the basis for this bias?
 - b. How typical is this type of incident for you?
 - c. Does that aspect of your social identity give you advantages or disadvantages in our society? Was this an example of discrimination or prejudice?
5. How can we help ourselves and others:
 - a. understand and remember the difference between occasional and ongoing bias?
 - b. tell the difference between discrimination and prejudice?

Subtle Distinctions in Experiencing Bias

In order to achieve greater understanding, acceptance, and equity, we need to be able to empathize with those who have had a range of experiences, some similar to ours and some different. One problem that often arises is understanding what it means to “walk a mile in someone else’s moccasins.” The experience of being a victim of bias is a different experience depending on a range of circumstances. To say “I know what it’s like to be called a name” isn’t necessarily accurate since *what it’s like* depends on the context and the degree of power and privilege we have. There is a difference between experiencing ongoing discrimination because of an aspect of our social identity for which we are disadvantaged in society and experiencing periodic prejudice or stereotyping for an aspect of our social identity that usually gives us advantages. (See “Filter of Oppression Chart,” p. 213.)

If we look at race, a person can be white, for example, and thus privileged in our society today, or a person of color, and thus disadvantaged. A person of color, given the racism in our society, typically experiences discrimination on an ongoing basis.

Sometimes a white person can be the target of racial prejudice or stereotyping, e.g., harassed for being white by people of color. This is most appropriately called prejudice and is different from discrimination because white people are privileged in our society because of their race and hold power because of it. Racial prejudice, while painful, is different from ongoing discrimination. Given the diversity of each of our social identities, some of us typically experience discrimination for those aspects of our social identities for which we are disadvantaged in our society. We may also experience less frequent occurrences of prejudice because of those aspects of our social identities that give us privilege. Understanding the subtle, but significant, *differences* in these experiences is necessary if we are to *truly* empathize, rather than think we are understanding by using only *our* experiences as the model.

— *Worksheet: Different Kinds of Bias: Different Experiences*

1. Describe the bias in the incident.
2. Was experiencing bias for this characteristic a common occurrence for the main character(s)?
3. What aspect of the social identity of the main character(s), if any, would usually give them advantages in our society?
4. What aspect of the social identity of the main character(s), if any, would make them disadvantaged in our society and a target of discrimination?

“Different Kinds of Bias: Different Experiences”, p 221

Roderick is a Black 5th-grader. He does very well in school with a special interest in math and science. His teacher, Ms. Johnson, has started an after-school “Girls’ Math Club.” She got a special grant to do this as a way to encourage girls to continue to be interested in, and do well in, mathematics. By middle school, girls do not get as high math grades as boys and do not score as well on standardized tests. By high school, girls take less math and thus are not as well prepared for college math courses.

In the Girls’ Math Club they do interesting kinds of math problems, more interesting than what they get to do in the classroom. They work in pairs and small groups rather than working on their own. Some of the work they do is pre-algebra so they’ll be more ready for the special algebra classes available in 7th grade. The club meets two days after school for an hour and a half each time.

When Roderick tried to get into the Girls’ Math Club, Ms. Johnson told him that it was only for girls. She explained that by 5th or 6th grade many girls become uncomfortable taking risks in math class with boys in the room. It helps to have a safe place where they can get extra time to experiment in mathematics.

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Adam is a white 6th-grader. He loves playing basketball. He and his friends play during recess and sometimes after school, unless the gym is being used for other groups. He and his stepfather often play at the local YMCA.

After he gets home from school, Adam often rides his bike around town. He has noticed that there are several courts where it is pretty easy to get into a pickup basketball game. He thinks this would be a great way to get in more basketball time.

One afternoon Adam decides to try to get into one of these games. He locks up his bike and goes up to the kids playing. They’re all Black. He asks to join in. One of them says, “We don’t want any white kids here.” Another says, “Go play with your people.”

Adam is shocked. He is a pretty good basketball player and he thinks the other kids would have fun playing with him if they gave it a try. He has never had anyone turn him away before because of his skin color.

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A group of 5th-grade girls go to the bead store to get supplies for projects they are doing. Elizabeth and Keiana are both Black, Zoe is white, and Leah is Korean American. They wander around looking for their favorite kinds of beads and pointing out really special ones to each other.

After a while Elizabeth and Keiana are looking at the glass beads and Zoe and Leah are looking at the ceramic painted ones. Elizabeth and Keiana realize that one of the store owners moves from behind the counter and watches them as they look through the beads. The other two owners continue what they were doing; no one watches Leah and Zoe.

The girls buy some beads and start walking home. Leah asks Elizabeth why she and Keiana were being watched. Elizabeth explains that it happens a lot, that storekeepers think that Black kids are going to steal from them. Keiana agrees that that’s what happens and tells them how much she hates it. Leah and Zoe are both totally surprised.

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Olivia is a white 4th-grade girl. She has spina bifida, a birth defect that means she's paralyzed from the waist down. She walks with crutches. She wants to be in a play that a group of 4th and 5th graders wrote. They've organized tryouts and posted signs around school.

When Olivia gets to the tryouts, the two kids who are running these say to her, "How are you going to walk around the stage with those crutches?" "There aren't any parts in our play for people on crutches!" They tell her she can't try out. Olivia knows she's good at acting and singing. This isn't the first time she's been rejected for being physically disabled, but she knows she could do a part fine if they'd just give her a chance.