



## UNDERSTANDING JUSTICE

*"Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are."*

*—Benjamin Franklin*

### OVERVIEW

In this brief series of self-paced activities, school staff 1) consider the term “justice” and related terms, 2) record their immediate reactions to a series of words, 3) explore the relationships between personal stereotypes and systemic discrimination, and 4) reflect on the ways that privilege can influence justice.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- For individual reflection
- For formal or informal staff professional development
- For examining your own stereotypes and privileges and how both might be affecting your relationships at school and in the local community
- To kickstart broader discussions of justice, stereotypes, privilege and/or systemic discrimination among the staff

#### TIME REQUIRED

- < 60 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Adult

#### MATERIALS

- Understanding Justice [Handout](#)
- Access to the hyperlinked [video](#)
- Pen and paper

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

School staff will:

- Understand the difference between personal stereotypes and systemic discrimination
- Explore how privilege impacts discrimination and justice

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Before you engage in the self-paced activities below (whether on your own or with a small, supportive group), pause, take a few deep, conscious breaths, and consider the following:

- Am I committed to unearthing some of the stereotypes and privileges that might be perpetuating systemic discrimination? Why?
- Am I prepared for the emotional risk of considering my implicit biases (or unexamined prejudices)? How will I navigate feelings of vulnerability if they emerge?

## INSTRUCTIONS

### GETTING ORIENTED

- This is a helpful foundational set of reflections for teachers and school staff who represent the majority culture in your school or community.
- These exercises may also be helpful to anyone who is interested in examining their own stereotypes and privileges and how both might be affecting their relationships at school and in the local community.
- These activities may be particularly helpful if you or your colleagues are looking for tools and prompts to kickstart broader discussions of justice, stereotypes, privilege and/or systemic discrimination.

### PART 1: JUSTICE AND RELATED TERMS

- What is justice?
  - The maintenance or administration of what is just—especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments
  - The administration of law, especially the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity
  - The quality of being just, impartial or fair

- The principle or ideal of just dealing or right action (Source: The Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
- To fully understand justice, we need to include these words in the discussion: bias, stereotype, prejudice, discrimination, privilege
- Think about your understanding of bias, stereotype, prejudice, discrimination and privilege. These concepts work in collaboration with justice. Can we have a just world where prejudice and discrimination exist? What part does justice play? Record your thoughts.

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## PART 2: EXAMINING OUR THOUGHTS AND REACTIONS

- Let's explore our thoughts. Download and print the handout.
- For each word in the table, enter your first three reactions. Spend 15-20 seconds per word, and then continue. You will have time to process your reactions at the end of the activity.
- Review your reactions. Are there any that take you by surprise, any that you are proud of and any that you would be embarrassed to admit?
- Choose a word from this activity that made you react in a way that surprised you.
- From where do you think these reactions are based? Challenge yourself to confront the origin of these first thoughts. Record your thoughts.
- This activity reminds us that we all have first thoughts about specific groups of people and, at times, specific individuals. We are not always sensitive to those thoughts. However, we must be aware of them to ensure that they do not control second thoughts or third thoughts.

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## PART 3: PERSONAL STEREOTYPES AND SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION

- Dr. Jackie Jordan Irvine helps us begin to understand why stereotypes can be helpful and harmful and how to help students come to terms with stereotypes.
- Watch Dr. Jordan below: [Insert You Tube video below, as is possible.]  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ttz4Fr-7Ztk>
- Deconstructing stereotypes is crucial to development. Additionally, it requires the use of critical thinking skills to determine where prejudices come from and how these ideas can be reframed to be more open and accepting.
- Name three things Irvine recommends teachers do to guard against stereotypes.
- Bias, stereotype, prejudice, discrimination and privilege affect us on a personal level, but what happens when those same issues begin affecting the bigger picture? What happens when discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes become systemic?
- Systemic discrimination includes patterns of behavior, policies or practices that are part of the structures of an organization and create or perpetuate disadvantage.
- Some examples of systemic discrimination include:
  - Women's prevention from voting.
  - Unequal access to education.
  - [Jim Crow laws](#).
  - LGBT people being denied the opportunity to legally marry and receive the benefits of marriage.

## PART 4: EXAMINING PRIVILEGE

- In addition to looking at systemic discrimination, we cannot discuss justice without talking about how privilege affects justice. Who we are, where we come from, and what we have access to impact our success. That privilege, or lack thereof, should not define who we are or what we accomplish in life. Understanding how our position of privilege can affect our access to success is important.
- Let's revisit privilege and consider how privilege impacts social justice.
- The following activity will help determine how privilege can affect a person's life. Record your points on a piece of paper. Total your points at the end. (Hand out or read aloud the questions on this handout).
- The closer to 20 your score, the more opportunities you have had in your life.
  - What do you understand about privilege and justice from this exercise?
  - How can this exercise impact your life, your relationships or your teaching?

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- As you reflect on elements of this learning activity, how would you now respond to one or more of the following key questions:
  - In your own words, what is justice? How does it play out in your school and classroom?
  - How might some of the stereotypes you have identified affect your relationships with students and/or colleagues?
  - How do you see systemic discrimination affecting your school?
  - How might privilege influence justice in your school or community?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Scientists are actively exploring evidence-based recommendations for reducing racial bias in [educational](#) settings. [Research](#) in social psychology suggests that nurturing non-threatening environments for professional development where participants do not feel shamed is key. The goal is to increase participants' internal motivation to reduce bias while also lessening external pressure, and this self-paced activity provides an opportunity for personal exploration of one's possible biases.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Multiple studies show [discipline disparities](#) and lower [academic outcomes and behavior evaluations](#) for students of color when compared with white students. Despite educators' best intentions, they can't always be aware of their implicit biases, especially when an intense work day isn't necessarily conducive to pausing and considering one's daily thoughts and behaviors.

In light of this demanding daily pace, it's important for teachers to engage in reflective processes that can potentially unearth biases and help them to shift away from some of their default thoughts and stereotypes. Teachers' growing awareness of their biases and/or privileges can affect the quality of education their students receive—and is a crucial part of building a just and equitable society.

## SOURCE

This practice is excerpted from [Social Justice Standards|Understanding Justice](#) on the [Teaching Tolerance](#) website.