



## STANDING UP AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

*"It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped."*

*—Robert F. Kennedy*

### OVERVIEW

People sometimes look the other way when they see an act of discrimination because they do not know how to stop it. In this jigsaw activity, students explore real-world examples to help them identify peaceful ways to respond.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- As part of an exploration of social justice issues such as racism, homophobia, and discrimination on the basis of religion
- As part of a larger unit or discussion around bullying, social exclusion, etc.
- To inspire students to courageously stand up for their own rights and those of others

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 2-4 class sessions

#### LEVEL

- High School

#### MATERIALS

- Internet access to the following sites:
  - [Constance McMillen](#)
  - [Graeme Taylor](#)
  - [Rochelle Hamilton](#)
  - [Abby Brammer](#)

- [Samantha Elauf](#)
- [Not In Our Town](#)
- [Not In Our School](#)
- [HERO Teens](#)
- [Gay-Straight Alliance](#)
- [Youth for Human Rights](#)

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Identify and explain instances of discrimination
- Explore ways to stand up against discrimination
- Encourage others to take action against discrimination

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- How do you see systemic discrimination affecting your classroom, school, or community?
- Have you experienced discrimination yourself? If so, how have you responded? Why?
- Could any of the issues addressed in this activity (i.e., discrimination against LGBTQ people, Black people, and/or Muslim people) be challenging or even triggering for you or your students? How will you prepare yourself and your students, and how will you navigate challenges if they arise?
- Are your students likely to have significant differences of opinion about these issues and how they might be addressed? How will you handle possible disagreements between them, or between their opinions and your own?

## INSTRUCTIONS

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be discriminated against?
- Why do people discriminate?
- What can we do to stand up against discrimination?
- How can we stop acts of discrimination at our school?

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## VOCABULARY

- **discriminate** [ dih-skrim-uh-neyt ] (*verb*) to treat a person or a group of people differently than other people, often because of traits such as race, gender, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation

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## INTRODUCTION

- Review the meaning of the term “discriminate.”
- Ask students to freewrite their response to the following questions: *How would you feel if you weren't allowed to play a sport, go to a dance, or get a job because of how you looked or what you believed in? Would you accept being discriminated against, or would you stand up for yourself?*

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## JIGSAW ACTIVITY

- Have students form groups of five. (These are their “home” groups.) Ask each person within each group to choose one of the following five real-life people who has stood up against discrimination: [Constance McMillen](#), [Graeme Taylor](#), [Rochelle Hamilton](#), [Abby Brammer](#), or [Samantha Elauf](#).
- Tell students: *Make sure all five people are accounted for within your group; no one should have the same person. You are going to become the expert on the person you chose.*
- Then, have students regroup into expert teams (e.g., everyone who has Constance McMillen groups together, and likewise for the other people).
- Provide students with these specific directions: *Read online about your person. As you read, think about who was being discriminated against and why, as well as how people responded to the discrimination. Then, with your fellow experts, discuss the teen you read about, answering the following questions. (It is a good idea to take notes since you will be responsible for teaching members in your “home” group about this person and his/her experience.)*
  - *Who was being discriminated against?*
  - *Why was this person being discriminated against?*
  - *What did he/she and/or others do to stand up against this discrimination?*
- Next, have students return to their “home” groups, taking turns sharing what they learned about their assigned teen.
- Discuss the following as a class:
  - *Based on your reading and the summaries you heard from your group members, what do these teens who stood up against discrimination have in common? (Note: Consider capturing student responses on the board or chart paper.)*
  - *Which actions can you emulate to stand up against discrimination in your own school or community?*
- Now, have each member of each “home” group read online about a different organization: [Not In Our Town](#), [Not In Our School](#), [HERO Teens](#), [Gay-Straight Alliance](#), and [Youth For Human Rights](#).
- Tell students: *Share what you learn with your group members. During your discussion, make two-column notes. In the first column, write the names of each organization. In the second column, use details from the texts to record the following information about each group:*
  - *What is the purpose of this organization?*
  - *How do they take action against discrimination?*
  - *Does your school have a group like this?*
  - *What is the importance of a group like this in our country?*

- Finally, assign “home” groups the following task (to be completed in class or as homework, as time allows): *Based on what you read about these organizations and what you learned about teens who have stood up against discrimination, write a proposal for how your group thinks your school should deal with acts of discrimination. (You may wish to assign each group member a different section of the proposal.) Sections should include the following:*
  - *Define what constitutes an act of discrimination.*
  - *Recommend how the school can prevent discrimination.*
  - *Identify how students can safely—and anonymously, should they choose—report discrimination.*
  - *Outline actions the school should take to stop instances of discrimination that are reported.*
- Extension activity: Have students research how to start a school chapter of one of the organizations they read about.

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Did the jigsaw structure work well as a way to engage all students equitably in participatory learning and discussion? What would you do the same or differently next time?
- How did students react to the stories of teens standing up to discrimination? Did any disagreements arise? Do they seem more motivated to stand up to discrimination themselves?
- Are you prepared to support students in standing up to discrimination they may encounter? What else can you do in your own life to stand up for yourself and others?
- Did students come up with any ideas that could be realistically implemented at your school, e.g., different ways to prevent, report, and/or combat discrimination? What can you do to help turn these ideas into reality?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research has shown that [interventions to reduce prejudice](#) among youth are often effective, especially when they focus on increasing empathy and perspective-taking. Learning about other teens’ personal stories can be a powerful way to do this. Cooperative learning, such as the jigsaw classroom strategy used in this activity, has itself been shown to be an effective way to [improve relationships](#) among diverse students.

Positive teacher-student relationships and a supportive school climate can serve as [protective factors](#) for students who are more likely to experience discrimination and bullying based on one or more stigmatized identities. For example, inclusive efforts such as the presence of a student Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club have been shown to [reduce homophobic victimization](#) in schools. Also, students are more likely to [report victimization](#) and/or [intervene in bullying](#) that they witness when they experience a positive, inclusive school climate, with specific policies in place against bullying and discrimination, and when teachers set an example by refraining from discriminatory behavior themselves and standing up to discrimination that does occur.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Experiences of discrimination and bullying [are harmful](#) to adolescents' mental health and well-being. Despite research showing that [identity-based bullying](#)--harassment or negative treatment based on stigmatized aspects of one's identity, such as [race/ethnicity](#), [religion](#), or [sexual orientation](#)--tends to be even more harmful than other kinds of bullying, most anti-bullying programs in schools do not specifically address identity-based bullying. For all students to feel safe and supported at school, and for students to feel empowered to report and/or intervene in situations of discrimination they encounter, it is critical for educators to [set an example](#) and promote [positive, inclusive](#) school environments.

## SOURCE

The original activity, [Standing Up Against Discrimination](#), is featured on the [Teaching Tolerance](#) website.