

Where do you stand?

Examining Social Inequality

In order to address poverty, it is vital to first understand the underlying factors which create inequality in the first place. Through this interactive activity, students will build empathy and understanding by walking through daily situations in someone else's shoes. As a follow-up, participants will brainstorm ways to build solidarity with others in order to begin to address the issues participants faced.

Materials: Role-play cards/slips
 Solidary plan handout

Set up: Large open room, for participants to stand shoulder-to-shoulder

Age: 13+

Time: 30min + follow-up activity



LEARN

Activities

1. Ask participants to line up, shoulder-to-shoulder across the length of the room.
2. Hand out one role card to each participant. Ask participants to read their role card, and visualize the character in their mind, through reflecting on the following questions:
 - What was your childhood like? What did your home look like? What kinds of games did you play? What did your parents do for a living?
 - What is your everyday life like now? With whom do you socialize? What do you do in the morning, afternoon, and evening?
 - What sort of lifestyle do you have? Where do you live? How much money do you have at your disposal each month? How do you spend your leisure time? What do you do on holiday?
 - What are you afraid of?
3. The facilitator will read out the 'Situations and Events'. If the situation applies to the character, the participant should take one step forward; otherwise, they should stay in their spot. Continue until all the situations have been read out.

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SHARE

Discuss

1. Once all the situations have been read, participants should look around to see where others are standing, in relation to their own position.
2. Together, reflect on the following questions, asking participants to share their character's role before answering.
 - How did it feel to be able to step forward / How did it feel to stay where you were?
 - For those who stepped forward often, what did it feel like to see others were not moving forward as fast as you?
 - For those who didn't step forward often, how did it feel to watch everyone else get so far ahead?
 - Did anyone feel they were being denied their basic human rights?
 - Which roles were hardest hit by poverty? Which were least affected?
 - Which situations surprised you the most?
 - In which ways does this activity reflect our current society?
 - Did this activity make you think about inequality in a new way? If so, how?

Note: Some participants may express guilt when they discover their position in relation to others. It is important to remind participants that the purpose of this activity is to help us all be aware of where we stand, and what privileges our lives have afforded us. It is important to recognize the ways we experience life, and to understand that others experience life differently. We must learn this before we can work together to solve problems.

Examples of Quotes to Share:

"Guilt is a profoundly conservative emotion and as such is not particularly useful for bringing about change. From a position of insecurity and guilt, people do not change or inspire others to change" Michael Kaufman

"If we inherit injustice, we should never feel guilty. We are not responsible for that past. However, if we choose to do nothing about it going forward, then we have plenty to feel guilty about." Jamie Utt, Changefromwithin.org

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ACT

Follow Up Activity

1. Divide participants into small groups. Provide each group with the list of situations and events, and one of the role cards most affected.
2. Together, each group should re-read the situations and events, discussing the reasons why the character would/wouldn't advance in each case. (If time is limited, ask groups to pick 5 situations to discuss)
3. After discussing the situations, groups should pick a situation from the list they feel passionate about, and develop a solidarity plan to find ways to address the situation and support this person (See example below)
4. Share your plans with others, and act!

Acting in Solidary to Address Social Inequality

Imagine the character on the card is one of your classmates (or co-workers, neighbour). Together, pick one of the situations on the list you feel strongly about. As a group, discuss 2-3 different ways that you as an individual, or within a community, could better support this person in the situation. Make a plan, sign your commitment, and take action!

Discuss and Identify

- What programs already exist in our community to address this situation?
- What other programs should exist?
- What individual actions can you take?
- In what ways can you become a better friend to this person?
- Is there an action, small or large, that you can commit to doing right away?

Make your Plan

I will stand in solidarity by:

Signed:

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Situations and Events

1. You have never encountered any serious financial difficulty.
2. You have decent housing with a telephone, internet and cable television.
3. You feel your language, religion and culture are respected in Canada.
4. You feel that your opinion on social and political issues matters and your views are listened to.
5. Other people consult you about different issues.
6. You are not afraid of being stopped by the police.
7. You know where to turn for advice and help if you need it.
8. You have never felt discriminated against because of your origin.
9. You are well protected should you become ill or have an accident.
10. You can go away on holiday in a foreign country once a year.
11. You can always invite friends home for dinner.
12. You are happy with the life that you lead.
13. You feel you can study and follow the profession of your choice.
14. You are not afraid of being harassed or attacked in the streets.
15. If you want, you have a good opportunity of holding an important political position one day.
16. Getting a copy of your birth certificate, in order to get a passport, is easy for you
17. You can participate in international seminars abroad.
18. You can afford to go to the cinema at least once a week.
19. You have access to a great variety of healthy food
20. You are not afraid for the future of your children.
21. You can buy new clothes at least once every three months.
22. You feel that your knowledge and skills are respected in the society where you live.
23. You can vote in national and local elections.
24. You can use the Internet when necessary.
25. You are positive when you think about your future.

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Character Role Cards

You are 15 and live with your parents and seven brothers and sisters in a small flat in Calgary. Your mother works as a cashier in a supermarket, your father is unemployed.

You are a 17 year-old girl from East Africa. You are a refugee and recently arrived in Alberta; you can hardly read or write in English.

You are a well-trained engineer from the Middle East and have been granted asylum in Canada.

You hardly speak English and earn your living as a newspaper vendor.

You are a single mother with three children. You work in a laundromat.

You are an active youth member of a political party in Alberta. Your parents own a medium sized business providing services to the oil industry.

You are the son of an immigrant, who owns a successful fast-food chain.

You are 53. You and your wife owned a small carpenter's workshop that has just gone bankrupt.

You are the partner of a young artist addicted to heroin.

You have just completed your training in a college of hotel management and are looking for a job.

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You are the 19-year-old son of a cattle rancher.

You are a young man who uses a wheelchair

You are a 15-year-old indigenous female, living in northern Alberta.

You are 16 and a car mechanic apprentice.

You are a 18-year-old transgender youth, with supportive parents who own a family business.

You are 20 and a student. You finance your studies by working as a waiter and other part-time jobs.

You are retired. You used to work in the oil patch.

You are the daughter of a bank manager. You are studying at the University of Alberta.

You are 83 years old, and live on a minimum pension.

You are a temporary foreign worker.

You are a 27-year-old homeless man.