

## **Class Privilege and Oppression**

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*This exercise simulates class privilege and oppression in the United States. This exercise works best at the beginning of class so that students' don't suspect the true topic. I generally say something about the importance of learning to work collaboratively and wanting to take some time out of class to do some skill-building on how to work with others. I then explain that students will be split into five groups and that each group will be given an envelope with supplies and instructions. I explain that no group will be given all of the supplies they need, so they may have to learn to negotiate with other groups, too. I then tell them that the group who finishes first is the winner and show them some candy that will be given to the winning group. I then have students count off by 5's and ask all of the 1's to sit in the front of the class. I then arrange the rest of the groups along a diagonal so that group 5 is in the back corner of the class. I then hand out the envelopes and let them start.*

*What the students don't know is that the groups represent social class. Group 1 (the upper class) is given all but two of the supplies they will need to complete the exercise (and I make sure that group 2 has the supplies group 1 will need). Group 2 (the upper-middle class) then has all but 4 supplies. Group 3 (the middle class) has exactly half of the supplies. Group 4 (the working class) has only 4 supplies. And Group 5 (the poor) is given only 2 supplies. Not surprisingly, Group 1 almost always wins. I then ask to hear only from the winning group and I ask them why they won. They almost always come up with individual level explanations (worked hard, delegated, etc.). I then ask everyone else why group 1 won. Everyone else says it's because they had all of the supplies. I then ask group 1 if they knew they had all of the supplies. Typically, they did not. I ask them why they didn't know this. They explain that they never had any reason to get up and go interact with the other groups.*

*At this point, I explain that this was actually a demonstration of social class. I then lead a discussion about privilege. I also ask other groups to comment on their experiences. Typically, the middle class hoards their materials and either negotiates for supplies or only donates their scraps. On the other hand, the working class helps everyone else out because they say they know what it's like to be in need. I link these experiences to patterns of charitable giving in the U.S and the importance of community. I then ask the poor what it was like to open the envelope and find only two supplies there. Typically, they describe feeling hopeless and simply giving up. This becomes the springboard for a conversation on learned helplessness. All of this then leads into a conversation about social justice and possible solutions to the inequities in our society.*

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### **Cooperation Activity Exercise**

The goal of this activity is to be the first group to complete the project described below correctly. Each group has been given some of the materials necessary to complete this project, but no group has been given everything they will need. Thus, you will need to beg, borrow, or steal the materials needed to complete your project from other groups. Bring your completed project to the front when you are done.

1. Glue a red 8 inch diameter circle in the center of a beige 9 inch diameter square.
2. Glue a yellow 7 inch equilateral triangle in the center of the red circle.
3. Glue a green 5 inch high and 4 inch wide oval in the center of the yellow triangle.
4. Glue six 1 inch high and 2 inch wide pink rectangles inside the green oval.
5. Have each member of your group sign their name inside a pink rectangle using a red pen.
6. Bring the completed project to the front!