

# UNIT 2: Diversity and Inclusion

People have different beliefs, values, personalities and perspectives and come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. It is the responsibility of a citizen to recognize, understand and appreciate these differences – and to work to understand how the impact of these differences (particularly those based on race, gender, class and other factors) may influence people’s experience of what “citizenship” means to them. Citizenship is not simply promoting your own values and views; it requires a sense of caring, empathy and concern for others. A good citizen has the courage to stand up for what they believe in, as well as the rights of others. A commitment to the common good is paramount. But to understand and work for the “common good,” one must be willing to build trust by listening and respecting other people’s ideas, experience and realities.

## Who wins? Everyone does!

Strong thriving communities draw upon the talents and gifts of diverse people. They value the wisdom and experiences of all community members and mobilize the strengths, skills and talents of diverse groups. Diversity is seen as “value-added” and as an asset to the community. Building relationships across differences is key to developing partnerships and efforts committed to working for the common good.

## Learning begins with me

A good way to deepen your understanding of issues of diversity and inclusion is to commit to learning more about ourselves. It’s important to have a good understanding of our own personality, beliefs and cultural background as a first step in being open to recognizing, understanding and appreciating the perspectives and differences of others. If we know ourselves – including our preferred styles of communication, values and reasons behind our beliefs – we may be more open to learning about the differences of others which can lead to mutually respectful interpersonal relationships. Self-awareness also encourages us to learn about the biases, assumptions and stereotypes we may hold about people different from ourselves. Learning to unlearn misinformation we may have about ourselves and other

people is essential to good citizenship and working for the common good.

### **Principles of Citizenship:**

- Character

## Engaging in dialogue can lead to personal, interpersonal and community change

One way to learn more about ourselves and about others is to engage in dialogue. We live in a “debate culture” that tends to encourage thinking toward one “right answer” and often fosters division and arguments among people. Dialogue is different. Dialogue fosters understanding by encouraging the sharing of multiple perspectives while those involved remain open to learning and growth. Engaging in dialogue around complex issues such as those related to citizenship allows people to explore common ground from which they might work for positive change together.

Once we have an understanding of ourselves, we can begin thinking about how to best understand and respect others. Oftentimes, when we hear an opinion that is different from ours, our first reaction is to either dismiss it completely or argue against it. A responsible citizen will instead listen in order to understand this differing viewpoint. This is not to say that citizenship requires abandoning your own opinions for the sake of others’; standing up for what you believe in is an important component of citizenship. Indeed, sometimes the result of understanding another’s perspective is simply “agreeing to disagree.” However, a citizen who displays tolerance and a respect for diversity will seek to find common ground between varying opinions and view the difference not as a battle to be won, but as an opportunity to learn and work towards a solution that benefits the most people possible.

## Acknowledging injustice – working for change

Citizenship and working for the common good requires us to learn about and acknowledge the history and realities of injustice in society and in

our communities. If our goal is to improve our communities, it is our responsibility to do our best to involve, engage and work for everyone in the community, regardless of ethnicity, gender, class, race, sexual orientation, age, religion and other human differences. The first step to looking at our communities in an inclusive fashion is being honest

with ourselves about existing stereotypes and forms of personal and institutional discrimination. In the effort to make “progress,” groups of people are often left behind. Understanding and feeling the urgency to challenge inequities are precursors to overcoming them, and a caring citizen will have the attitude of fairness necessary to do this work.

## References

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**“We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all of the threads of the tapestry are equal in value, no matter what their color.”**

– Maya Angelou

## ACTIVITY:

# Walk the (Trust) Walk

### **Description:**

Youth learn social skills and trust by leading one another blindfolded from one point to another. This activity can be used as an icebreaker.

### **Participant Age:**

13–19

### **Activity Objectives:**

The participants will:

- Build team trust.
- Practice communication skills.

### **Learning and Life Skills:**

Communication; Cooperation; Team-work

### **Materials, Equipment,**

#### **Handouts:**

- Blindfolds equal to half the number of participants

### **Time:**

20 minutes

### **Setting:**

Preferably outdoors with plenty of space

### **Procedure:**

#### **Before the meeting:**

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Find a safe outdoor area for the activity.

#### **During the meeting:**

1. Tell the group that they will be doing an activity to get to know one another better. Ask everyone to find a partner, someone whom they don't know very well. (If there are an odd number of participants, the facilitator can participate.) Give each pair a blindfold.
2. If not outside already, take the group outside. Explain to them that one person in each pair must volunteer to be blindfolded. Give instructions that one member is to put the blindfold on; make sure that the blindfolded people cannot see.
3. Instruct the group that the non-blindfolded member in each pair is to choose a point somewhere in the immediate area to serve as the "destination" or end point. The goal of the activity is for the non-blindfolded member to give only verbal directions to the blindfolded member to lead them from the starting point to the destination. Teammates may not make physical contact during this activity, and the blindfolded member may not peek.
4. After every pair has finished. Switch roles (blindfolded/leader) and repeat the activity with a new destination.

### **Reflection Activities and Ideas:**

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. How did you feel as the blindfolded? As the leader?
2. How did you communicate to your blindfolded teammate when you were the leader?
3. How did it feel to trust your teammate when you were blindfolded?
4. How and when do we have to trust people in the real world? How is having trust in your community an important part of citizenship?

Adapted with permission from *Peer-Plus II Notebook* (4H1009), developed by 4-H Youth Programs, East Lansing: Michigan State University, Cooperative Extension Service, 1986.

## ACTIVITY:

# Communicating Through Conflict

### Description:

Youth work in groups to write a skit depicting a conflict situation. They discuss the situation, exploring whether the outcome was negative or positive, what parties did well and what parties could have done differently. After, youth learn and practice conflict resolution skills. Finally, youth make the connection between conflict resolution and citizenship.

### Participant Age:

13–19

### Activity Objectives:

The participants will:

- Practice conflict resolution strategies.
- Understand how communication affects citizenship.

### Learning and Life Skills:

Communication; Conflict Resolution; Managing Feelings

### State of Michigan Social Studies Standards:

Strand VI.2 Group Discussion

### Materials, Equipment,

#### Handouts:

- “Conflict Role-Play” handout
- “Communicating Through Conflict” handouts (five): “Beginning a Difficult Conversation”, “Using Contrast”, “Listening”, “Diffusing Emotions”, “Moving Toward Resolution”
- Newsprint and markers
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint
- Paper for each group
- Writing utensils, for each participant

### Time:

90–120 minutes, broken into two parts

### Setting:

Indoors, tables and chairs to accommodate all participants. Make sure an area is open to serve as the “stage.”

### Procedure:

#### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print out one copy of the handout, “Conflict Role-Play,” for each participant and one copy of each of the five “Communicating Through Conflict” handouts for each participant.
- Make sure that all participants have a writing utensil.
- Bring newsprint and markers (easel optional).
- Arrange a cleared “stage” area in the room, and ensure that all participants will have a clear view of this area.

#### During the meeting:

##### Part I

1. Tell participants that the purpose of this activity is to learn how to resolve conflicts using communication.
2. Distribute the “Conflict Role-Play” handouts and ask for two volunteers to act out the role-play in front of the group.
3. Break participants up into teams of two or three, and make sure each team has paper and a writing utensil. Instruct teams to write out a skit that depicts a conflict situation similar to the “Conflict Role-Play” example in that the outcome is negative. Encourage them to make their situation realistic (even based on real-life experiences, but being sensitive to the feelings of others). Explain that each team will act out their skit once they have finished.
4. Allow each team to act out their conflict skit in front of the group.

#### Reflection Activities and Ideas:

After each skit, encourage discussion and record responses:

- Is the outcome positive or negative? Productive or unproductive?
- Ask the group to identify certain words or expressions that escalated the conflict.
- What could have been done differently to achieve a more positive result?

##### Part II

1. Distribute the five “Communicating Through Conflict” handouts and explain to the group that they are going to learn and practice some conflict resolution skills to make difficult situations more peaceful and productive. Use the handouts to introduce techniques for the five different components of conflict resolution: (1) beginning a difficult conversation, (2) using contrast, (3) listening, (4) diffusing emotions and (5) moving toward resolutions. For each component, read the information and the examples aloud, and then, in pairs, have participants practice the techniques for that component using the cases given on the handout.
2. After going through the “Communicating Through Conflict” handouts, reestablish the original teams of two or three from Part I, and ask them to write a

new skit – using the same situation from their first skit – to reflect a positive outcome based on the techniques they have just learned.

3. Allow each team to act out their new skit in front of the group.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. How did these skits differ from the first round? What made the outcomes more positive?
2. What do these techniques have to do with citizenship?
3. What issues related to citizenship are difficult to talk about? How can we use these techniques to have more productive dialogue regarding these issues?

## Try This, Too:

- Ask youth to brainstorm their own example situations in which they can practice conflict resolution techniques, rather than those given in the “Communicating Through Conflict” handout.
- Have the participants organize a workshop for other youth on conflict resolution techniques using the “Communicating Through Conflict” handout.
- Have the participants act out their skits for younger children to show them ways for resolving conflicts.
- Select – or have the group select – a controversial topic related to local public policy or school policy. Divide the group in two, and assign one side the “supporting” viewpoint regarding the issue and the other side the “opposing” viewpoint regarding the issue. Explain that they will have, not a debate, but a dialogue around this issue, using the techniques learned during the activity.
- Re-visit these techniques during future activities, for example, if youth discuss public policy with local government officials.



Adapted with permission from “Communicating Through Conflict” workshop materials developed by LeadNet, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2006.

## HANDOUT:

# Conflict Role-Play

## Background:

Two teens, David and Christina, are working together on planning an event for their 4 H club at which they will help elementary school students learn about nutrition. They agreed beforehand to each do an equal share of the work at the event, part of which involves giving a presentation to younger children about nutrition. There are four tasks they have to do in order to carry out the event: (a) Identify and invite presenters to talk about nutrition, (b) put up informational flyers around the elementary school, (c) get together crayons and coloring books to distribute to the children and (d) present a fun ice-breaker activity to kick-off the event. Tomorrow is the day of the event. The first three tasks are finished, and all that's left is to present the ice-breaker activity.

## Characters:

- **David:** Identified and invited the presenters and got together the crayons and coloring books for the children. He also selected an ice-breaker activity for them to use. He feels that he has done more than his share of the work for the project so far.
- **Christina:** Put up the information flyers in the elementary school. She feels that her teammate has been bossy and hasn't listened to her ideas

## Dialogue:

**David:** So, our event is tomorrow. Do you want to go ahead and present the ice-breaker activity?

**Christina:** Not really. I assumed we'd do it together. I don't like talking in front of groups.

**David:** (frustrated) Christina, I've done almost everything for this project. The least you could do is lead this activity. It would only be fair.

**Christina:** (angry) What do you mean, you've done almost everything? I put up our flyers. And besides, whenever I had an idea, you just shot it down! You don't listen to anything I say. You just want to do everything your way!

**David:** Well, I wanted to make sure this event goes well. A lot of your ideas didn't seem like they would work.

**Christina:** Well, I think your ideas are dumb, too! You can forget about me presenting anything tomorrow!

**David:** Ugh! What are you good for?

**Christina:** (offended) You can be such a jerk!

## **HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict**

# ***Beginning a Difficult Conversation***

Four important strategies can help *establish safety* (a key first step) and draw someone into a conversation about a difficult topic. These are:

- Explain the situation, focusing on the facts as you see them. Speak tentatively, recognizing that your interpretation may not be right.
- Tell how the situation is affecting you, emotionally and otherwise.
- Give the outcome you'd like.
- Ask how the other person sees the situation.

### **Example:**

*“Christina, we’ve been working on this project together for a few weeks now, and the event is tomorrow. I think we’ve done a good job, but I have a concern. We agreed at the beginning that we would both put in the same amount of work to get the project done, and I feel like I’ve done more than my share so far. I’m a little frustrated with the way we’ve broken up the work. I want the event to go well, and I want to make sure we both get to contribute equally. I think it would be fair if you presented the ice-breaker activity tomorrow. How do you see this situation?”*

Find a partner. Consider the following situations. Take turns practicing these four strategies to open a conversation.

1. You and your fellow club members are planning a project. At the meeting, your club president, who is very competent and confident, dominates the conversation and doesn't consider the other members' ideas. After the meeting you approach the president to express your concern.
2. On your sports team, one of your teammates consistently stays out late the night before games and is too tired to perform well during the games. The teammate's performance is hurting the whole team. You have a conversation with him or her after practice to address this.
3. Your friend has been bullying an unpopular student in school. You've noticed him or her do this on several occasions, and you don't think that it's right. After witnessing another incident, you meet the friend in the hall and ask if you can talk with him or her about it.

Adapted with permission from “Communicating Through Conflict” workshop materials developed by LeadNet, East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 2006.

## HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict

# Using Contrast

When someone has misunderstood you, a contrast statement can be used in reply. This is a don't/do statement that negates the bad intention another has assumed of you, and reinforces your true intention. It also helps you avoid using the word "but," which often is a red flag in a conflict. For example:

*After David tells Christina that he thinks the breakdown of work has been unequal for their project, Christina replies angrily, "What do you mean, you've done more than your share? I put up our flyers. And besides, you didn't even listen to my ideas, anyway!" David's response to Christina is: "I don't want you to think that I don't value your ideas or contributions; I do want our share of the work to be equal."*

1. After confronting your club president about his or her tendency to disregard other club members' ideas, he or she replies sharply, "What are you talking about? Do you know how much work I do for this club?"

I don't \_\_\_\_\_.

I do \_\_\_\_\_.

2. You explain to your teammate how he or she is hurting the team by staying out late the night before games. Your teammate reacts defensively, saying, "Why do you have such a problem with me having fun? Just mind your own business."

I don't \_\_\_\_\_.

I do \_\_\_\_\_.

3. After witnessing your friend bully a less popular student, you confront him or her to express your disapproval. Your friend replies, "I thought you were my friend! You're supposed to stand up for me."

I don't \_\_\_\_\_.

I do \_\_\_\_\_.

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## **HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict**

# ***Listening***

Four important listening skills can help establish safety and draw someone out or diffuse someone's anger. These are:

- **Ask** – *“Can you tell me what you’re thinking about this?” Or, “Can you tell me why you feel that way?”*
- **Reflect** – *“You say nothing is wrong, but you seem pretty upset.”*
- **Paraphrase** – *“Let’s see if I understand. You feel unvalued when I go ahead on this project without discussing my action with you first.”*
- **Guess** – *“Do you think I took all the best parts for myself and just gave you what I didn’t want to do?”*

Find a partner. Consider the following situations. First decide which of the above four skills might be most effective in helping talk through the problem. Then choose one to role-play for a couple of minutes to demonstrate at least one of the listening skills.

1. Your teammate for a club project just told you that she feels you’re not carrying your weight.
2. Your friend is upset with you because she thinks that you’ve been spreading rumors about her. You think there’s been a misunderstanding, and you want to clear the air with her. When you confront her, she resists talking about it, saying, “There’s nothing to talk about.”
3. You are the president of your club. After one of your club meetings, a peer member approaches you and claims that you are too controlling and don’t listen to other members’ ideas.

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## **HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict**

# ***Diffusing Emotions***

Facing someone's anger is probably the most dreaded aspect of dealing with conflict. A key to helping them engage in a productive conversation is patience. When others are acting out their feelings, they are not ready for rational dialogue. Strong emotions take a while to subside because of chemicals that are released into the blood. To keep yourself from reacting to anger with anger or defensiveness, and to help establish conditions for rational discussion, there are a few strategies you can use.

- First, ask yourself, "Why would a reasonable person react this way? How might I act if I were that person?" This question can help you see things from the other person's point of view, and avoid a defensive reaction, which can escalate the anger.
- Next, use listening skills, especially *reflect* and *paraphrase*.
- If you learn you have done something to offend them, intentionally or not, apologize.
- After listening patiently and respectfully, and reflecting and paraphrasing to make sure you understand the problem as they see it, *legitimize* their emotion and *invite* them to strategize solutions. For example: "I understand why you are upset. I might feel the same way. Can we look at ways we could resolve this situation?"

Try practicing this sequence with a partner, using the situations below.

1. A teacher bursts out of her classroom and into the hallway where you and your friends are having a conversation and yells at you about disrupting her class. She threatens to write you up.
2. You are the president of your club. During a club meeting one of the members makes a suggestion for a project that the club could perform. You reply that you don't think the club has enough money to do what the member has suggested. The club member reacts angrily, "Fine, nobody ever listens to my ideas anyway. I should just quit!"
3. The roads were bad leaving your friend's house and as a result you get home a half hour past your curfew. One of your parents blows up at you for being late.

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## **HANDOUT: Communicating Through Conflict**

# ***Moving Toward Resolution***

You have successfully begun a difficult conversation, listened respectfully, used apology or contrast when appropriate, legitimized their emotion and invited them to search for solutions. Once the other person has agreed to try to resolve the situation, the following strategies can help you move forward.

- **Find a mutual purpose.** Find something you can both agree on, and build on this. For example, consider the situation where Sarah is getting defensive because Peter doesn't think she's been doing enough for their project. Peter can say, "Well, I think we can agree that we both want to do well on this project. Can we talk about a way to do this that we both feel is fair?"
- **Clarify the reasons underlying a position.** Often people take opposing positions on issues, when the underlying reasons for their positions might not be in conflict. For example, Sarah may not have been contributing to the project because she didn't feel that her ideas were welcome. Her interest is to participate and do well on the assignment. Once Peter understands that, the two of them can be creative about finding ways to satisfy each of their needs.
- **Agree to disagree.** Openly recognize those areas where you disagree, and work around them. Make sure you understand the reasons underneath the disagreement.
- **Brainstorm possible solutions.**

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## ACTIVITY:

# Exploring and Challenging Stereotypes

### Description:

Participants engage in an activity and discussion to deepen understanding about stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination and the connections to issues of citizenship within communities.

### Participant Age:

13–19

### Activity Objectives:

The participants will:

- Explore definitions of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.
- Examine negative impacts of prejudice and discrimination.
- Explore connections between citizenship and the importance of addressing issues of prejudice and discrimination.

### Learning and Life Skills:

Accepting Differences; Empathy; Self-Responsibility

### State of Michigan Social Studies Standards:

Standard II.1 Diversity of People, Places, and Cultures

### Materials, Equipment, Handouts:

- Newsprint and markers (various colors)
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint
- Handout: “Exploring Stereotypes” (It is strongly advised that you adapt this handout to include three or four racial/ethnic groups based on what makes sense for the geographic area you live in and the issues of stereotyping and prejudice that exist.)

### Time:

60 minutes

### Setting:

Indoors, participants seated in a circle, if possible

### Procedure:

#### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Print one copy of the “Exploring Stereotypes” handout for each participant.

#### During the meeting:

1. Introduce the concept of stereotypes with the following statements:

*Today we’re going to focus on what we know about the concepts of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. These discussions are critically important to the notion of “citizenship” – and can be challenging at times. It may be important for us to create guidelines together about how we want to be in dialogue. What are some guidelines for discussion that you think are important for us to establish for this conversation?*

2. It may be important to first set the stage by establishing some guidelines for discussion. Ask the group for suggestions and write them on newsprint so all can see them. The following are examples of helpful guidelines related to issues of diversity:
  - Be respectful.
  - Listen to each other.
  - Remain open and non-judgmental.
  - Be sensitive to how painful these dialogues can be to people who are part of groups who are targeted for stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.
  - Honor the seriousness of the learning and conversation.
3. Begin the activity by asking the group what the concept of stereotypes means to them. Jot down their thoughts and ideas on newsprint. Ask if anyone in the group can relate to being part of a group that is stereotyped. Invite them to share their examples and ask, “How does it make you feel when you experience being stereotyped?”
4. Thank the group for sharing their examples and acknowledge their good work together. Then offer the following as one definition of stereotypes:

*Stereotypes are over-simplified generalizations – most often negative – about members of a particular group.*
5. Tell the group that we’re now going to explore the notion of stereotypes more deeply. Divide the participants into three small groups. Assign one group “athletes”, another group “adults” and another group “teenagers.” Give each group newsprint and markers and tell them that they have about three minutes to work together to come up with as many stereotypes as they can of that group. Tell them to be prepared to share their list with the whole group.
6. After a few minutes, ask each group to share their lists and process a discussion by asking the following questions:

- What do you notice about what the groups came up with?
  - Are there any similarities or differences between the lists?
7. Explain to the group that you want to move into the next portion of the activity. Emphasize that learning and dialogue around the very real issues of prejudice and discrimination based on race and other differences are important aspects of good citizenship. Distribute the “Exploring Stereotypes” handout. Instruct participants to write below each group name as many stereotypes that they can think of related to that group. Make sure they do not write their names on their handouts. Emphasize that these are stereotypes that they are aware of, not necessarily ones that they believe. Allow about five minutes for this step.
  8. After about five minutes, collect all of the handouts. Shuffle the handouts to protect the anonymity of the authors, and then redistribute one handout to each participant so that everyone has a handout filled out by someone other than themselves. Reemphasize that the stereotypes that everyone generated are stereotypes that they are aware of, not necessarily stereotypes that they accept. Ask the group to read the stereotypes on the handout they received. Record their responses on newsprint.

Facilitate a discussion using the following questions as a guide:

- What do you notice about the responses?
- How do we learn stereotypes? How do we get information about groups different from us?
- Stereotypes often lead to people in that group being treated as “less than” which is the essence of discrimination. Can you think of examples of how stereotypes based on race lead to discrimination and groups receiving fewer resources?
- What are the costs to all of us if we continue to hold stereotypes and misinformation about people different from ourselves?
- How do building relationships and friendships with people different from ourselves help to breakdown stereotypes, bias and misinformation that we may have about groups?
- Why is it important to focus on stereotypes and work to unlearn bias and misinformation in order to work for the greater good and good citizenship?
- What ideas do you have about how we can work to address issues of stereotype and discrimination?

### **Possible key points to draw out and engage in dialogue around include:**

- Citizenship is about working toward a true and just democracy. This includes learning more about the realities of our histories – and how we’ve all learned bias, stereotypes and prejudice – and how those biases too often lead to behaviors and systems that are harmful to the common good in communities and in society.
- Stereotypes are generalizations – or more accurately – overgeneralizations and simplifications that are usually negative about a group of people.
- Stereotypes are often based on race, gender, class and other human differences.
- We all learn stereotypes through our families, schools, faith communities, peer groups, the media and other institutions. Carlos Cortéz and others refer to this as the societal curriculum through which we all learn information that may or may not be helpful and accurate about individuals and groups.
- We likely hold stereotypes and misinformation about groups different from us even if members of that group do not live in high numbers in our community.
- Stereotypes can be difficult to unlearn because of the tendency to look for informa-



tion and examples that “confirm” our beliefs. Research shows that when people receive information that disconfirms their stereotypes, they think of that person as an “exception” to the stereotypes they hold of that group.

- People are individuals – and they are part of groups. Not all generalizations about groups are negative. Some may be a guide to what is true for many individuals within a certain group. (For example, many Latinos are often connected and committed to their families.) But it’s important to realize that there are likely to be as many differences within groups as there are similarities.
- Even “positive stereotypes” (such as, “all Asian American students are good at math”) are harmful. Stereotypes foster simple and shallow notions of groups and often encourage the denial of the real issues, complexity, wholeness and humanity of people and groups.
- It’s important not to deny that people are part of groups and understand that there may be a very real sense of pride and group identity for members of that group. There are likely to be many differences within that group as well.
- Negative stereotypes foster prejudice and discrimination at the personal and institutional level. For example, if one holds the stereotypic view that African Americans are not as smart as white people, than teachers, schools and communities may not question (or even be aware of) behaviors, systems and policies that advantage white students at the expense of students of color.
- A common stereotype is that people of color, including Latinos, Asian Americans, Arab Americans and others are “from somewhere else” and are not “real” citizens. People of color often get asked, “Where are you from?” even when they and their families may have lived in the United States for years – and even generations.
- Everyone holds stereotypes that foster prejudicial beliefs about groups different from themselves. When those in the dominant group – those with more power and resources in society – hold those beliefs and act on them through laws, rules and policies, it is called racism, sexism and other “isms.”
- There are many examples of how stereotypes and bias lead to treating groups as “less than.” For example, the belief that girls are not athletic and are not as valued or important as boys has led to the reality that in most communities in the U.S., boys’ sports receive many more resources and attention including stadiums, cheering squads, school assemblies and community-wide parades. While there are increasing sports activities available to girls, boys’ sports continue to receive school and community-wide support and attention. (You may want to engage the group in dialogue around this point to check out the perspectives of girls and boys on this issue.)
- While women in the U.S. became full citizens with the right to vote in 1920, men continue to maintain firm control of the nation’s major systems and institutions including government, business, industry and the media. Women continue to be paid less for comparable work done by men – and in Michigan, earn only 67 cents on the dollar as compared to men. At the present rate of progress it will take 50 years for women to achieve earnings parity with men nationwide.
- It’s important to understand the equation that racism = prejudice + power. Stereotypes and prejudice influence how those with power create and enforce rules and policies within organizations and in communities. For example, since the framing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787, whiteness in this country has meant preference and advantage. In the Act of March 26, 1790, Congress’s first words on citizenship and the ability to become a citizen was limited to “any alien, being a free white person who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for a term of two years” (Kendall, 2006).
- History teaches us that the notion of “whiteness” was created right at the beginning of the development of the U.S. system of government in order to advantage

those who were deemed as white. Many legal cases related to citizenship over the years defined who was to be considered white and who was not. Those who were white were given preferences and advantages such as the right to vote, own property and be part of national and local decision making.

- This legacy of advantage to white people is maintained today and contributes to the continuation of economic and social inequities between white people and people of color.
- It's clear that stereotypes are dangerous because they tend to foster a sense of superiority and entitlement in those who hold them against others. Often those who are advantaged based on race, gender and other differences are unaware of the preferences and privileges that they historically and currently receive.
- People who are part of groups who are commonly stereotyped and disadvantaged may internalize these messages to the detriment of their own sense of self-worth and capacity to achieve.
- Studies show that even when people are committed to equality and egalitarian views, they often still harbor "mental residue" of hidden bias, prejudice and stereotypes.
- Stereotypes and prejudice we hold may lie hidden beneath the surface of our thinking and have an impact (more than we know) on friends we choose, where we choose to live and go to school, who gets hired and promoted in companies and who's arrested and prosecuted for crimes.
- Developing a critical consciousness and engaging in learning and discussion about stereotypes and other issues of diversity and social justice can be healing and liberating.
- We tend to "make up" information about people based on stereotypes we've learned when we don't really know people. An important way to unlearn bias and stereotypes is to create authentic relationships with people across differences. This can be a challenge in many areas because we are often disconnected from one another. Racial segregation, for example, has been increasing throughout the past 25 years in many regions of the United States.

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## Try This, Too

Many of the points listed in this activity make excellent discussion starters. Consider cutting the statements into strips and putting them in a "hat." Pick a statement, read it aloud and facilitate a dialogue in small or large groups about that statement. Allow ample time so that everyone's views and voice can be heard. Remember to use guidelines for discussion because these issues often generate feelings and multiple perspectives. If the group has further questions, consider creating research projects that encourage learning to go deeper around these important issues.

## Want to Learn More?

Are you interested in digging deeper and testing yourself for hidden biases you may hold. Hidden bias tests measure unconscious attitudes and associations we may have about people and groups. Our willingness to explore our own biases, assumptions and stereotypes is an important first step in creating positive change in our communities. Visit the "Understanding Prejudice" web site and take the hidden bias test to get a glimpse at your own conscious or unconscious attitudes based on gender and race. You'll find the test at: <http://www.understandingprejudice.org/iat/>

**HANDOUT:**

# ***Exploring Stereotypes***

For the group listed below, write as many stereotypes that you can think of. These are not stereotypes that you necessarily believe, but stereotypes that you know to exist for each of these groups.

***Black/African American***

***Arab American***

***Asian American***

***Latino/Latina/Hispanic***

***Native American/American Indian***

***White/European American***



## ACTIVITY:

# A Class Divided

### Description:

By watching the video, *A Class Divided*, participants address the impact of prejudice and oppression.

### Participant Age:

13–19

### Activity Objectives:

The participants will:

- Illustrate that prejudice is learned and can be unlearned.
- Examine the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination.
- Explore the positive impact of working to understand the pain of discrimination and the affect on overall group cohesion across differences.
- Shed light on oppression at the personal, interpersonal and institutional levels.

### Learning and Life Skills:

Accepting Differences; Empathy;  
Self-Responsibility

### State of Michigan Social Studies Standards:

Standard II.1 Diversity of People, Places, and Cultures

### Materials, Equipment, Handouts:

- Video, *A Class Divided*. The activity involves using the first 30 minutes of the video. (This video is available through PBS Video by calling 1-800-344-3337. It is available for loan to those living in Michigan through your county Michigan State University Extension office. MSUE staff members: The video is available for loan through the MSU Extension Multi-cultural Resource Library.)
- VCR and monitor
- Newsprint and markers (various colors)
- Easel or tape for recording on newsprint

### Time:

60 minutes

### Setting:

Indoors, room arranged so that everyone can see video

## Procedure:

### Before the meeting:

- Review activity directions and materials.
- Set up the VCR and monitor so that it is viewable to all participants.

### During the meeting:

1. Introduce the activity with the following statements:

*Today we're going to have an opportunity to focus on issues of diversity as they relate to the development of prejudice, stereotypes and injustices. These discussions are critically important to the notion of "citizenship" – and can be challenging at times. It may be important for us to create guidelines together about how we want to be in dialogue. What are some guidelines for discussion that you think are important for us to establish for this conversation?*

2. It may be important to first set the stage by establishing some guidelines for discussion. Ask the group for suggestions and write them on newsprint so all can see them. The following are examples of helpful guidelines related to issues of diversity:
  - Be respectful.
  - Listen deeply to each other.
  - Remain open and non-judgmental.
  - Be sensitive to how painful these dialogues can be to people who are part of groups who are targeted for prejudice and discrimination.
  - Honor the seriousness of the learning and conversation.
3. Introduce the video with the following statements:

*We are now going to watch a video called A Class Divided. But first, I'd like to share a little background information about what we're going to see. The day after The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in April 1968, Jane Elliott, a teacher in rural Riceville, Iowa, conducted a powerful exercise with her third grade students to help them experience the pain of discrimination by dividing them into groups that were "better than" and "less than" based on eye color. Two years later the Public Broadcasting System visited her classroom and filmed the exercise for an episode of the TV show Frontline. The video you are about to see, A Class Divided, features those students as adults, revisiting the exercise they experienced as third graders and reflecting on its effects on their lives.*

4. Tell the group that as they watch the video to pay special attention to:
  - The behaviors of the group when they are told that they are "less than."
  - The behaviors of the group when they are told that they are "better than."
  - The behaviors of the teacher.
  - Your feelings and reactions to the film.

It may be helpful to write these statements on a sheet of newsprint and display it on the wall during the video.

5. Show approximately 30 minutes of the video. Stop the videotape at the point when the announcer says, “This experiment has been used with schools, organizations. . . .” School children are seen getting on a school bus and the film is about to go into a segment on how the film has been used in prisons.

## Reflection Activities and Ideas:

Ask the group the following reflection questions:

1. What seems to stand out for you?
2. What did you notice about the children when they were told they were in the “less than” group?
3. What did you notice about the “better than” group?
4. What did you notice about the teacher?
5. Describe your feelings and reactions to the video.
6. How do you see these kinds of beliefs and actions playing out in today’s classrooms and communities?

Possible key points to draw out and/or share with the group:

- Citizenship is about working toward a true and just democracy. This includes learning more about the realities of our histories – and how we’ve all learned bias, stereotypes and prejudice – and how those biases too often lead to behaviors and systems that are harmful to the common good in communities and in society.
- The video illustrates how prejudice is learned. Jane Elliott introduced the thought that intelligence and moral character – and the value placed on people – is based on the color of their eyes. This is similar to how prejudice is learned based on skin color and other differences.
- As an authority figure, the teacher had power and influence and set the rules for how the children were to behave related to their behaviors toward others based on eye color. This is very similar to how prejudice and discrimination work in real life. Important adults (parents, family members, teachers and others) teach children through words and actions how to think and behave toward people and groups that are different from themselves.
- Prejudice and stereotypes that people hold influence how rules and policies get created in organizations and in communities. This is powerfully illustrated in the video. Jane Elliot provided the information or belief that groups are “less than” based on eye color. She then created rules and systems that advantaged those in the “better than” group. For example, when the group was “on top” they got to use the drinking fountain, get second helpings at lunch, play on the playground equipment and had other advantages available to them when they were told they were “better than.” When they were in the “less than” group, the opposite was true and they were denied access to these things. This is how racism, sexism and other “isms” work in society.
- In the video, Jane Elliott constructs or “makes up” the idea that people are better than others based on eye color. Similarly, it is widely believed that race is a “socially constructed” idea whose purpose was and is to advantage groups based on race. History teaches us, for example, that the notion of “whiteness” was created right at the beginning of the development of the U.S. system of government in order to advantage those who were deemed as white. These were the people who were allowed to vote, own property and be part of national and local decision making. This notion of “whiteness” allowed the government to justify the enslavement of people of African decent and genocide of those who were indigenous to this country before white people came to this land.
- This legacy of advantage to white people is maintained today and is largely responsible for the continuation of massive economic and social inequities between white people and people of color.

