Responding to Bias Incidents in Middle and High Schools:

Resources and Best Practices for School Administrators & Educators

ADL®
FIGHTING HATE FOR GOOD

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Contents

Educators and school administrators play vital roles in creating an environment where all students can learn and thrive. Cultivating an equitable and inclusive school community requires ensuring that historically marginalized students are welcome and safe.

This toolkit is a resource to help educators and school administrators strengthen their responses to school-based incidents of bias and bigotry. Whether it be a racist "joke," slur, stereotype or some other manifestation of implicit or explicit bias, all school community members must be committed to addressing bias-related incidents in our schools. This is in large part because standing idly by in the face of a bias-related incident can have a lasting impact. Failing to effectively respond to bias incidents tacitly condones the harmful words or actions and sends a message that school safety and equity are not community priorities. By challenging harmful language and behaviors, educators and school administrators can actively challenge bias, cultivate inclusivity and model how students can do the same.

In this toolkit, you will find ADL's "P.E.A.C.E." framework to guide you in proactively preparing for and responding to hate and bias-related incidents in school. To assist you in incorporating critical reflection and learning in your response to bias-related incidents, we have provided descriptions of incidents most frequently reported to ADL. This guide also provides an overview of several hate symbols, slurs and culturally embedded stereotypes, and outlines appropriate reflection and discussion questions for the classroom.

The most effective responses to bias-motivated incidents incorporate prevention, interventions and long-term education. The work to build inclusive school communities cannot begin after an incident has occurred. A commitment to continuous anti-bias learning is essential before, during and after an incident.

P.E.A.C.E. Framework: Developing Your School's Incident Response Strategy

ADL has developed the P.E.A.C.E. framework as an acronym to use when preparing for and responding to hate and bias-based incidents in schools.

What is a Bias Incident?

- A bias incident often involves noncriminal conduct motivated by hatred, prejudice or bigotry and directed toward any individual, residence, house of worship, institution or business expressly because of the victim's real or perceived race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or disability. Bias incidents can involve hateful imagery, language or actions.

Before responding to a bias incident, consider the following:

- **Everyone has bias.** Be aware of how bias (your own and others') may affect perceptions and actions.
- **No two incidents are exactly alike.** Approach each case individually.
- **Dig deep. Incidents can be indicators of other problems with school culture.** Take time to assess the whole picture to address the root of the problem.
- **Get out in front or risk being left behind.** In the immediate aftermath of an incident, make your response priority number one, and take all the key stakeholders of your school (e.g., students, families, staff, community) into account.
- **Model inclusivity.** Make sure your policies, personnel and pedagogy all reflect the values you want your students to exhibit.
- **Practice.** Regularly practice and refine your bias incident response protocol.

Prevent and Prepare

Building an inclusive school community should be a continuous, year-round priority. Preparation is key so that you can act quickly when an incident takes place.

To actively prevent incidents, continuously assess your school's culture and environment. Below are some questions you may wish to ask throughout the school year.

- Do you have a committee of students, family members and staff working on diversity, equity and inclusion goals throughout the school year?
- Are you providing anti-bias and anti-racism training for teachers and staff (including on topics such as microaggressions, implicit bias, stereotypes, inclusive language, responding to insensitive comments, cyberbullying, online hate, etc.)?
- Are your physical and virtual spaces accessible to all? Does your school consider accessibility needs?

- Have you considered which identities are represented on your school signage, posters and photographs? Do they reflect the inclusive community you are trying to build?
- Have you conducted a school climate survey and reviewed the results with your school community and staff?

Having clear policies and protocols to follow when an incident occurs will make your response swift and effective. Consider the following questions in your planning.

School Policies

- Have you reviewed and updated your policies on bullying, harassment and discrimination?
  - Are these policies inclusive of all students?
  - Are these policies equitably enforced? Do your policies address incidents that take place in digital spaces?
  - Have you reviewed and updated your policies in your staff handbook?
- Have you publicized these policies to all members of the school community using many different methods of communication (e.g., on notice boards, in electronic and hard copy newsletters)? Are your school policies available in many different languages?
- Is your data collection protocol consistent with local, state and federal standards? It is important to track and analyze incidents so that patterns can be addressed.

Response Protocol

- Does your school have an incident response protocol? Consider creating a readily available incident response checklist to use when incidents occur.
- Has the protocol been clearly communicated to school staff? Practicing and refining the protocol will make your team more efficient and thorough in their response when incidents do occur.
- Do your team members understand the roles they may be asked to play in connection with incident response (e.g., investigation, communication, community healing, etc.)?
- Do you have relationships with community-based organizations, your state Attorney General's office, your local human rights commission and other relevant stakeholders? These relationships can enhance your ability to respond rapidly and comprehensively to an incident.
- Do you have a standardized bias-incident response form to guide and document information-gathering after an incident?
- Have you clarified what role (if any) school resource officers (SROs) play in your school?

Encourage Reporting

Young people are often very reluctant to tell adults about incidents because they believe reporting may make things worse.

- Are you fostering a culture where students feel comfortable discussing bias incidents with school staff?
- Do students know what to do when an incident occurs? Are there trusted adults in the building to whom they can turn for help?
- Do you have an easily accessible reporting mechanism?
  - Is your reporting mechanism safe, confidential and anonymous? Schools must ensure that students who report incidents do not experience retaliation or unnecessary interaction with law enforcement.
  - Is the reporting system accessible to people with disabilities? Is it safe and comfortable for historically marginalized students, students who are immigrants and students learning English as a second language? Ensuring safety and inclusion for vulnerable students will encourage reporting.
- Have you affirmed that your school is a "safe zone" by reinforcing existing laws, policies and constitutional rights that protect immigrant students from federal immigration enforcement activity at school?
- Do staff know what to do when an incident is reported to them? Is there clarity among the staff with respect to who reviews and investigates these reports? Take reported issues seriously, invest the time to listen before engaging in problem-solving and maintain confidentiality when possible.
- You may notice an initial increase in reported incidents when you begin to implement some of the suggestions listed above. This may reflect an increased trust between the school administration and the students.

Act Quickly and Respond

Every reported incident should be responded to in a serious manner to reassure the school community that hateful, biased language and actions are unacceptable. Understand that the impact of an incident on your school community—and therefore your response—will vary based on the type of bias or hate and the method of dissemination.

In the Immediate Aftermath

- Make sure all students are safe.
- Investigate all allegations of bias incidents swiftly, thoroughly and seriously.
  - Use a standard bias incident reporting form to gather information and preserve evidence. Interview everyone involved separately and collect written accounts as soon as possible.
  - Consider the bigger picture at the school. Ask students whether similar incidents have happened and listen to concerns and feedback about school climate.
- Protect confidentiality and the rights of all involved parties, including the student(s) allegedly responsible for the bias incident.
- Provide comfort and aid to students who were targeted and impacted. Provide space for them to process their emotions. Ensure that they are heard and seen.
- Determine the extent to which mental health, social service providers and other victim resources should be consulted.

- Ensure the consequences you are considering are equitable; a disproportionate or poorly communicated response can perpetuate and solidify biases.

Questions to Consider

- Who needs to be included in the response to this incident? Do staff, families, community organizations, media and/or others need to be involved from the onset?
- Who is reaching out to those who are impacted, and how? Think about the roles that administrators, educators and support staff can play with respect to outreach.
- How will you ensure that those who are impacted feel safe and that their needs are addressed?
- How will you ensure transparency about the investigation without compromising confidentiality and safety?
- Do some or all of the involved parties belong to another school community? How are you communicating with them? *Incidents may take place on the sports field or other venues where two schools interact. Consider how you are communicating and coordinating with the other school's administration.*
- Does the incident involve an imminent threat to student safety or the safety of others? If so, consider whether school safety resources may need to be activated.

Communicate

Prompt, intentional and specific communication with the school community makes a big difference. Statements from school leadership set the tone for the community.

- Determine who in the school community needs to be informed. Remember, word will get out and travel quickly. It is often better that the community hears from the school administration first. Otherwise, they may assume administrators are not taking the incident seriously.
- Initial communications should be timely and do the following:
    1. Describe the nature of the incident (e.g., "swastika on the bathroom wall"). Be transparent and specific. If slurs or offensive language were used, make sure to use censored words (for example, n-word, r-word) so that you do not perpetuate the harm.
    2. Use thoughtful, inclusive language, and choose terms that respect how affected communities self-identify.
    3. Denounce the incident and reaffirm your school's values.

4. When appropriate, announce an immediate investigation of the incident.
5. When ready, present a clear plan of action moving forward. Are you hosting conversations in classrooms? Are you planning a schoolwide program? What steps are you going to take to help the school community heal?
6. Share resources that will help the school community continue these conversations outside of the school setting.
7. Protect the identities and rights of the students involved.

- Tone matters. Use this opportunity to convey that bias will not be tolerated and to build trust with the school community.
- You may choose to tailor your message depending on the audience (e.g., students, staff, families and the wider community).
- Send regular updates and plans for short- and long-term actions to various stakeholders.
- If the media is involved, make sure to clarify who is charged with responding.

Educate and Heal

Make sure you are teaching students about bias, its harmful effects and how to challenge it throughout the school year. Don't wait for an incident to occur to talk about these important issues.

Teachable Moments

- Provide opportunities for all members of the school community to discuss and process their thoughts and feelings about the incident and bias more generally. Remember to center the perspectives of impacted communities if it is safe, respectful and appropriate to do so—otherwise, you may risk retargeting affected individuals and communities.
- Educators, counselors and administrators should coordinate disciplinary, behavioral and educational interventions for students responsible for the bias incident.
- Turn bias-motivated incidents into teachable moments for aggressors, bystanders and the wider school community by using the next section in this guide. Beyond administering consequences, schools have a responsibility to educate the students who perpetrate bias incidents.

Community Healing

- Include many perspectives in the conversation about how to heal the school community. Responding to hate can be a community-building opportunity if you encourage collaboration.
- If appropriate for your school community, hold a town hall, vigil, assembly or school community gathering. These events can help convey information, elevate ally voices and personal stories and provide an open forum for the community.
- Be careful not to tokenize marginalized voices by asking members of an affected group to represent their community or culture.
- Responding to incidents should not be a "one-and-done" approach. Anti-bias education is a long-term process, and preventing bias requires an ongoing commitment from all stakeholders in the school community, including the school's administrators. Integrate anti-bias and bullying prevention strategies into the school curriculum, school climate programs and family engagement efforts.
- Continue to provide professional development for school staff on how to lead discussions on the nature and impact of bias with students and families.

Assess and Adjust

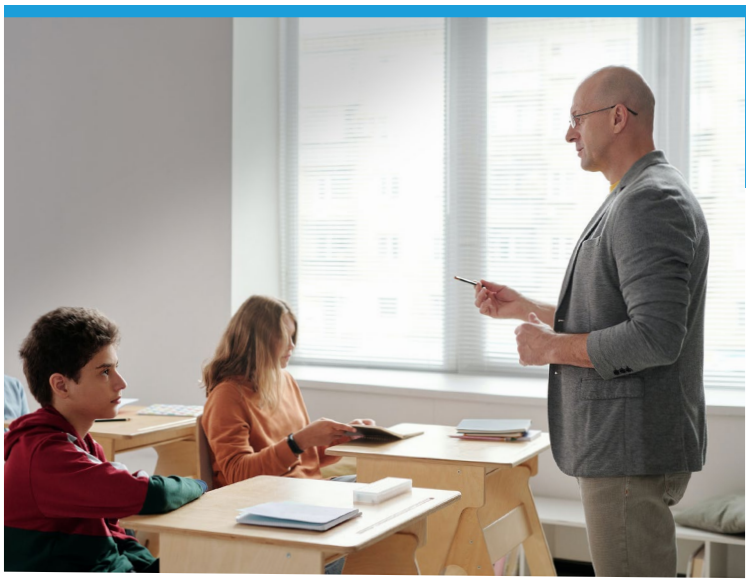
- After each incident, convene the staff for a debriefing.
- Review and update policies and protocols based on lessons learned.
- Continue to regularly drill bias incident response with your staff.
- Review your curricula to include anti-bias education throughout the year.

Stop and Support: Practical Tips to Intervene When Incidents Occur

Why Should Educators Intervene?

Responding to biased language and incidents conveys important messages about a school's culture and values. Effective responses communicate that your school community not only values holistic education but is committed to protecting historically marginalized people, whether they are widely represented in your school community or not.

Comments and actions motivated by bias can sometimes catch us off guard, making it hard to know what to say or do in the moment. Remember that silence is harmful; by refusing to intervene, you are communicating that the biased language or actions are acceptable. As educators and leaders, being prepared for these moments will allow you to respond more intentionally and with confidence. In responding, we communicate care by holding those who cause harm accountable, show solidarity and support for those who are targeted or harmed, model and encourage ally behaviors and educate the broader school community.



When an incident occurs, you will want to STOP the behavior and SUPPORT the targeted students or groups.

Strategies to Stop the Behavior

Below are effective ways to respond to biased, harmful language and actions in the moment. These responses can be coupled with longer conversations and contextualized lessons available on our website. Remember that because bias is embedded in our culture, including in our language, people might not always recognize that their words are biased.

STRATEGY #1: Interrupt

- "Let's pause the conversation here to reflect on something that was just said."
- "That sort of language/behavior is not acceptable in my classroom. Every single student is an equal and valued member of our community."

  Note: Some students may push back and say they heard the offensive term in the media or at home. To this, you can say, "Regardless of where you learned it, bias is not welcome in our school."
- "Ouch! Let's talk about that a bit more."
- "What I just heard was not ok."

STRATEGY #2: Ask a question.

- "What do you mean?"
- "What do you know about the meaning or history of that word?"

STRATEGY #3: Explain impact.

- "Do you know how that symbol makes some people feel?"
- "When you say that, it is really damaging to an entire group of people."
- "Statements like that have a long history of causing pain and fear for entire communities."

STRATEGY #4: Broaden to universal behavior.

- "Do you mean everyone who is _____, or are you speaking of someone in particular?"
- "I don't think that's a _____thing. I think lots of different people have that quality."
- "You can't make a generalization about a group of people based on your interactions with (or what you've heard about) one or a small number of people."
- "Every human being deserves respect and decency."

STRATEGY #5: Connect to a historical context.

- "What you said feeds into an old stereotype. Let's talk about where that comes from …"
- "You may not realize it, but that language has a long history of disrespect, violence and oppression …"
- "Let me explain how that language was historically used to talk about people …"

Strategies to Support the Targeted Students or Groups

It is imperative that educators provide support for any student who has been targeted. Providing support might look different depending on the incident. Be cautious not to put targeted students in a position that is embarrassing; some students who may need support might say they are okay because they want to avoid further marginalization. Be sure to remain flexible in providing support, and check in often.

What support can look like:

- After stopping the incident, find a quiet moment to speak to the affected student one-on-one.
  - Ask if the student is okay.
  - State that you value and respect them and that you will not stand for this type of behavior.
  - Ask how you can support the student.
  - If the student has a relationship with another school-based adult, you may want to encourage them to discuss the incident with them.

- Students process bias incidents in different ways, and educators should respect their reactions. Here are some ways you can offer to help:
  - Encourage the student to report the incident to the administration.

    Note: If a student expresses that they do not wish to report the incident to the administration, educators should let the student know that educators have a responsibility to report incident to the administration in order to keep them safe. Ensure the student that you will keep them informed of the process so that there is transparency.
  - If your school has an organized club or affinity group for students, suggest that the student reach out to process their feelings in the community.
  - Encourage the student to talk to parents or caregivers about providing support at home, and offer to connect families to the appropriate school staff if they would like to speak about the school's response to the incident.

Schedule Time for Follow-Up and Learning

Not everything will be accomplished in the immediate aftermath of an incident. In fact, you will want to provide time and space for reflection, learning and dialogue. It is important to schedule the time to follow up after an incident occurs. We suggest you use the materials provided here for your students to reflect, grapple with the history of the language or action and discuss how to move forward. For additional ideas and guidance, please reach out to your local ADL office.

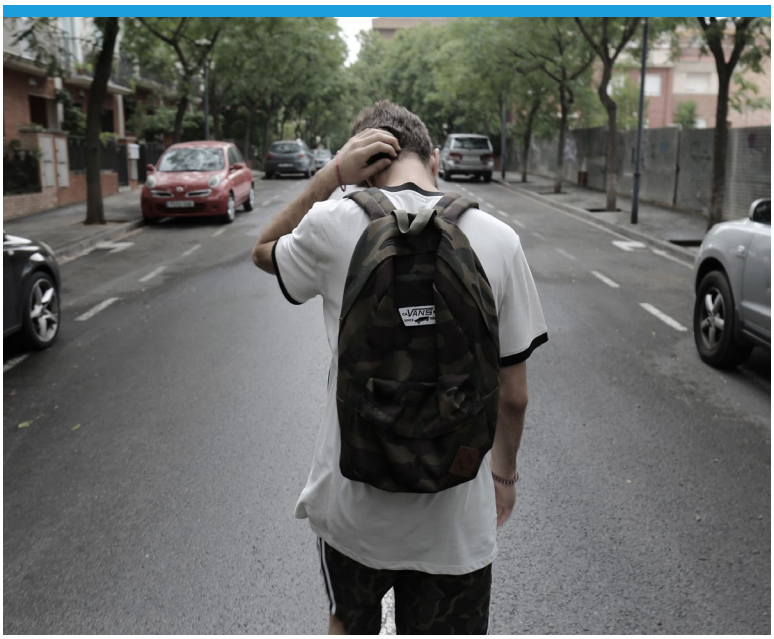
What to Do if the Aggressor/Perpetrator is Unknown

Responding to incidents of bias can become extremely complex if the perpetrator is unknown. Consider providing education to the school community in these moments and facilitating group conversations to explain and explore historical and current bias. However, avoid framing the response as punitive or burdensome; students should not view anti-bias education as a chore but rather as an important and integral part of the curriculum. Reaffirm your school's values and provide support to students on an individual or group basis. Bias still causes harm even when there is no identifiable target or aggressor.

Concepts to Remember When Responding to Incidents

Center impact, not intent.

Students will often say that their words or actions were not intended to cause harm. It is important for educators to refocus the conversation from intent to impact. We recommend explaining how, for the person targeted, the harm and impact of the biased action is what matters, not necessarily the intent behind it. You may choose to ask the aggressor to reflect on these questions: "How do you think that action or comment made the target feel?" and "How do you think people from the targeted community are impacted when that language



is used?"

Help students accept discomfort and uncertainty.

A safe learning environment doesn't mean you and your students will or should be comfortable with every discussion. Be prepared for conversations about bias to be messy and complicated. They may not end as you expect they will. You can remind yourself of this and share that understanding with your students to manage everyone's expectations. It is helpful to remember and share with students that deep learning, the kind that is lasting and long-term, often comes when things are uncomfortable or "sticky." It may also be helpful to explain to students that when complex conflicts are handled well, there can be a greater understanding and improved relationships on the other side.

Revisit conversations if they don't go as planned.

It is important to circle back to any conversations that don't go as planned or which feel unfinished. Educating students about the impact of bias is an ongoing process that will require multiple conversations. While you might not have the words to respond perfectly to every situation, you do have a responsibility to say something that interrupts any harm being caused. You might consider simply stating, "What I just heard/saw was not okay." You can then follow up later after collecting your thoughts and planning for what might be a complex conversation to navigate.

Turning Incidents into Teachable Moments: Your Guide to Facilitating Deeper Learning

This section provides information on some of the most common school-based bias incidents, background and historical context of the incidents and possible strategies for turning the incident into a learning experience for students.

Instructions on How to Use This Section

Your response to a bias-related incident should go beyond intervening in the moment. In order to have lasting impact, it is important to facilitate deeper understanding and valuable learning for those involved. When students get "caught" saying or doing something inappropriate or unacceptable, they are usually able to respond in ways that we, as adults, want to hear. However, that doesn't mean learning, empathy or healing has taken place. We want to help young people grapple with present-day facts and historical context in an age-appropriate way, ideally encouraging them to make different choices in the future. It is never too late for students to learn. Long-term learning and change won't occur without understanding how and why bias is harmful. We encourage educators to engage in professional development and continuous learning.

Each section includes: (1) pre-education reflection questions, (2) the history of the bias and (3) discussion questions for deeper learning.

Begin by having the students reflect on the pre-education reflection questions provided in each section as soon as possible and before doing any targeted learning. This will provide insight regarding the students' thinking and should also push them to analyze their actions. Responses in writing often yield the most honest reflections.

Review the relevant history of the trope, slur or symbol related to the incident that has occurred. Feel free to share this information with the students in print or talk it through with them. It is important for learners of all ages to understand where bigoted ideas come from and the intentionally harmful purposes for which they were created, in age appropriate ways. Connecting present-day ideas to history and a context of systemic oppression allows us to learn about (and then reject) ideas that cause people harm.

Lastly, we have included reflection questions to be used following the learning so that students can articulate how new information and understanding might inform the way they plan to move forward.

Most Commonly Reported Incidents to ADL

ADL responds to hundreds of school-based bias incidents annually. In this section, you will find resources to turn the incidents that are most commonly reported to ADL into teachable moments. This list is not comprehensive—many other examples of biased language and behavior exist. You may want to use a similar framework to address other incidents in your school community. The following addresses incidents related to antisemitism, anti-Black and anti-Asian racism, anti-immigrant bias, anti-Muslim bias, anti-LGBTQ+ bias and ableism.

Swastika

Pre-Education Reflection Questions (To be used immediately following an incident):

- What does a swastika mean?
- When you see a swastika, what thoughts and feelings come to mind?
- When did you first learn of the swastika? What do you know about it?
- How do you think this symbol makes people feel? Why?
- What do you think the impact of the swastika is on individuals? Communities? And society at large?

History

We see symbols every day in all aspects of our lives. Symbols are used to convey ideas, qualities, emotions, material objects/products, opinions and beliefs. Unfortunately, symbols are also used to convey hate and bias. The swastika is one of the most significant and notorious of hate symbols associated with antisemitism, or the marginalization and oppression of Jewish people.

What we recognize as the swastika is an ancient symbol that emerged independently among many cultures on several continents. Before the twentieth century, its use (including in the United States) was almost always harmless. While this symbol remains harmless in some cultures across Asia, much of the western globe understands the swastika to be a violent hate symbol. Although this history might lead to misunderstandings at times, it is important to understand that when seen in the United States, the swastika is most often associated with discrimination, violence and terror. However, in some specific religious contexts, such as when displayed on a Buddhist or Hindu temple, the swastika continues to serve as symbol of good fortune.

In 1920, Adolf Hitler adopted the swastika as the primary symbol for the Nazi Party in Germany and included the symbol on the Nazi flag. (To learn more about how the symbol was adopted by Nazis, visit: encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/history-of-the-swastika and www.smithsonianmag.com/history/man-who-brought-swastika-germany-and-how-nazis-stole-it-180962812.) The ideology of Nazism was anchored by the theory that Aryans (people who are now most frequently associated with being white) were biologically distinct and superior. After gaining power over the government in 1933, the Nazis aimed to create a German society based on racial purity that was free from people considered to be "undesirable," including Jews, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community and various ethnic, religious and political minorities.

To achieve this goal, the Nazi-led government began by legalizing discrimination against certain social groups based on religion, ethnicity, political beliefs, ability and sexual orientation. Many of the discriminatory laws that were put in place in Nazi Germany were modeled after racist laws in the United States. Laws that informed Nazis included legal segregation based on race and the mistreatment of Black Americans as well as laws that banned interracial relationships and marriages. Nazis also looked at how the United States denied citizenship to Indigenous Peoples even though various Indigenous nations had occupied American land for centuries. Hitler was also inspired by other oppressive polices and events from around the world.

Laws used to segregate people in German society became increasingly more violent and led to the Holocaust: the state-sponsored mass murder of around six million Jews and millions of other people

belonging to "undesirable" groups. Those who were murdered also included children of people deemed "undesirable." This violence and other brutal acts that terrorized millions is symbolized by the swastika.

Today, the swastika is legally banned from display in Germany and some other countries. In the United States, we most frequently see a public display of the swastika by white supremacist groups, particularly neo-Nazis. Neo-Nazis praise Hitler and Nazi Germany's discriminatory practices and hate Jews, people of color, people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community. These groups and the individuals that adhere to them pose a threat to the safety and well-being of all, in particular those who belong to marginalized communities.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before? What surprised you?
- What questions do you still have?
- How have different groups adopted and changed the meaning of the swastika over time?
- Why do you think white supremacists continue to use this symbol today?
- What do you think the impact of the swastika is on individuals? Communities? And society at large?
- Why do you think we see swastikas in schools in various places (walls, notebooks, bathrooms, etc.)? What do you think students mean when they draw a swastika in a school?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Swastika (ADL)

Swastika and Other Hate Symbols (ADL)

How the Symbolism of the Swastika Was Ruined (Britannica)

History of the Swastika (USHMM)

Swastikas and Nazi Salutes: Addressing Holocaust Symbols in the Age of the Image (Melissa Mott, *Echoes & Reflections*)

Heil Hitler Salute

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- What does a "Heil Hitler" salute mean?
- When you see and hear a Heil Hitler salute, what thoughts and feelings come to mind?
- Where did you learn about this action? What do you think it is meant to communicate?
- How do you think the Heil Hitler salute impacts Jewish people? How do you think non-Jewish people are impacted by this action?

History

The Nazi salute, or Hitler salute, is a gesture that was adopted by the Nazi Party in Germany in the 1930s. This gesture of raising an outstretched right arm with the palm down was used to show loyalty and obedience to Adolf Hitler. In Nazi Germany, it was often accompanied by chanting or shouting "Heil Hitler" or "Sieg Heil," a German phrase that translates to "Hail Victory." In Nazi Germany, all German citizens were forced to perform the salute.

After gaining power over the government in 1933, the Nazis aimed to create a German society based on racial "purity" that was free from people considered to be "undesirable," including Jews, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community and various ethnic, religious and political minorities. Nazi ideology included the belief that Jews were to blame for Germany's economic, social and political problems. This ideology also encouraged people to believe that problems like unemployment and hunger would continue until all people not belonging to the "master race" were driven out of Germany. This Nazi salute was one of many tools used by Hitler to convince German citizens that aligning themselves with Nazi Germany would help the country gain power across Europe.

As Hitler attempted to create a German society that he considered "pure," the Nazi-led government began by legalizing discrimination against certain social groups based on religion, ethnicity, political beliefs, ability and sexual orientation. Many of the discriminatory laws put in place in Nazi Germany were modeled after racist laws in the United States that harmed Black Americans and other people of color. Laws used to segregate people in German society became increasingly more violent and led to the Holocaust: the state-sponsored mass murder of six million Jews and millions of other people belonging to "undesirable" groups. The Nazi salute was used to show support for this violence and other brutal acts that terrorized millions.

Even though the United States entered World War II (1939–1945) to fight against Nazi Germany, the Nazi salute is still used by white supremacist groups in the U.S. Some white supremacist groups believe in Neo-Nazi ideology. They praise Hitler and Nazi Germany's discriminatory practices and hate Jews, people of color, people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ community. These groups and the individuals that adhere to them pose a threat to the safety and well-being of all, particularly those who belong to marginalized communities.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before? What surprised you?

- What questions do you still have?
- Have you ever seen this action being used in school or in your community? Please explain what happened.
- How might the Heil Hitler salute harm people today in ways that were not mentioned in the reading?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Sieg Heil (ADL)

Swastikas and Nazi Salutes: Addressing Holocaust Symbols in the Age of the Image (Melissa Mott, *Echoes & Reflections*)

Making a Leader (USHMM)

Holocaust "Jokes"

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- What is the "joke" and why is it a joke? Please explain the joke.
- Where did you learn about this "joke"?
- How do you think the "joke" makes people feel—those who are Jewish and those who are not Jewish?
- What effects do jokes like the one you shared have on individuals? On our school community? On society?

History

It is not uncommon for people to mask harmful expressions of bias behind humor. Prejudicial humor sends a clear message about who is deserving of respect by communicating biased ideas about a person or group based on identity. Simultaneously, it communicates that this biased idea is not harmful because "it's just a joke." In reality, prejudicial humor makes bias and bigotry seem more acceptable and normalizes discrimination against targeted groups.

One example of this kind of prejudicial humor is jokes about the Holocaust. During the Holocaust, millions of people were murdered, including approximately six million Jews—about two thirds of the European Jewish population at the time. After gaining power over the German government in 1933, the Nazis aimed to create a German society based on racial "purity" that was free from people considered to be "undesirable." These "undesirable" groups included Jews, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community and various ethnic, religious and political minorities. Nazi ideology included the belief that Jews were to blame for Germany's economic problems. This ideology also encouraged people to believe that problems like unemployment and hunger would continue until all people not belonging to the "master race" were driven out of Germany or killed.

Jokes about Hitler and the Nazis were made as the Nazis rose to power and even before World War II (1939-1945). These jokes were told and heard by German citizens and downplayed the discrimination experienced by targeted groups, dehumanizing them and paving the way for further persecution. Legalized discrimination against social groups based on religion, ethnicity, political beliefs, ability and sexual orientation became increasingly more violent. Jokes about these realities made these violent actions seem socially acceptable.

While we often think of the Holocaust as part of a far-off past, Holocaust survivors who directly experienced the Nazi atrocities are still alive today. The stories of millions who didn't survive are carried on by family members who continue to face bias and discrimination because of their identity. These jokes can be incredibly painful for survivors, their families and those who carry the burden of traumatic family histories. Jokes about the Holocaust communicate that not only was the discrimination and violence against millions of Jews acceptable during the Holocaust but that discrimination and violence against Jews is still acceptable today.

Prejudicial humor expands what people understand to be socially acceptable behavior to include language that is inappropriate and disrespectful. Biased jokes may have been more socially acceptable several

generations ago, the same way that explicit racism was more socially acceptable. As we evolve or grow as a nation, it is important for our humor to evolve as well.

Holocaust jokes are antisemitic and reinforce a system that marginalizes or discriminates against Jewish people. These jokes are harmful whether Jews are present to hear the joke or not. When we tell prejudicial jokes, or laugh at them, we cosign a history of mistreatment and communicate that violence and harm against others is "no big deal."

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What questions do you still have?
- What questions might you ask yourself before telling a Holocaust joke?
- What message is conveyed when you laugh at a Holocaust joke?
- If you hear a hurtful joke told by someone else, what might you say to intervene?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Jokes, Excuses and Why Words Matter (ADL)

Slurs, Offensive Jokes and How to Respond (ADL)

Springtime for Hitler (Monica Osborne, *The New Republic*, August 22, 2011)

Dead Funny: Humor in Hitler's Germany (Rudolph Herzog)

Throwing Pennies

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- What does it mean when people throw pennies at someone?
- Where did you first learn about this action?
- What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you see this happen?
- How do you think the person at whom pennies are thrown is impacted?
- How might others be impacted by this action?

History

The action of throwing pennies at Jewish people is connected to one of the oldest and most persistent stereotypes about Jews—that Jews are cheap, greedy and hoard wealth. The stereotype of Jewish greed took hold in Europe during the Middle Ages. During this time, Jews were isolated into neighborhoods called "ghettos," prohibited from owning land and restricted to specific jobs. The Christian Church held political power and prohibited Christians from performing the jobs of moneylending and tax collecting. Because of these laws set by the Church, Jews, having few options, stepped into these roles. This created and maintained a stereotypical association of Jews with greed. Having Jews perform these functions of lenders and tax and rent collectors also helped to protect those in power, which allowed the powerful to continue to exploit people while positioning Jews as the face of the exploitation.

This stereotype is an example of the ways in which an oppressive law can create the conditions for a stereotype to thrive. Another example is the U.S. law that prohibited enslaved Black people from learning how to read and write, creating the stereotype that Black people are unintelligent. While we know this stereotype to be false, this association, much like the association of Jews and money, has continued and is perpetuated through generations.

As antisemitism became engrained in ancient society, Jews continued to be seen as outsiders by European Christians. Jews were often blamed for a community's economic, political and social problems. For example, anger was often directed at Jews for collecting taxes rather than the Christian political powers that imposed the taxes. To reinforce ideas that Jews were the problem, literature and art of the time depicted Jews as untrustworthy, money-hungry and working against the interests of the honest citizen. This sometimes led to violence and Jews being driven out of communities or even entire countries. Eventually, this stereotype of Jews hoarding wealth worked its way into modern language and ideas.

In addition to interpersonal violence based on this stereotype, there are several conspiracy theories related to Jews and money. These conspiracy theories, including the idea that Jews control the global economy and banks, reinforce the idea that Jews are to blame for economic problems. Money and economic power have been used throughout history to maintain economic inequities. Exploitative economic systems are to blame, not any specific group of people.

Maintaining the association between Jews and greed by throwing pennies at a Jewish person preserves a culture in which Jews are seen as untrustworthy. This misrepresentation of the Jewish community reinforces the system of antisemitism, or the marginalization of Jews. When we reinforce antisemitic

stereotypes and the actions that support them, we create a society in which the safety and well-being of Jews are under threat.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What surprised you?
- What questions do you still have?
- Are there other ways in which this stereotype has an impact on individuals or society? How so?
- Have you seen other examples of this stereotype play out in school, the news or media?
- What could be done to educate the general public about why these ideas are harmful?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

How Income Varies among U.S. Religious Groups (David Masci, Pew Research Center, October 11, 2016)

Jewish "Control" of the Federal Reserve: A Classic Anti-Semitic Myth (ADL)

Jews and Money: The Story of a Stereotype (Abraham Foxman, Los Angeles World Affairs Council, December 8, 2010)

"Jews are Greedy" Stereotype (ADL)

N-Word

Reminder: Make sure to use censored words (for example, n-word, r-word) in the place of slurs so that you do not perpetuate the harm while addressing the incident.

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- How is this slur used? What does it convey?
- Where did you first learn or hear about this slur?
- What thoughts and feelings do you have when you hear this slur?
- Was there someone or something that caused you to think it was ok to use this slur? Please explain.
- What is the impact of slurs on the people targeted? What is the impact on others who are part of that identity group?
- What is the impact on community and society?
- How might the meaning of this word vary depending on the racial identity of the person who says it?

History

Language is one tool that reinforces systems that discriminate against, harm andoppress groups of people. Slurs are harmful language designed to degrade targeted individuals and groups. One such slur is the N-word. Dating back to seventeenth-century colonial America, this slur is directed at Black people and has been used over time to justify disrespect, discrimination and violence.

Beginning in the early 1600s, senseless logic was used to justify the institution of U.S. chattel slavery, or the treatment of enslaved Black people as property. This logic included ideas that Black people were not human and therefore belonged in captivity. Ensuring that the U.S. bought into this racist idea would allow white Americans to profit off the stolen, free, forced labor of enslaved Black people. This inhumane system was the basis for the early U.S. economy. As enslaved Black people generated billions of dollars in wealth for white people in the U.S., they received no compensation and were subjected to constant and brutal violence. The legacy of slavery perpetuates the racial wealth gap we see today.

Kidnapped from Africa, enslaved Black people were often stripped of their native language and names. While “new” names were sometimes given by enslavers, the N-word was frequently used to call or refer to enslaved Black people. This word was also used by white Americans who did not “own” enslaved Black people. The N-word was used to communicate that Black people were inferior and undeserving of basic human dignity and respect. While enslaved Black people resisted their oppression in many ways, doing so was extremely dangerous and could result in various kinds of “punishment” including lashings, lynching and being sold away from family.

Anti-Black racism was reinforced in laws, education, media and politics. Following Emancipation, or the freeing of Black people from enslavement after hundreds of years, Black people continued to be seen as subhuman and were denied equal access to resources and humane treatment. The N-word continued to be used broadly for decades and was a socially acceptable term among mainstream society in the U.S.

While most people in the U.S. now reject the use of the N-word and recognize its harm, there are several current examples of its use to talk about or attack Black people. For most Black people, the N-word invokes immense trauma, pain and grief. Use of the word perpetuates a violent history and reinforces anti-Black racism, a system that marginalizes and oppresses Black people.

It is important to note that throughout history, groups that have been targeted with oppressive language have, at times, decided to reappropriate, or adopt and shift, the meaning of slurs. The act of reappropriating words that were once used to cause widespread harm is a way that targeted groups sometimes choose to take back the power that is lost when outside groups define them in harmful ways. One example of this is the reappropriation of the N-word by the Black community. After centuries of mistreatment, many people in the Black community decided to take back the slur, change the spelling and adopt an alternate definition to signify kinship. Not all members of the Black community choose to use the word in this way or support this act of reappropriation. Each individual Black person can decide whether they want to use the reappropriated term.

Non-Black people should never use the N-word in any context, period—regardless of whether they are in the presence of a Black person or not. This means that non-Black people should never repeat the word if stated by someone else, use the word when singing along to a song with the N-word in it, or read it out loud when in writing. When non-Black people use the N-word unchecked among other non-Black people, they normalize the term among themselves, communicating that the N-word is acceptable.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What surprised you about what you learned?
- How have you responded when you have hear or seen this slur being used?
- In the future, how might you respond differently based on what you have learned?
- Many words have been reappropriated by targeted groups to reclaim power. Why might this be a decision that people make?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Ta-Nehisi Coates on Words that Don't Belong to Everyone (Random House, November 7, 2017)

Straight Talk About the N-Word (*Teaching Tolerance*, Fall 2011)

If You Truly Knew What the N-Word Meant to Our Ancestors, You'd NEVER Use it (Brando Simeo Starkey, *The Undefeated*, May 18, 2017)

Slurs and Biased Language (ADL)

Nooses

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- Where did you first learn or hear about this symbol? What did you learn about it?
- What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you see a noose?
- What is your understanding of the meaning of this symbol?
- What might other people feel when they see a noose?
- Why do you think a noose is considered threatening?
- What do you know about the history associated with this object?

History

The hangman's noose is one of the most powerful hate symbols and objects connected to anti-Black racism in the U.S. After the Civil War and passage of the Thirteenth Amendment (which abolished slavery), violence and the threat of violence was regularly used against Black Americans as a means of social control. Many white Americans justified this treatment to ensure that Black people would be prevented from having the same opportunities, rights and resources that they had.

It has been documented that over 4,000 Black people were murdered by lynching in the U.S. between 1882 and 1968. Often, Black people were lynched for minor social "transgressions" such as looking at a white person, using profane language or refusing to step down from a sidewalk when a white person was walking past. Black adults and children were hanged in front of large crowds of people who publicly gathered to watch a lynching as a means of "entertainment." Photographs of these horrific events were often turned into postcards and used as correspondence. Having no laws or social protocols to protect them, Black people lived under constant threat and fear of lynching and other forms of racist terror and violence.

In the early twentieth century, there was a rise in Ku Klux Klan (KKK) membership. This period, often referred to as the second wave of the KKK, saw more than five million active KKK members, equaling five percent of the U.S. population at the time. With an increase in public lynchings of Black people, the noose became a central hate symbol for the KKK and those who supported the KKK's ideology. Not only were Black people and their property violently attacked by white mobs but physical nooses and drawings of nooses were often used to threaten violence against Black Americans.

While we sometimes talk about this type of violence against Black Americans as being a thing of the past, it is important to note that Black Americans continue to be targets of racist violence. It is also important to remember that many Black adults alive today experienced legal segregation and mob violence during their lifetimes.

In recent years, there has been an uptick in noose-related incidents in K-12 schools and communities. The noose continues to be used as a threat against Black lives, representing both a violent history and injustice today.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?

- What surprised you about what you learned?
- Public lynchings in the U.S. were one of the ways in which white people asserted control over Black people. Can you think of any other ways (actions, laws, language) in which racial inequities are maintained today?
- In 2020, there is still no law that would classify lynching as a federal hate crime in the U.S. Why do you think the country has not yet categorized this type of violence as a hate crime?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Noose (ADL)

Why the Noose is Such a Potent Symbol of Hate (Alaa Elassar, *CNN*, June 23, 2020)

Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror (Equal Justice Initiative)

Comparing Black People to Monkeys

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- The racist comparison of Black people to animals is one that has existed for a long time in our country's history. Where did you first learn about it?
- Why do you think this trope (or theme) was created and has been perpetuated?
- What message does it convey when we compare people to animals?
- What is your understanding of the impact of this comparison on people who are targeted, particularly Black people? What is the impact on others and society at large?
- To what extent have you heard similar comparisons made about other groups of people? Please explain.
- Do you think it is harmful to compare people to animals, if only in a "joking" way? Why or why not?

History

Racial categories are created by people, or are socially constructed. They didn't exist until the 1800s, and once constructed, they were used to justify ideas that some people were genetically superior while some were inferior. "Scientific racism," or the early division of people from around the world into distinct racial categories, developed prior to the discovery of human DNA and was based primarily on the examination of human skulls. The findings were then used to divide people with different observable physical characteristics (such as skin color, eye shape and hair texture). Some physical differences we observe between humans (such as skin color) are simply a result of geography and environment, and the human ability to adapt to the sun's harmful rays. Early humans who lived closer to the equator produced more melanin (the skin's brown pigment found in every human in varying quantities) as a natural sunscreen.

Scientists have since found that there are no significant genetic differences between people from different racial categories. In fact, there is just as much genetic diversity within racial groups as there is between them.

While it has long been proven that there is no scientific basis for distinguishing people based on race, there are very real social impacts of this practice on people of different races. For example, early "scientific racism" was used to justify the enslavement of Black people in the U.S. Those who supported slavery used "scientific racism" to claim that Black people were the inferior racial group, while white people were superior to all other racial groups. Maintaining the institution of slavery involved ensuring that stereotypes about Black people were widely shared.

Though the harmful comparison of Black people to monkeys predates slavery, during this time it became a tool to convince society that slavery, and the horrific acts it involved, was warranted because the people in bondage weren't actually *people*. After slavery was abolished, the harmful stereotypes associated with Black people did not disappear; those stereotypes have crept into present-day themes in both explicit (clear, conscious) and implicit (unconscious) ways. One theme that emerged was the idea that Black people were like animals, less intellectually developed and therefore content in captivity.

Throughout history, other groups have been targeted with similar degradation. While we often think of racial categories as being clear and permanent, it's important to note that even the social groups that have been perceived as "white" have actually changed over time. For example, in the 1800s, large groups of

Irish people emigrated to the U.S. after fleeing famine in Ireland. People already living in the U.S. (who had originated in other parts of Europe) met the Irish with hostility and violence. The Irish were viewed as having a culture and religion that were undesirable. They too were compared to monkeys to justify mistreatment and exclusion. This comparison also worked to further reinforce the racist idea that being Black was the most socially undesirable racial identity.

As Irish people gained political power and new groups of immigrants entered the U.S. from China as well as southern and eastern Europe, the categorization of the Irish shifted. Irish people began to be seen more generally as white. The shifting of racial classification for various European groups ensured that Black people and other people of color would remain in the minority with barriers to resources, opportunities and rights.

The racist idea that Black people, with ancestry in Africa, are less evolved than all other racial groups, is perpetuated today. In recent years, several notable Black public figures, including Barack and Michelle Obama, have been compared to apes. The continued comparison of Black people to animals not only relies on faulty "science" but also reinforces a long legacy of mistreatment and violence and continues to affect how our nation fights for racial justice.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What surprised you? What questions do you still have?
- How has race been used to rank different groups of people in society?
- How has the comparison of people to animals been used as a tool to harm and exclude racial groups over time?
- How does spreading these themes harm people today in ways that were not mentioned in the reading?
- In the future, how will you respond when you see this stereotype being used?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

The Racist Trope That Won't Die (Brent Staples, *New York Times*, June 17, 2018)

Here's Why White People Should Not Call Black People "Apes" (Whitney Alese, May 30, 2018)

Types of Mankind (Harvard Library)

Darwin, Race and Gender (Steve Rose, *EMBO Reports*)

Social Darwinism (History.com, August 21, 2018)

Collection of Racist Cartoons (Ferris State University Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia)

Confederate Flag

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- What is the meaning of the Confederate flag?
- What have you learned about the Confederate flag? What messages did you receive about it? Where did you learn what you know?
- What does this flag mean to you?
- Where have you seen Confederate flags in person or in the news/media? What are they conveying?
- What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you see Confederate flag?
- What do you know about how other groups perceive the Confederate flag?

History

In 1860-61, eleven southern states seceded (or broke away) from the U.S. to form the Confederate States of America. The Confederate states wanted control over states' rights instead of being regulated by the federal government. A primary goal for the Confederate states was to ensure that the institution of slavery could be maintained.

The enslavement of Black people in the U.S. was the basis for the early American economy. Treated as property, enslaved Black people generated billions of dollars in wealth for white Americans. In 1860, cotton sales alone generated $200 million, or the equivalent of $5 billion today. Enslaved Black people received no compensation and were constantly subjected to violence. Despite the inhumane treatment of enslaved Black people, several Southern states wanted to protect the economic benefits this stolen labor provided.

The conflict between the Confederacy and the Union (the northern states that supported the federal government) erupted in the Civil War. During the Civil War, the flag that became most associated with the Confederacy was the Confederate flag, sometimes referred to as the "battle flag." Eventually, the Union won the Civil War with the help of enslaved Black people who enlisted in the Union army following the Emancipation Proclamation. The institution of slavery was abolished, but Black people continued to be subjected to mistreatment, discrimination and violence.

A century later, during the Civil Rights Movement (1950s-60s), Black people continued to fight to secure civil rights including the right to education, fair employment, public safety, public access and voting rights. During this time, the Confederate flag began to be flown more frequently. The flying of this flag in response to the Civil Rights Movement sent a clear message to Black Americans that the Confederate flag represented ideals opposing racial equity. Throughout time, including to this day, the Confederate flag has been used to threaten violence against Black Americans.

While some people continue to claim that the flag is a symbol of Southern heritage or pride, it is widely understood that the history of the flag encouraged violence and the dehumanization of Black people. The flag remains popular among white supremacist groups and individuals who target Black people, other people of color, and people who are Jewish, Muslim and immigrants.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What did you learn that surprised you? What questions do you still have?
- Why might it be harmful to ignore the violent history of the Confederate flag and focus only on the Southern origins of the flag?
- How is the Confederate flag different from the Pride rainbow flag or a Black Lives Matter flag? Why is the distinction important?
- To what extent has your thinking about the Confederate flag changed?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

The Birth of the "Stainless Banner" (John Coski, *New York Times*, May 13, 2013)

The History of the Confederate Flag and What It Represents (Jameelah Nasheed, *Teen Vogue*, February 23, 2020)

"All Lives Matter"

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- What do you think the statement "All Lives Matter" means?
- To what extent is this phrase important to you? What does it mean to you?
- Where did you learn the phrase "All Lives Matter?"
- What thoughts and feelings come up when you hear the phrase "All Lives Matter?"
- What does "Black Lives Matter" mean? Why do you think this phrase was created?

History

Black Lives Matter is an activist movement that began as a hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter) after George Zimmerman was acquitted in the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager shot and killed by Zimmerman in Florida in July 2013. The movement became more widely known after two separate high-profile killings in 2014 of Black men (Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY, and Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO) at the hands of the police. Neither of the police officers involved in their deaths were indicted (i.e., formally charged with a crime). The movement was not solely inspired by these three deaths. In the U.S., Black people have disproportionately been the victims of police brutality for centuries.

In the U.S., there is a larger context and history of African American men and boys killed at the hands of the police, many of whom, like George Floyd (2020), were unarmed. Since 2014, other high-profile deaths include Tamir Rice (2014), Laquan McDonald (2014), John Crawford (2014), Freddie Gray (2015), Walter Scott (2015), Alton Sterling (2016), Philando Castile (2016), Terence Crutcher (2016), Antwon Rose (2018) and many, many others. Black women and girls are also victims of police violence, a reality that sparked the "Say Her Name" movement to highlight how violence against Black women often goes unnoticed. Women who have been killed at the hands of police include Sandra Bland (2015), Deborah Danner (2016), Atatiana Jefferson (2019) and Breonna Taylor (2020).

Beyond being a decentralized social justice movement (a movement led by many different leaders depending on location), "Black Lives Matter" is also a statement meant to affirm that Black people are human beings whose lives should be valued the same as white and other people's. The slogan "All Lives Matter" was coined in direct response to the statement "Black Lives Matter."

While "All Lives Matter" is meant by many to undermine efforts for racial equity, others mistakenly think the statement is more inclusive than stating "Black Lives Matter." This belief is informed by the incorrect assumption that "Black Lives Matter" means that Black lives are more important than other lives or that they are the *only* lives that matter. Members of the Black community have stressed that the statement "Black Lives Matter" is a way to declare that "Black lives matter **as well**." In essence, "Black Lives Matter" is meant to address the long history of mistreatment toward Black people in the U.S. Because Black people are disproportionately impacted by police brutality and other racial violence, the need to state that Black lives matter is critical.

Between 1882 and 1968, thousands of Black people were murdered by lynching in the U.S. Often, Black people were lynched for minor social "transgressions" such as looking at a white person, using profane language or refusing to step down from a sidewalk when a white person was walking past. Black adults

and children as young as 12 were hanged in front of large crowds of people who publicly gathered to watch a lynching as a means of "entertainment." Black people were also targeted with other forms of violence and harassment both by civilian mobs and police officers. Having no laws or social protocols to protect them, Black people lived under constant threat and fear of lynching and other forms of racist violence. For many Black Americans, that fear lingers as Black people continue to be murdered by police at a disproportionate rate.

The Black Lives Matter movement and the statement itself intends to ensure that Black people are safe from violence. Prioritizing the well-being of one group or individual is important when that group or individual is in disproportionate danger or pain. This principle shows up in many aspects of our lives, including in school. While every student in your school is important, if there is a pattern of a certain population of students (e.g., LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, Black students) being targeted with bias and bullying, those students need and deserve to be specifically focused on and cared for. Black Lives Matter asks our people and society to value Black people as human beings and put an end to a long legacy of harm, mistreatment and racial violence.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you did not know before?
- What other questions do you have regarding this phrase and the Black Lives Matter movement?
- Has your thinking changed on using "All Lives Matter" in the future? If so, how?
- What would you say to someone who uses the phrase "All Lives Matter?"

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

The Hashtag #BlackLivesMatter Emerges: Social Activism on Twitter (Monica Anderson, Pew Research Center, August 15, 2016)

Why "All Lives Matter" Is Such a Perilous Phrase (Daniel Victor, *New York Times*, July 15, 2016)

We Need Leaders to Affirm that Black Lives Matter, not Exploit the Phrase to Divide Us (Kevin Cokley, *USA Today*, July 13, 2020)

Why Saying "All Lives Matter" Misses the Big Picture (Paxton K. Baker, *CNN*, June 23, 2020)

Anti-Asian Racism (Related to COVID-19)

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

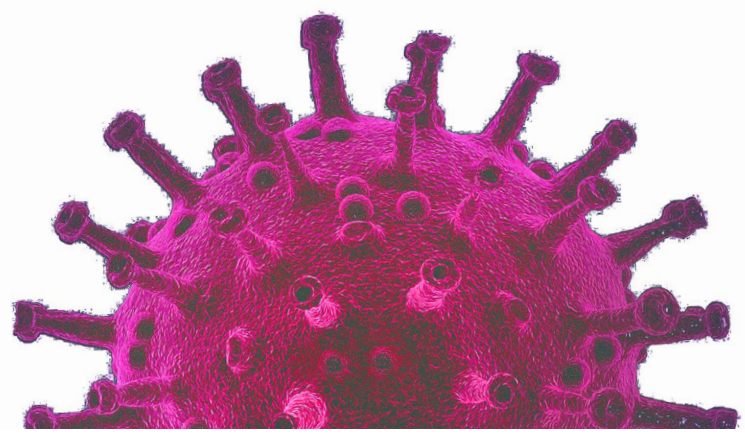
- Have you heard the terms "Chinese Virus" or "Kung-Flu" to describe COVID-19/Coronavirus? Where did you hear it and from whom?
- How did you feel when you heard it? What did you do?
- What message do these phrases convey?
- Have you referred to COVID-19 as the "Chinese Virus" or "Kung-Flu?" If so, why did you use those terms?
- Do you think it is harmful to use this terminology to describe the virus, even if only in a "joking" way? Why or why not?
- How do you think this language impacts Asian people? How does this language impact our school community? Society as a whole?

History

Global anxiety about the outbreak of the coronavirus has led to the spread of much misinformation and scapegoating. In schools and communities in the U.S., we have seen incidents of harassment, violence, anti-immigrant bias and anti-Asian racism targeting members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. These incidents include reports of being told to "Go back to China," being blamed for "bringing the virus" to the United States, being called racial slurs, being spat on and being physically assaulted. Statements made by public officials referring to COVID-19 as the "Chinese Virus," "Kung Flu" or "Wu Flu" are shaping the way in which Americans talk about the pandemic.

The scapegoating that has taken place in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak is not new. We define scapegoating as: "Blaming an individual or group for something based on that person or group's identity when the person or group is not responsible." Contagious diseases often fuel scapegoating, anti-immigrant bias and racism.

An early example of this scapegoating happened in Europe in the 1300s. As the Bubonic Plague spread, killing a quarter of the population in a few years, many people looked for an explanation. Jews, a religious and ethnic minority in Europe, were blamed for causing and spreading the plague. Hundreds of Jewish communities were targeted with violence in the misguided hope that killing all Jews would end the spread of disease. This violence was defended by stereotypical ideas that Jews were dirty, untrustworthy outsiders. Similarly, in the fifteenth century, as the sexually transmitted disease syphilis spread across the globe, each nation blamed another nation for the disease. Germany blamed France.



France blamed Italy. Poland blamed Russia. While blaming neighboring countries may have seemed like a way to manage the spread of disease, this tactic was ineffective and irrational.

Examples of blaming immigrants, people of color and ethnic minority groups for spreading illness and disease can be seen in more recent history as well. In the 1920s, associations between germs and immigrants led to immigration restrictions in New York City. As large groups of Irish immigrants arrived, cholera outbreaks swept the United States. Advice to avoid Irish people became widespread despite cholera being traced back to contaminated public water wells. In the 1980s, during the early days of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Haitian immigrants were singled out and blamed for spreading the disease. With the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, panic about the disease led to an increase in manifestations of explicit racism in the U.S. as people made the incorrect assumption that all Black people with ancestry in Africa carried Ebola.

Anti-Asian racism fueled by COVID-19 is based on irrational, misinformed and false ideas about the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community and the diverse continent of Asia. In the U.S., the recent uptick in anti-Asian racist incidents reinforces false ideas about who is American and what Americans look like. Asian people have been immigrating to the U.S. in large numbers since the mid-1800s and have been U.S. residents or citizens for generations. When Asian American people are told to "go back to China," it is important to remember that like the ancestors of white European immigrants, the U.S. is their home. When we blame a specific racial or ethnic group for spreading a contagious disease, we ignore the important reality that contagious diseases do not discriminate. And, we spread fear and racism.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- Why do you think this kind of racial scapegoating around illness has been a recurring theme throughout history?
- When fear is running high, why might people blame marginalized communities for societal problems?
- How would you intervene when you hear someone refer to COVID-19 by a racist name in the future?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide (Human Rights Watch, May 12, 2020)

Coronavirus: Protect Yourself and Stand Against Racism (Facing History and Ourselves)

"Build the Wall"

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- Have you seen or heard the phrase "Build the Wall" in the news, in school, in your community, etc.?
- What do you think is meant by the phrase "Build the Wall?"
- Who is the phrase targeting?
- What are your thoughts and feelings when you hear this phrase?
- How do you think other people feel when they hear this phrase?
- Aside from the construction of a wall at the southern border of the U.S., what other meanings might this phrase have? Do you think those meanings are harmful? Why or why not?

History

While campaigning for the U.S. presidency in 2015, Donald Trump called for an expansion of the already-existing physical barrier between the U.S. and Mexico. As part of a larger anti-immigration policy proposal, the wall was meant to prevent people from unlawfully crossing the border into the U.S. Anti-immigration rhetoric and ideas became central to Trump's campaign, and the chant "Build the Wall" became popularized among his supporters.

The rallying cry "Build the Wall" has been used to target immigrants and the Latinx community, or those from Latin America, as well as immigrants from other parts of the world. Coupled with the chant have been narratives that immigrants are responsible for bringing crime and violence into U.S. cities and towns. While this false story creates fear and anger against immigrants and the Latinx community, studies have shown that immigrants—regardless of where they are from, what immigration status they hold and how much education they have completed—are less likely than native-born citizens to commit crimes or become incarcerated. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, while the overall percentage of immigrants (documented and undocumented) in the U.S. increased sharply between 1990 and 2010, the violent crime rate in the U.S. during that time dropped by 45 percent.

Additional misinformation about immigrants includes the idea that immigrants hurt our country financially by taking jobs and not paying taxes. Though some people claim that immigrants are taking job opportunities away from people born in the U.S., immigrants help to create new jobs. In addition to buying U.S. and local products, which helps create jobs, immigrants are more likely than native-born citizens to start their own businesses and hire employees. States with large numbers of immigrants report lower unemployment rates for everyone. In addition, immigrants participate fully in our economy and collectively pay between $90 and $140 billion each year in taxes. A recent study found that undocumented immigrants alone pay approximately $11.64 billion in taxes each year. On average, immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits, meaning the taxes they pay more than cover the cost of things like public education and healthcare.

Many immigrants who cross the southern border, including those without documentation, are doing so to flee poverty, violence and persecution in other parts of the world. Many travel thousands of miles on foot in hopes of establishing a better life. Despite the lack of documentation to remain in the U.S. for an extended

period, immigrants coming to the U.S. can enter legally when seeking asylum or traveling to a new country to escape violence and the threat of violence. Women, children and LGBTQ+ people are among those facing disproportionate levels of sexual and physical violence in the Northern Triangle countries—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Attempts to keep out those who are immigrating and seeking asylum places many people in grave danger.

The U.S. prides itself on being a nation welcoming to immigrants. Except for Indigenous Peoples, who occupied the country's land for thousands of years, all people living in the U.S. today are from or have ancestry in another country. Calls to "Build the Wall" ignore this reality and the long history of immigration from Europe and around the globe. While there may be national immigration challenges to address, it is possible to create both processes and policies that treat immigrants with dignity and respect.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What did you learn that surprised you?
- How do you think myths and stereotypes about immigrants impact the way we talk about immigration and Latinx people in general?
- What questions do you still have?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Myths and Facts About Immigrants and Immigration (ADL)

Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants (Abby Budiman, Pew Research Center, August 20, 2020)

Anti-Immigrant Bias

(Sometimes Called "Xenophobia")

"Go Back to Where You Came From"

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- Have you ever heard someone say "Go back to where you came from"? What happened?
- What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you hear this expression?
- What did you think is meant by the phrase "Go back to where you came from"?
- How do you think those to whom this phrase is directed feel when they hear it?
- How do you think other people feel when they hear this phrase?
- What assumptions are being made when this phrase is used?

History

The phrase "Go back to where you came from" is widely recognized as a racist and anti-immigrant insult. Having been directed at several groups throughout U.S. history, it communicates that those who do not fit a narrow definition of what it means to be "American" are out of place and not welcome. The insult has been directed both at people who have immigrated to the U.S. and at people who were born here. Assumptions are made based on race, ethnicity or other features (e.g., an accent) that the person "does not belong."

One of the earliest examples of anti-immigrant policy dates to 1798 with the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts. This set of laws made it more difficult for immigrants to gain citizenship and vote. It also allowed for the imprisonment and deportation of noncitizens if they opposed the government. These laws were in direct conflict with the Constitution, and some states declared them invalid. What these laws didn't consider was that all European settlers in the U.S. were immigrants, some more recent immigrants than others.

This anti-immigrant bias became explicitly racist in the years leading up to the abolition of slavery. The Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery in 1865, but Black people were not granted citizenship in the U.S. until several years later. Despite having a long history of living in the U.S., newly freed Black people were left without an official nation. During these years, a push to send Black people "back" to Africa gained momentum. In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment granted Black people not only citizenship but also the "right to residence" in a country they had lived in for generations. White America's push to send Black people "back" to a continent that they had never known communicated that Black people were unwelcome and un-American.

This racist and offensive language continues to be used today. One notable example is the recent tweet posted by President Trump in July 2019 directed toward four U.S. members of Congress, all women of color (Ocasio-Cortez, Omar, Pressley and Tlaib). Trump's tweet stated these women should "go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came." All four Congresswomen are U.S. citizens and three of them were born in the U.S.

This language reinforces the idea that immigrants, people who speak languages other than English and people of color cannot *also be* American (or should not be allowed to be in the U.S.). This conveys harmful messages that contradict our nation's values. This language also ignores an important piece of family

history for most people who live in the U.S. Except for Indigenous Peoples, who inhabited the country's land for thousands of years before Europeans arrived, all people living in the U.S. today are from or have ancestry in another country.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What ideas would you like to explore further?
- Why do you think this anti-immigrant and racist language has been used to target various groups throughout history?
- How would you respond if you were to hear this insult being used?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Myths and Facts About Immigrants and Immigration (ADL)

Key Findings about U.S. Immigrants (Abby Budiman, Pew Research Center, August 20, 2020)

Terrorist References and Bomb Jokes

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- Have you ever heard Muslim people being referred to as terrorists? What happened?
- Have you heard or participated in jokes about bombs, especially around Muslim people? If so, please explain the joke. Who did you learn it from?
- What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you hear terrorist references and jokes about bombs when talking about Muslim people?
- How might this kind of language impact Muslim people?
- How might this language impact our school community and society in general?
- Where do you think the stereotypes about Muslim people come from?

History

There are a variety of myths, misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslim people that are reinforced in everyday life, language and media. Anti-Muslim bias has long existed in the U.S. However, following a terrorist attack that killed almost 3,000 people on September 11, 2001 (9/11) in New York City, the number of anti-Muslim incidents increased. Although the attack was perpetrated by the extremist group al-Qaeda, Muslims in the U.S. were broadly targeted with hate and bigotry relentlessly and for years to come.

Although the sitting president (George W. Bush) and other prominent leaders stated that Muslim people should not be collectively blamed for the attack, harmful stories and misinformation about Muslims and Islam gained momentum. One such incorrect idea was that Islam is a violent religion. This is simply not true. Extremism is not unique to Islam or any other specific religion, and those few who commit violence in the name of Islam do not represent the religion or its adherents. Despite this reality, Muslim adults and young people have been unfairly perceived as dangerous and violent.

These unfair and offensive assumptions have led to harassment and physical attacks against Muslim people in schools, workplaces and public spaces. They have also led to an increase in public humiliation including increased screening and profiling by airport security of Muslim people and others thought to be Muslim and increased surveillance of mosques. Media and language further reflect anti-Muslim attitudes with a rise in jokes suggesting all Muslims are terrorists and associating Muslims with bombs. According to a 2017 Pew Research Study, approximately one-third of the Muslim people surveyed said they had been treated with suspicion within the past year because of their religion.

Incidents of assault, vandalism and threats targeting Muslim individuals and institutions in the U.S. tend to noticeably spike in the aftermath of terrorist attacks linked to Islamic extremists in the U.S. or abroad. When we hold an entire group accountable for the harmful actions of a few individuals, we criminalize a religious identity, making an entire group of people, and in turn, all faith communities, unsafe.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before? What surprised you?
- What questions do you still have?

- In what ways do you think life changed for Muslim Americans after September 11?
- Why is it harmful to blame the actions of a few people on an entire group?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Myths and Facts about Muslim People and Islam (ADL)

Islamophobia and Being an Ally (ADL)

Jokes, Excuses and Why Words Matter (ADL)

"That's So Gay"

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- Have you heard the phrase "that's so gay"? How did you feel when you heard it?
- What do you think is meant when someone says "That's so gay"?
- Does the phrase most accurately express what you (or the person who said it) intended to say?
- How do you think this phrase impacts people who are gay, lesbian, bi, queer or questioning? How does this phrase impact our school community?

History

Language has the power to reinforce systems of bias and discrimination as well as to challenge those systems. Because we use language every day, it has the power to "casually" reinforce bias without us being aware of it. The phrase "that's so gay" is one way in which language sends harmful messages about people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer and questioning.

The word "gay" dates to the twelfth century and was used for centuries to mean "full of joy, carefree and lighthearted." Because language is created by people, the meanings of words often evolve and change over time. In the 1600s, "gay" became associated with overindulging in personal desires and passions. In 1951, "gay" appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary for the first time as a slang term defining people attracted to people of the same sex. While the dictionary acknowledged yet another shift in the definition of the word, "gay" began to be used by members of the LGBTQ+ community in the 1920s. As members of the LGBTQ+ community fought for equal rights, including the right to openly identify as gay, the word's definition became solidified.

The harmful phrase "that's so gay" began to be used in the 1990s as a replacement for words like "stupid," "undesirable," "disgusting" or "uncool." The phrase is frequently heard when referring to things that have nothing to do with romantic attraction or sexual orientation. This use of the phrase communicates that "gay" equals "stupid" or "bad." As a result, "that's so gay" carries with it a history of negative judgment and rigid ideas about who or what is acceptable.

While some people might dismiss the seriousness of this phrase as something "people just say," it's important to acknowledge a larger context of mistreatment and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community. In many communities and families in the U.S., people who are LGBTQ+ are forced to hide their identities in order to be physically and psychologically safe. LGBTQ+ youth represent almost 40 percent of homeless youth in the U.S. due to family rejection and are much more likely report high levels of depression.

The belief that there is something wrong, abnormal or shameful about being a member of the LGBTQ+ community has led to an extremely damaging practice called conversion therapy. This dangerous practice uses a series of physically and emotionally painful activities, with the goal of creating a negative association with being a member of the LGBTQ+ community. It is estimated that more than 700,000 LGBTQ+ people have been forced into this abusive practice, and tens of thousands will be in the future. To date, 20 states have banned conversion therapy, but there is no federal law forbidding this practice.

In addition to conversion therapy, there are other laws and practices that uphold the system of anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry. It wasn't until 2015 that marriage equality became the law of the land in all 50 states. Several states

continue to have marriage equality bans written into their laws, showing a resistance to equity in these communities across the country. LGBTQ+ people disproportionately face challenges in adopting children, receiving necessary healthcare, obtaining employment and accessing other fundamental resources. Globally, it remains illegal to be LGBTQ+ in 71 countries throughout the world, punishable by jail or worse.

The short- and long-term impact of a phrase like "that's so gay" is harmful whether LGBTQ+ people are present to hear that language or not. According to GLSEN's 2017 National School Climate Survey, almost all of LGBTQ students (98.5%) had heard "gay" used in a negative way (e.g., "that's so gay") at school, and 91.8 percent reported feeling distressed because of this language. In a world that continues to reject and harm people simply because of who they are, it is critical that we find better, more accurate and inclusive language to describe things we don't like.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What did you learn that surprised you?
- In what ways might the phrase "that's so gay" reinforce negative ideas about people who are LGBTQ+?
- How would you intervene if you hear someone using this phrase in the future?
- If you are tempted to use this phrase, what will you say instead?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

The History and Impact of Anti-LGBT Slurs (ADL)

History of the Word "Gay" (PBS)

The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools (GLSEN, 2017)

About Conversion Therapy (The Trevor Project)

Tackling Homophobic Language (Stonewall Education Guides)

National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health 2019 (The Trevor Project)

LGBTQ Youth (StopBullying.gov)

F-Word

Reminder: Make sure to use censored words (for example, n-word, r-word) in the place of slurs so that you do not perpetuate the harm while addressing the incident.

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- Have you heard this word used?
- What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you hear it?
- Where did you learn this word from?
- How do you think this word impacts people who are LGBTQ+?
- How do you think this impacts other people? How might this word impact the school community?

History

The F-word has been part of the English language since the 1300s. During the European Inquisitions, the term referred to a bundle of sticks that would be used to set fire to people who opposed the teachings of the Catholic Church. To avoid being killed, some people shifted their beliefs in support of the Church. Though no longer seen as a threat to political and social life, those who once opposed the Church would be forced to wear a "fagot" design embroidered on their sleeve to signify a damaged reputation. This practice shifted the meaning of the word, and it became used to describe things that were a burden or difficult to bear. Often, people would use the word as a sexist insult to describe women who were perceived to be limiting the freedom of their husbands.

Later on, the word was used to refer to men who were less masculine than people thought they should be. During the twentieth century, the F-word became the slur most used to disrespect gay men and men perceived to be gay. Because of the widespread anti-LGBTQ+ bias that exists, the slur has become an insult that is often used to insult both the LGBTQ+ community and straight men.

Though language is one tool that is used to reinforce the system of anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry, it is important to acknowledge a larger context of mistreatment and discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community. In many communities and families in the U.S., people who are LGBTQ+ are forced to hide their identities in order to be physically and psychologically safe. LGBTQ+ youth represent almost 40 percent of homeless youth in the U.S. due to family rejection and are much more likely report high levels of depression.

The belief that there is something wrong, abnormal or shameful about being a member of the LGBTQ+ community has led to an extremely damaging practice called conversion therapy. This dangerous practice uses a series of physically and emotionally painful activities with the goal of creating a negative association with being a member of the LGBTQ+ community. It is estimated that more than 700,000 LGBTQ+ people have been forced into this abusive practice, and tens of thousands will be in the future. To date, 20 states have banned conversion therapy but there is no federal law forbidding this practice.

In addition to conversion therapy, there are other laws and practices that uphold the system of anti-LGBTQ+ bigotry. It wasn't until 2015 that marriage equality became the law of the land in all 50 states. Several states continue to have marriage equality bans written into their laws, showing a resistance to equity in several communities across the country. LGBTQ+ people disproportionately face challenges in adopting children,

receiving necessary healthcare, obtaining employment and accessing other fundamental resources. Globally, it remains illegal to be LGBTQ+ in 71 countries throughout the world, punishable by jail.

In using anti-LGBTQ+ slurs, people communicate support for a culture that makes LGBTQ+ people unsafe. This language not only reinforces the policies and practices that harm LGBTQ+ people, but it also communicates that LGBTQ+ people don't deserve to be respected and valued.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What surprised you about what you learned?
- What questions do you still have?
- In what ways do you think this slur reinforces a culture that harms LGBTQ+ people?
- When you hear this term in the future, how will you challenge it or intervene?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

The History and Impact of Anti-LGBT Slurs (ADL)

Study Shows Anti-LGBT Slurs Still Used for Harm (Dani Heffernan, GLAAD, January 24, 2012)

Misgendering and Deadnaming Transgender and Nonbinary Students

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- Have you noticed that you and others do not use accurate pronouns for peers and classmates? How do you think that makes them feel?
- Are there reasons you find it difficult to use correct pronouns for your peers and classmates?
- How would you feel if someone disregardedor did not acknowledge an important part of your identity?
- How do you think people who are transgender and nonbinary are impacted when you use the wrong pronouns?
- How do you think this impacts the school community?

History

We use people's pronouns and names frequently in regular, everyday communication both verbally and in writing. We do it almost without thinking. Because names and pronouns are the two ways people speak to and about others, they are personal and important. They are also key pieces of our identity. Therefore, calling someone by the wrong name, "deadnaming" them (referring to a trans person by the name they used before they transitioned) or "misgendering" them by using incorrect pronouns is disrespectful and harmful and can make people feel unsafe.

Beginning at an early age, many people are taught that pronouns should follow specific rules: "she, her and hers" should be used to describe girls and women and "he, him and his" should be used to describe boys and men. We've also been taught that the sex we are assigned at birth (male or female) based on external genitalia (penis or vagina) determines which of two gender identities (boy or girl) we will have. Over time, we've come to understand that not all sexual anatomy fits into two categories and that sex does not determine gender identity. Gender identity is about who someone is internally. It can't be seen, and it is not determined by the sex someone is assigned at birth. Because the "rules" constructed by society can sometimes limit who we are told we can be, gender identity might change over time.

As our society has evolved, our language has expanded to be able to describe a variety of gender identities and experiences. People whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth are referred to as cisgender. For other people, gender identity does not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth. They might describe themselves as transgender, gender nonconforming or nonbinary. Because more language is needed to describe the wide range of gender identities people hold, some people don't yet feel there is language to describe who they are. There is no "one way" to look based on identity, and people outwardly express their gender identity in a variety of ways.

When people tell us who they are and what name and pronouns they'd like us to use to refer to them, it's important that we listen. While some people might think that using incorrect pronouns or names is "not a big deal," it's critical to recognize that respecting who people are is a fundamental part of creating safety for people of all genders. A national survey on discrimination against transgender people revealed that 78 percent of transgender and gender nonconforming K-12 students reported harassment. In many cases,

harassment has led to violence, and transgender and gender nonconforming people are disproportionately the targets of physical assault and hate crimes.

Though non-inclusive language is one tool that is used to reinforce a system that harms transgender and gender nonconforming people, it is important to acknowledge a larger context of mistreatment and discrimination. In many communities and families in the United States, people who are LGBTQ+ are forced to hide their identities in order to be physically and psychologically safe. LGBTQ+ youth represent almost 40 percent of homeless youth in the United States due to family rejection and are much more likely report high levels of depression. Studies have shown that using someone's appropriate pronoun and name reduces the instances of attempted suicide.

The belief that there is something wrong, abnormal or shameful about being transgender or gender nonconforming has led to an extremely damaging practice called conversion therapy. This dangerous practice uses a series of physically and emotionally painful activities in hopes of creating a negative association with being LGBTQ+. It is estimated that more than 700,000 LGBTQ+ people have been forced into this abusive practice and tens of thousands will be in the future.

In failing to use language that honors and respects who people are, we reinforce a culture that makes transgender, nonbinary and gender nonconforming people unsafe. Because every human being deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, it is important that we use accurate names and pronouns. That may involve learning new terms or moving away from language that we've traditionally used.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- What questions do you still have?
- Have you shifted your thinking around the importance of using accurate pronouns and names?
- What steps should we take in school to build a more inclusive environment for transgender, nonbinary and gender nonconforming students and staff?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Let's Get It Right: Using Correct Pronouns and Names (ADL)

Beyond the Binary: Discussing Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity in K-12 Schools (ADL)

Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (National Center for Transgender Equality)

Pronouns 101: Why They Matter and What to Do (and Not Do) if You Misgender Someone
(Kay Martinez, October 7, 2019)

R-Word

Reminder: Make sure to use censored words (for example, n-word, r-word) in the place of slurs so that you do not perpetuate the harm while addressing the incident.

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- Do you think this word most accurately describes what you are intending to say?
- How do you think this word impacts individuals? How might this word impact the school community?
- What do you know about how people with disabilities are treated in our society?

History

During the mid-1400s, the verb "retard" was defined as slowing down or holding back. Because language is created by humans and the meaning of words change over time, the term shifted in the early 1900s to describe children with intellectual disabilities. First used in a pediatric medicine journal, the term was not widely considered offensive, and it replaced terms such as "idiot," "moron," and "imbecile" in medical vocabulary. The word was not broadly used in the U.S. until the 1940s, during which time it began to be used to intentionally demean and insult people.

Today, the R-word is used to "casually" describe things that are negative, stupid or unwanted. While some might consider this word to be harmless, this language communicates that people with disabilities are stupid or flawed. This not only perpetuates harmful stereotypes but it also reinforces ableism, or a system that disrespects and discriminates against people with disabilities. As part of this discrimination, able-bodied people (people without disabilities) are seen as "normal" and superior.

Throughout history, disability has been used as an excuse to harm people in a variety of ways. In the late 1800s, several states in the U.S. created "ugly laws" to keep "unsightly beggars" off the streets. People with disabilities would disproportionately be targeted with these discriminatory policies and were often charged fines or jailed. Unfairly seen as being unable to valuably contribute to society, people with disabilities have been forced into institutions, experimented on, and forcibly sterilized (or made unable to have children). It was not until the 1960s that efforts to shut down these institutions gained momentum.

Though stigma around disability has declined in recent years, people with disabilities continue to face collective discrimination. People with disabilities have challenges finding employment and make considerably less money than workers who are not disabled when hired. They are less likely to receive necessary healthcare, are disproportionately targeted with hate crimes and navigate a world that is largely designed to accommodate only those without disabilities. Assumptions that people with disabilities "need" or "want" to be "cured" do not meaningfully contribute to society; the idea that people with disabilities should be pitied creates a culture where harmful stereotypes and language thrive. Lack of representation and stereotypical representations in the media continue to be a source of bias for people with disabilities.

In 2010, Congress passed Rosa's Law, replacing the term "mental retardation" with "intellectual disability" in federal legislation. The law was named after Rosa Marcellino, a nine-year-old girl with Down syndrome who advocated with her mother for the removal of the R-word from legislation in Maryland. Because every

human being deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, it is important that we eliminate language that causes harm, even if it means moving away from terms we have regularly used in the past.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- Did you learn anything new?
- In what ways do you think the R-word causes harm?
- What are your thoughts around using the R-word moving forward?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Equal Treatment, Equal Access: Raising Awareness about People with Disabilities and Their Struggle for Equal Rights (ADL)

Rosa's Law Signed into Law by President Obama (Special Olympics)

History of Stigmatizing Names for Intellectual Disabilities Continued (MentalHelp.net)

The Effects of the R-Word (Spread the Word)

"SPED"

Pre-Education Reflection Questions

- Have you heard this word used before? In what situations have you heard it used?
- How did you feel when you heard it?
- Do you think this word best describes what you or the person meant to say?
- How do you think this word impacts people with disabilities? How might this word impact others? How might this word impact the school community?
- What do you know about how people with disabilities are treated in our society?

History

Special education programs have been part of our public school system for the past fifty years. Prior to the 1970s, parents of children with disabilities had few options for providing their children with an education other than homeschooling or paying for their children to attend expensive private schools. Without legislation banning discrimination against students with disabilities, roughly 4.5 million students were denied access to a good education. After decades of advocacy by parents of children with disabilities, in 1975, the U.S. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA). The EHA was fundamental in guaranteeing children with disabilities the right to receive free and high-quality public education. Over the years, the EHA has been updated to guarantee that students with disabilities receive an education that is tailored to meet their individual needs. Because of the specialized nature of this type of education, it is commonly referred to as "special education."

While special education services have come to be part of most schools, the language used to describe special education programs is sometimes damaging. "SPED" is often used as an abbreviation for "special education," the term most frequently used to refer to school programs that specialize in educating students with disabilities, especially mental or learning disabilities. While this might seem like a harmless abbreviation, this shortcut can have harmful impacts. This is especially true when "SPED" is used as a descriptor of people.

When "SPED" is used to describe students with disabilities, those students are automatically defined by one piece of their identity. This label fails to recognize the ways in which students with disabilities are incredibly diverse and have important identities that extend beyond their physical or intellectual ability. Because special education programs are often physically separated in school buildings, defining students as "SPEDs" reinforces ideas that students who receive specialized support are not a part of the larger school community.

The term "SPED" has also come to be used as a substitute for the word "stupid." Examples of this include students saying, "I'm being so SPED" after making a mistake or saying to peers, "You're such a SPED" in situations ranging from schoolwork mistakes to a fumble on the football field. The use of "SPED" to mean "stupid" perpetuates the idea that students with different learning needs are inherently less intelligent than their peers in general education. It also ignores the reality that mistakes are a part of life and learning for all people.

The system of ableism disrespects and discriminates against people with disabilities. Language that communicates that able-bodied people (people without disabilities) are "normal" and superior helps support a culture in which people with disabilities continue to be harmed.

Follow-Up Discussion Questions

- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- Did anything surprise you, and if so, what?
- In what ways do you think using the word "SPED" can cause harm? What message is being conveyed?
- How might you respond when you hear a friend or peer use "SPED" in the place of "stupid"? What can you do to intervene?

Additional Resources and Suggested Reading

Equal Treatment, Equal Access: Raising Awareness about People with Disabilities and Their Struggle for Equal Rights (ADL)

A Brief History of Special Education in the United States (All Education Schools)

The History of Special Education in the United States (*Special Education News*)

Ableism 101: What it Is, What it Looks Like, and What We Can Do to Fix it (*Access Living*)

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