

**Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild@HWDSB: Building a Community of Care**  
**Module 2 Understanding Identity and Intersectionality**

**Lesson # 13 - Check Your Privilege**

**Learning Goal:** To explore different aspects of identity and privilege and identify which identities give you unearned privilege and which identities do not.

**Key Vocabulary**

**Privilege:** A special right, advantage, or immunity granted only to a particular person or group. Privilege can be earned, or unearned. Privilege is often invisible (or hard to see) for those who have it.

**Myth of Meritocracy:** The myth that your success in life is based on your ability or how hard you work.

**Oppression:** Refers to the injustices and disadvantages some individuals or groups suffer because of intentional or unintentional practices within a society. Different identities come with different privileges and oppressions.

**Intersectionality:** How the combination or intersection of our multiple identities and the privileges and oppressions we experience influence our lives and how we interact with the world. No one experiences one form of privilege or oppression. Our lives are shared by our racialization, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability/disability, height (to name only a few). “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives.” —Audre Lorde

**Curriculum Connections**

**Social Studies Curriculum, Grades 1-8**



Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8

The combination of the citizenship education framework and the knowledge and skills in the curriculum expectations brings citizenship education to life, not only in social studies, history, and geography, but in many other subjects as well.

**The Citizen Education Framework** in the front material of the Social Studies/ History and Geography curriculum outlines the information and skills a learner needs to understand in order to study History and Geography. One quadrant focuses on Identity, and one's place within their local and the global community. This lesson is a component of students acquiring the knowledge necessary to understand themselves, and their role as citizens of Canada.

**Tools and Materials**

- Recycled pieces of paper, and a recycling box
- Questionnaires for students to complete

**Modification for Remote Learning:** PowerPoint will include visuals, worksheet/questionnaire and modifications needed for teaching this lesson remotely. Students will use whatever supplies they have at home.

**Prior Knowledge Required:**

Students will need to know some personal information about themselves and their families such as religion, race and other personal signifiers.

### Educator Pre-reflection

**Learning Objectives**–At the end of this activity, you and students will be able to:

- Visualize how your identity lines up with dominant groups
- See which identities give you unearned privilege and which identities do not
- Understand the assumed norm (aka dominant identity) in the various systems of oppression

### Before engaging in this lesson, consider:

\*Please be aware that race is a heavy burden many racialized students carry even at a very early age due to their lived experiences. If a racialized student is unwilling to share, participate, or even be present for these conversations, it may be due to personal triggers. Thus, forcing them to participate in a conversation about race where they do not feel safe may cause added harm to such students. As the expert on your students' background history, triggers, body language, and classroom dynamics, please make informed and empathetic decisions regarding ensuring a safe and inclusive setting to engage in these brave conversations.

Tips for talking about race with students (<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/race-talk-engaging-young-people-in-conversations-about>) The article linked with give you some tools and support leading these conversations.

Recognize that you are a learner too, and that you are also working towards becoming an Anti-Racist Ally

### Student Pre-reflection

Before you begin, think about...

- *What privileges do you enjoy in your daily life?*

### Provocation

It is quite possible that you enjoy quite a few privileges that you may not even be aware of. You may even take what you have for granted. Such is the nature of privilege, but it can be a hard thing to understand, even for adults.

For in-person learning: Here's a demonstration to help students visualize privilege:

- First, all the students receive a piece of paper and crumple it into a ball.
- Then, the recycling bin is placed in front of the classroom.
- Tell students they represent the country's population, and they all have a chance to reach the upper class/ wealthy class/ 1%.
- All they must do is throw their paper balls into the bin while sitting in their seats.
- Students in the back of the room will have a much more difficult time and will cite unfairness.

- Most students in the front will make it, and only a few in the back will make it, as expected.

**For Remote Learning Classrooms:** [Students Learn a Powerful Lesson About Privilege \(1.45 mins\)](#)

### Teacher Prompts:

1. “The closer you were to the recycling bin, the better your odds: this is privilege. Did you notice how most of the folks who complained were in the back of the room?”
2. “And the people in front of room were less likely to be aware of their privilege.”
3. “Privilege is a special right, advantage, or immunity granted only to a particular person or group. Privilege can be earned, or unearned. Privilege is often invisible (or hard to see) for those who have it. Who was privileged in this activity? Did they earn it?”
4. “How is this exercise related to race and racialization in Canada?”

Show students the image of the iceberg- explaining the significance of the underwater portion of the iceberg. Explain that some privileges (like where people are sitting) are visible. And some are invisible. Note that Professor Peggy McIntosh developed a test to help people “unpack the invisible knapsack” of privilege. What does she mean by “unpacking the invisible knapsack?” (Prompt: *A lot of privileges are invisible to us, as we don't see what we benefit from, just what we are missing in comparison to others.*)

### Learning Task/Activity

Distribute the handout/post on the Hub: “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack: Questionnaire” to students.

Remind students that this is an *independent reflection activity* in that they are not to share the results with other people- it is for their own learning and understanding. (Keeping the questionnaire private is important so that students do not feel centered out or isolated or ashamed of their answers)

Students work through the questions, answering them as best as they can, adding comments if they feel the need to explain their answers.

When students are finished answering their questions, have them tally up their yes and no responses at the bottom of the questionnaire.

(Sources: This lesson is adapted from Peggy McIntosh's “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” from Working Paper 189: Wellesley College, 1989.)

### Consolidation

Lead a class discussion about the results using these questions/ prompts (remember it is not necessary for students to share/or for you to know the results of their questionnaires):

- *Think about how many “Yes” responses you had out of 15 on your questionnaire. (but don't tell me) What do you think this means in terms of the questions you answered?*
- *Look at one of the statements you answered “yes” to- is this a privilege? Why or why not? (Offer the example of #3- is this an earned, or unearned privilege? Why might this be a problem for people who answered no?)*
- *(Put up the image of the iceberg:) Some of the statements you reflected on were more invisible as privileges- that is, when we have them, we don't notice them. Let's look at this graphic. How does this help you visualize the types of privilege you read about?*

#### **Educator/Student Post-Reflection**

- *How does your new understanding of privilege change how you think about your identity?*
- *Why is it important to recognize “privilege?”*

#### **Ideas for Going Deeper/Further Resources**

Read more of McIntosh's examples at: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>

#### **Looking at “Reverse Racism”:**

Polling has suggested that many white people in the USA now believe that prejudice against white people is a bigger problem in North America than racism against Black people [www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/21/white-people-think-racism-is-getting-worse-against-white-people/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/21/white-people-think-racism-is-getting-worse-against-white-people/). Statistically, it is not. Some people have even begun to use the term “reverse racism” to describe perceived prejudice against white people.

Racial prejudice against white people can exist in North America and may be rooted in similar forms of hate and ignorance as racism against Black people, but it does not qualify as “racism” because the systemic and cultural container that it happens in still awards privilege to, and does not specifically oppress, white people.

Racial prejudice against white people may exist, but “reverse racism” against white people does not.

Part of the difference is the effect of the prejudice on people and society. Racism (reinforced by systemic and cultural forces) has a much bigger effect on people and society than prejudice, which is not amplified by those layers.