



## **Lesson 5: Bringing it Home**

### *Students Handouts and Supporting Materials for Teachers*

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## How Diverse is Your School Community?

There's a lot of talk these days about diversity in schools, but how aware are you of your school's particular makeup? Do you know which racial, ethnic and class groups are most and least represented in your school? Do you know how these numbers compare to other schools in your district or to your community as a whole?

**1. Consult one or more of the following sources in order to research your school's demographics—the characteristics of the people who go there.**

- Your school and district Web sites
- The administrative staff at your school or district office
- Your town's city hall or public records office
- A local newspaper
- The reference section of your public library

**2. Once you know where to locate the information you need, work with your teacher to identify one or more of the following items to research.**

- The total number of students in your school and district
- The percentage of students in your school and district from the following racial groups: African American, Latina/o, White, Asian, Native American, and Multiracial
- The percentage of people in your town or city from the following racial groups: African American, Latina/o, White, Asian, Native American, and Multiracial
- The percentage of students in your school and district categorized as poor (usually measured by the number of students who receive free or reduced price lunch)
- The percentage of people in your town or city categorized as poor
- The percentage of students in your school and district who are categorized as English Language Learners
- The percentage of people in your town or city who are categorized as English Language Learners
- The above figures for other neighborhood schools (for comparison purposes)

## Don't Talk to Her

*The reflection below is by Dane Pennerman, a student struggling with the social boundaries that exist in his middle school.*

As Roberto and I entered the cafeteria, I saw my friend Melissa.

"What's up, Melissa?"

Roberto punched me and said, "Don't speak to her."

"Why?"

"She's a Rocker."

"Roberto, she's still my friend."

As Roberto and I proceeded to the lunch line, I saw my buddy Hakeem.

"Hey Dane, come sit with us?" Hakeem offered.

"Go ahead, Dane, I'll catch you later," Roberto said, looking at me blankly.

"No, Roberto, you can come, too!"

Roberto looked at Hakeem's table and said to me, "I'll just see you after school, Dane."

All these people were some of my best friends in elementary school. What happened? When did I miss this? When did these boundaries go up around me? And more important, why hadn't I noticed them? Was I trying to pretend that they didn't exist?

The close friendships I had cultivated in elementary school were disappearing. All of my friends were now in their own "cliques."

The school cafeteria was now divided into Rockers, African Americans, Hispanics, and the Popular Kids. Why couldn't we all hang out together? Why does Hakeem call me "white boy" when he sees me talking to my Caucasian friends? Why does Roberto only know me between classes?

How am I supposed to handle this?

I view Hakeem, Melissa, and Roberto as friends, equally. How can I look beyond appearances, when it's the main focus of everyone around me? Am I wrong for not participating in the boundaries my friends create?

Sometimes I try to discuss the issues my friends have with each other. Is there really any basis for the ill feelings? I feel their dislike for each other is unwarranted.

I have yet to hear valid reasons from anyone. I remember talking to Hakeem. He told me Roberto's not really my friend: "Just because the two of you have a class together and walk in the halls together means nothing. When his Spanish friends come around, he doesn't know you, Dane."

I feel social boundaries are a way to avoid the things we are afraid of, things we may not understand about others. The way a person chooses to dress or the color of his or her skin should not separate us.

Melissa's black clothing is the way she chooses to look on the outside. Clothes do not make the person. Melissa faces some of the same challenges in life as a teen that Roberto and Hakeem face. When I try to find differences between my three friends, outside of individual appearance, there are none.

I know the three of them would really like each other if they gave one another a chance. On a daily basis, I push my friends to become friends. I always follow a negative remark with a positive one. I'm always quick to point out good points about one friend to the other.

I feel I am in the middle of something that may last my entire life, well after my middle school years. This bothers me. How can I get Rockers, Hispanics, and African Americans to accept each other?

I know communication is one way to mend this rift. If people who look different on the outside can get past appearances, then we will be able to heal.

Maybe as teens of the new millennium, we can solve this problem and cross all social boundaries.

*This essay was written by Dane Pennerman for Mix It Up. It appears at <http://www.tolerance.org/teens/stories/article.jsp?p=0&ar=32>.*

## How to *Mix it Up*

*Mix It Up supports the efforts of students who are interested in identifying, questioning and crossing social boundaries. Mix It Up is a project of Tolerance.org, Teaching Tolerance, and the Study Circles Resource Center.*

### How to *Mix it Up*

At many schools around the country, the cafeteria at lunchtime is a social map of the whole school—a map criss-crossed with boundaries. These boundaries exist for many reasons — habit, friendship, status, fear, prejudice. The simple space of a cafeteria table is, for many of us, a comfort zone where we can be ourselves with those who know us best. Touch base. Regroup. Let down the guard that classroom pressures often require of us. For others, the lunchroom with all its boundaries is a world with its own pressures — a world of familiar strangers and rigid expectations. But each year students across the country stir things up in their school cafeterias. And you can do it, too. Here are some ideas to help you Mix It Up at lunch.

### Reach out

All it takes is one person venturing outside the comfort zone to stir things up, but on Mix It Up Day, why not have a whole crowd sitting someplace new? Ask your friends to join in. Pitch the idea to the clubs, sports teams and other groups you belong to. Get teachers and administrators on board. Publicize the event with posters, stickers, raps and t-shirts.

### Plan

How are you going to “do the day?” Here are five ways to mix up lunchroom seating.

- Create a “calendar” out of 12 tables and sit by birth month or by Zodiac signs.
- Number several tables and draw your seat assignment from a hat.
- Draw colored candies out of a bag and sit with the matching tablecloth.
- Find a table where you don't know more than two people.
- Give each person a “ticket” that matches the color tag on a chair.

### Act

The day has arrived and you're sitting at a new table staring at a bunch of people you don't know. What now? Here are five ideas to jump-start the conversation.

- What's the last CD you bought?
- Imagine you rule the world. What's the first law you'd make?
- What's the craziest thing you ever did in public?
- You're signing autographs. What are you famous for?
- You're the principal. What's the first class you drop—and what class do you add?

### Dig Deeper

How'd it go? What worked? What didn't? What did you enjoy? Does your school need to look more closely at social boundaries? Start a *Mix It Up Dialogue*—visit <http://www.mixitup.org> to learn how.

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