Empowering Students, Challenging Bias
A Middle School Curriculum

GRADE LEVELS: Middle School (grades 6, 7, 8)

TOPICS: Communication, Conflict Resolution, Identity, Media, Bias, Bullying and Cyberbullying, Injustice, Social Action, Student Advocacy

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language

About the Middle School Curriculum

Empowering Students, Challenging Bias is a curriculum for middle school educators who want to promote anti-bias concepts in order to create safe, respectful and equitable classroom and school environments. This anti-bias curriculum is organized into five instructional units with 30 lesson plans in total.
The lesson plans encourage youth to reflect on their identity, understand and appreciate differences, explore societal issues arising from bias and discrimination, understand how people have historically confronted bias and injustice and take leadership roles in promoting justice and equity in their schools, community and society.

The anti-bias curriculum can also be used in Advisory, Social Studies and Health classes as well as integrated into other subject areas. Advisors for after-school diversity and affinity clubs can use the lesson plans to help youth understand issues and build upon that knowledge to create change in their school and community. An integrated approach to anti-bias education is significantly more powerful than tying it to one subject area.

The curriculum includes a bibliography, glossary and professional resources for educators.

**Anti-Bias Education**

Educational environments that reflect the rich diversity of the community, nation and world assist in opening young people's minds and actively engaging them in their own learning. Research has shown that prejudice is countered when schools and classrooms foster critical thinking, empathy development and positive self-esteem in youth.

*Anti-bias education* is a comprehensive approach to learning designed to actively challenge stereotyping, prejudice and all forms of discrimination. Creating inclusive, respectful classrooms where youth feel comfortable talking about difficult but important issues is an ongoing effort and working for social justice is a life-long endeavor. To prepare for successful learning of anti-bias concepts in the classroom, teachers should consider some **criteria** for creating positive, anti-bias environments where respect for diversity is taught, modeled and experienced firsthand.
With comprehensive anti-bias education, the mastery skills that participants acquire include the following:

- Young people understand the various dimensions of identity and apply this understanding to their thinking and behavior.
- Young people develop an understanding of basic terms and concepts relating to prejudice and discrimination and apply this understanding to their interactions with others.
- Young people increase their understanding of the impact of culture on communication and apply this understanding to their interactions with others.
- Young people develop the capacity to recognize and acknowledge bullying, prejudice and discrimination in themselves, in others and within institutions.
- Young people develop and put into practice skills to challenge bullying, bias and discrimination in themselves and others.

Overview of Units

**Unit I: Setting a Respectful Classroom Tone** provides lesson plans to build a solid foundation for students' social and emotional skill development. The lesson plans help students feel safe in their classroom; expand their feelings vocabulary and empathize with others; communicate effectively; manage conflict; and learn to work as a team member.

**Unit II: Identity and Differences** provides lesson plans to build a sense of self and explore the concepts of identity and differences. The lesson plans help students consider various aspects of identity and the identity groups to which they belong; examine the positive and negative aspects of diversity; and explore groups, cliques and friendship.
Unit III: Analyzing Where We Get Information provides lesson plans to build students’ critical thinking skills in analyzing the information they receive and absorb. The lesson plans help students differentiate fact from opinion; explore the concept of perspective; consider various information sources; assess and analyze online information; reflect on misinformation, rumors and gossip; and learn about advertising and propaganda.

Unit IV: Understanding Bullying, Bias and Injustice provides lesson plans to build an understanding of the bias and injustice young people see in their world. The lesson plans help students understand what stereotyping and bias are; explore the different forms bias takes; reflect on bullying, identity-based bullying and cyberbullying; explore how media perpetuate bias; and gain insight into the escalation of hate.

Unit V: Challenging Bias and Injustice provides lesson plans to empower students to do something about the bias, discrimination and bullying they encounter. The lesson plans help students understand how to be an ally; challenge bias in words, actions and online; explore the differences between equality and equity; and engage in social action and other projects that improve their school, community and world.

Anti-Bias Framework

Each lesson in Empowering Students, Challenging Bias has a core activity for young people and extension ideas that include writing activities and fit within English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. Educators may find it useful to use specific lesson plans from a particular unit to support ongoing curricular content; however, we encourage the consideration of using the units sequentially. By progressing through the units in this manner, students build a strong foundation for analyzing and confronting bias. Each section consists of 5–7 lesson plans. All of the lesson plans build upon the previous lessons/units and are highly interactive, modeling a participatory process that encourages youth to actively engage with issues that affect their classroom, school and community. As youth
work together and share diverse perspectives and backgrounds, solving problems, brainstorming and discussing the material, they learn to communicate respectfully, cooperate and improve their critical thinking skills. Research indicates that all of these abilities are associated with decreased discriminatory behavior.

*Empowering Students, Challenging Bias* is offered in conjunction with a training from your local ADL office. This anti-bias training provides a framework for the curriculum's use in the classroom. It also helps participants: (1) recognize bias and the harm it inflicts on individuals and society, (2) explore the value of diversity, and (3) improve intergroup relations and combat racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism and all forms of prejudice and bigotry.

ADL offers half-day and full-day workshops.

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