Confronting Bias, Working Toward Equity

A High School Curriculum

GRADE LEVELS: High School (grades 9, 10, 11, 12)

TOPICS: Respectful Dialogue, Identity, Diversity, Culture and Communication, Bias, Oppression, Systemic Discrimination, Bullying and Cyberbullying, Media and Stereotypes, Social Injustice

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: Arts, Behavioral Studies, Civics, History, Language, Writing

Buy the Curriculum

It’s recommended to use the curriculum in conjunction with a training from your local ADL office.

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About the New High School Curriculum

Confronting Bias, Working Toward Equity: A High School Curriculum is for educators to use primarily with students in grades 9–12 as supplementary material to enhance or integrate into existing curricula. The materials have been designed to assist educators and students in exploring ways to ensure that the tenets of freedom and equality on which this country was built become realities. This anti-bias curriculum provides teachers with 36 lesson plans organized into
five instructional units. The lesson plans encourage young people to: (1) explore societal issues arising from bias and bigotry; (2) understand how systems of power and control work to oppress marginalized groups in society; (3) improve critical-thinking skills; (4) examine diverse viewpoints; and (5) take leadership roles in promoting justice and equity in their schools, communities and society at large. The anti-bias curriculum includes a bibliography, glossary and professional resources for educators.
The material in this anti-bias curriculum fits most naturally in Social Studies and English classes; however, it is also connected to other subject areas, providing excellent opportunities for team teaching and cross-discipline learning. An integrated approach to anti-bias education is significantly more powerful than one that asks young people to think about prejudice and discrimination only on certain days or with particular teachers.

Overview of Units

Unit I: Building a Strong Foundation provides lessons for students to create classroom and school climates that are conducive to the honest, respectful exchange of ideas. Lessons build upon one another, allowing for a deeper understanding of the importance of listening to one another, understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others, sharing diverse perspectives, and learning strategies for civil discourse.

Unit II: Identity and Diversity provides lessons for students to research and share their cultural experiences and explore how they connect with their intersecting identities. These lessons provide students with opportunities to explore the complexities of United States culture and to examine both the benefits and challenges of a diverse nation.

Unit III: Analyzing Information provides lessons for students to enhance their critical thinking skills. The lessons provide opportunities for students to examine sources of information, evaluate data and investigate historical and current events from multiple perspectives. Students consider how inaccurate information and the omission of facts and diverse perspectives about any given historical or contemporary event can lead to bias.

Unit IV: Examining Bias and Discrimination provides lessons for students to recognize sources of bias and explore how bias manifests itself in U.S. society. Using both historical and contemporary examples, students analyze how
stereotypes—such as those found in media, advertising and language—can lead to bias, scapegoating and exclusionary practices, including discrimination.

Unit V: Challenging Bias and Injustice provides lessons for students to share information about their own experiences with bias and to consider the effects of bias and discrimination on individuals, groups and society.

Curriculum Professional Development

Developing a plan for using this anti-bias curriculum in conjunction with the standard curriculum should take into account both the academic skills needed to successfully engage in the lesson plans as well as the level of maturity and experience required to discuss diversity issues safely and effectively.

It’s recommended to use Confronting Bias, Working Toward Equity in conjunction with a training that provides a framework for its use. To maximize the impact of the lessons, educators are encouraged to analyze their personal, school and classroom policies and practices regarding issues of diversity, inclusion and equity; and to engage with these challenging and emotional topics before they address these same topics with students. This professional development also helps participants to: (1) promote respectful, inclusive and safe learning environments and communities, (2) build understanding of the value and benefits of diversity, (3) improve intergroup relations, (4) eradicate anti-Semitism, racism, heterosexism and all forms of bigotry and (5) encourage personal responsibility in the promotion of justice and equity.

This professional development is offered as a half-day and full-day training.

Anti-Bias Framework

Each lesson in Confronting Bias, Working Toward Equity 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 unit consists of 6–8 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 young people 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.

**Anti-Bias Education**

Schools in the United States have long played a vital role in supporting the nation’s democratic ideals. Providing all students with a quality education—one in which academic and social development are inseparable goals—is essential to creating equal access to opportunity and fostering responsible citizenship.

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 young people.

**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 young people 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.