Nike's Ad and Believing in Something

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

In September 2018, Nike announced that Colin Kaepernick, the former N.F.L. quarterback with the San Francisco 49ers, would be prominently featured as part of its 30th anniversary “Just Do It” campaign. The campaign’s slogan “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything” is featured in the ad. Kaepernick previously had a deal with Nike from his time as a quarterback that was set to expire, but it was renegotiated into a multi-year deal in combination with this campaign.
Colin Kaepernick was a quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers from 2011 to 2016. In August 2016, Kaepernick decided to take a stand about racial injustice by refusing to stand for the National Anthem at football games. He spent much of the season either sitting or kneeling during the anthem. It was the subject of a lot of public discussion and controversy.

After the 2016 season, Kaepernick opted out of his contract with the 49ers, which made him a free agent at the beginning of the 2017 season; but he has not been hired by another team. In 2017, early in the football season, the controversy re-emerged again when more than 200 N.F.L. players across many NFL teams took a knee during the anthem. In addition to professional football players taking a knee, many middle and high school sports players across the country—as well as those in college—took a knee in solidarity with Kaepernick and the issues raised by his protest.

The protest movement that Kaepernick started has been interpreted by some as being disrespectful to the American flag and the military; political conservatives have widely condemned it. However, Kaepernick has been clear that his protest is about racial injustice and in particular about the ongoing deaths of Black and Latino men at the hands of police. Since the Nike ad came out featuring Kaepernick, there have been a variety of responses including praise for Nike and the ad, as well as people vowing to boycott Nike and their products.

The full Nike ad in commemoration of their 30th anniversary can be watched here: Nike-Dream Crazy (video)

Age
12 and up

Questions to Start the Conversation
- What have you heard about the new Nike ad featuring Colin Kaepernick?
Questions to Dig Deeper
(See the Additional Resources section for articles and information that address these questions.)

- What do the words in the ad mean to you? “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.”
- What do you think Kaepernick believes in and what did he sacrifice?
- What is something you strongly believe in that you would be willing to sacrifice something or “everything?”

Ideas for Taking Action
Ask: What can we do to help? What individual and group actions might make a difference?

- Help to organize an educational forum in your school to discuss the new Kaepernick Nike ad. Make connections to other issues that are relevant in your school and community such as the First Amendment, taking a knee, activism, racial injustice, allyship, or police brutality.
- On social media, express your thoughts about Nike’s ad and the related issues around Kaepernick’s protest and racial injustice. Search for key hashtags (e.g. #NikeAd, #Kaepernick) and remember to respectfully engage with others who either share or don't share your views. Keep an open mind and challenge yourself to understand different perspectives.
- Talk together as a family about something you believe in and consider engaging in activism around that issue or topic. Here are some suggestions:

10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism.

**Additional Resources**

- [Believe in Something: Nike, Kaepernick and Social Change](ADL Lesson Plan)
- [Students’ Right to Protest the Pledge and National Anthem: Advice for Supporting Young People](ADL Education Blog)
- [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](ADL Lesson Plan)
- [Athletes and Activism](ADL Lesson Plan)
- [Race, Perception and Implicit Bias](ADL Table Talk)
- [Teaching about Racism, Violence, Inequity and the Criminal Justice System](Collection of ADL resources)