



SCHOOL LUNCH POLICY: KIDS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In Spring 2015, two fourth grade students (boy and girl twins) in Somerset MA, decided it was time to do something about their school's lunch policy that required boys and girls to sit at separate tables on opposite sides of the school cafeteria. Henry and Henriette James wrote an article in their school's newspaper that questioned the policy and expressed their thoughts and feelings about separating boys and girls. To write it, they spent several weeks conducting research and interviewing people. In August 2015, North Elementary's principal announced that the policy was reversed and now boys and girls will be able to sit together at lunch. This news story has the potential to raise two important issues for elementary students: (1) the impact of separating boys and girls and (2) the power children have to make a difference in their school, community and society.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about Henry and Henriette's actions that led to the change in policy, explore their own opinions about gender norms/separating children by gender and write a persuasive essay about a school policy/rule they want to change.

See these additional ADL resources: *Current Events Classroom* "[Mo'Ne Davis and Gender Stereotypes](#)," "[Toys and Gender](#)" and "[We Can All Be 'Kid President'](#)"; [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#) and [How Can I Prevent Gender Bias In Young Children?](#)

Grade Level: grades 3–5

Time: 45–50 minutes

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn about and understand why Henry and Henriette wrote a letter for their school newspaper.
- Students will explore their own thoughts and opinions about gender norms and the impact of separating boys and girls.
- Students will write a persuasive essay that reflects their thoughts about a school policy they'd like to change.

Compelling Question: How can students make a difference in changing a school policy?

Material:

- “10-Year-Old Twins’ School Newspaper Article Prompts Lunch Policy Change” (ABC News, August 21, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/10-year-twins-school-newspaper-article-prompts-lunch/story?id=33233270>), one copy for each student
- Three signs prepared in advance: AGREE, DISAGREE and NOT SURE
- [Persuasive Essay Graphic Organizer](#) (one for each student)

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL’s [“Glossary of Education Terms.”](#))

- gender
- gender-neutral
- interview
- investigate
- newspaper
- opinion
- passions
- policy
- research
- separating
- twins
- valid
- voice

INFORMATION SHARING: WHO ARE HENRY AND HENRIET JAMES AND WHAT DID THEY DO?

1. Distribute a copy of the article [“10-Year-Old Twins’ School Newspaper Article Prompts Lunch Policy Change”](#) to all students. Read the article aloud and have the students follow along.
2. After reading the article, engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What happened?
 - What do you think Henry and Henriette decided to write an article in the school newspaper?
 - What made their efforts successful?
 - How do you think they felt when they heard the news about the rule changing?
 - How do you think others in the school felt (students, teachers, parents)?
 - What happens when boys and girls are not allowed to do certain activities together?
 - What message(s) are conveyed when you separate boys and girls for some/most activities?
3. Ask students if they can think of any other examples of when boys or girls are separated, treated differently or where people make assumptions about their interests and likes based on their gender.

Share the following story:

In 2012, a 13-year-old girl named McKenna Pope from New Jersey was upset because her 4-year-old brother wanted an Easy Bake oven because he loved to cook. She wanted to buy one for him, but when she went to the store, she found that the packaging was geared towards girls (only girls were featured on the boxes and in the commercial, gender specific were used). She created a petition to get Hasbro, the toy company, to make a more gender-neutral (explain what “gender-neutral” means) Easy Bake oven. She collected 45,000 signatures on her petition, saying that she found it “quite appalling” that “boys are not featured in packaging or promotional materials.” She added, “The oven comes in gender-specific hues:

purple and pink. I feel that this sends a clear message: women cook, men work.” Hasbro decided to make an additional oven in black, blue and silver. (Read more about this at www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/11/30/eighth-grader-tells-hasbro-man-up-the-easy-bake-oven.html or watch McKenna’s TEDTalk here at www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTK_cjVryIc)

HERE I STAND ACTIVITY: LET’S TALK ABOUT GENDER

1. Explain to students that they are going to do an activity that will help them explore their opinions. Ask students: *What is an opinion? What is the difference between a fact and an opinion?* Elicit from students and explain that facts are absolutely true statements (something that truly exists or happens) and opinions are what people feel and think about something, and that there can be a wide range of opinions or points of view about something. Ask for an example or share one such as: Bananas are yellow (fact). Bananas are delicious (opinion).
2. Select a large open space and hang the AGREE, DISAGREE and NOT SURE signs along the wall with AGREE on one side, DISAGREE on the other side and NOT SURE in the middle. Explain to students that they are going to do an activity called “Here I Stand,” in which they will listen to some statements and decide whether they agree, disagree or are not sure about the statement. They will indicate their opinion about each topic by positioning themselves along an imaginary line, depending upon their opinion.
3. Read each statement below, requesting students to take a few minutes to decide their opinion on the statement and walk to the place on the continuum that represents that opinion. Instruct them to observe where others choose to stand. After everyone has chosen their spot, have students spend 3–5 minutes talking amongst themselves about why they are standing where they are.

Statements:

- Henry and Henriette were right that the school lunch policy is wrong and unfair.
 - Boys and girls like different things and have different interests.
 - Boys and girls are treated fairly in this school.
 - Separating boys and girls for some things is a good idea.
 - Toys, colors, books, etc. shouldn’t be identified as “boys” and “girls.”
4. After the last question is read and discussed, have everyone return to their seats and engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Was it easy or difficult to decide where to stand? Were some statements easier to decide and some more difficult?
 - How did it feel when most people had the same response as you?
 - If there was a time when you were alone in where you chose to stand, how did it feel?
 - Did you ever decide to change your position when you saw you did not agree with a majority of the group, or after hearing others’ opinions?
 - What did you learn about the topic by doing this activity?

WRITING ACTIVITY: WHAT I WOULD CHANGE IN MY SCHOOL

1. Tell students you are going to give them an opportunity to imagine their ideal school. Have them close their eyes, darken the room and/or play relaxing music so they can empty their minds and daydream a little. Ask questions like: *What does your ideal school look like? What are students doing? What are teachers doing? What's happening in the classroom, playground, lunchroom, cafeteria and gym? What are some of the rules?*
2. After asking the questions and imagining, have students jot down some notes. Then, have them turn and talk with a person sitting next to them, sharing what they imagined and especially focusing on rules or policies they feel are wrong or unfair.
3. Ask students to share the different ideas they had as you record them on the board, creating a list of things they might want to change in their school (and you can expand it to community if appropriate). These might include ideas such as: no dress code; we should be able to have a snack in the middle of the day; we should have longer recess; we shouldn't have homework on the weekends.
4. After generating a long list of ideas, explain to students that they will pick one idea of a new rule or policy that they would want to change. It should be something realistic and which they can provide evidence for the need to change it, as Henry and Henriette did. Tell students they will be writing persuasive essays the way the twins wrote an article in the school newspaper. The essays should include:
 - A title
 - A rule/policy change statement: a sentence about what they want to change worded similar to Henry and Henriette ("Boys and girls should sit together at lunch.")
 - 2–3 reasons why this rule/policy should change (depending on age, this may include additional research to provide facts, quotes or examples to support their reasons). Each reason can include a sentence or two.
 - A summary sentence or two
5. During class time, have students spend 10–15 minutes planning their writing using the [Persuasive Essay Graphic Organizer](#). Students can complete their essays for homework and if time permits, have them conference with each other in order to get feedback and complete several drafts leading to their final essay.
6. Have students share their essays with the class by reading them aloud or by placing them on their desks, and having students walk around, read them and provide comments. If possible, invite parents/family members to the publishing party or create a video of them reading their essays to share with family members and others.

CLOSING

Ask students: *What does Henry and Henriette's story tell us about making a difference?* Have students share a word or phrase in answer to this question as you record them on the board/smart board. Use those words to create a class poem about students making a difference.

ADDITIONAL READING

- ["Old Tactic Gets New Use: Public Schools Separate Girls and Boys"](#) (*The New York Times*, November 20, 2014)

- [“Boys and girls will not be separated at lunch at North Elementary”](#) (*SouthCoast Today*, August 22, 2015)
- [“Peer socialization of gender in young boys and girls”](#) in *Gender: Early Socialization* (Encyclopedia On Early Childhood Development, August 2014)
- [“Target scraps ‘sexist’ gender-based signage from its stores”](#) (San Francisco Gate, August 10, 2015)
- [“The problem with separate toys for girls and boys”](#) (*The Boston Globe*, February 27, 2015)
- [Want to be an activist? Start with your toys - McKenna Pope](#) (TEDTalk, January 29, 2014)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Writing
Standard 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Standard 5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Standard 4: Present information, findings and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development and style and appropriate to talk, purpose and audience.

PERSUASIVE ESSAY GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Student Name: _____

Title of Essay:

Rule/Policy Change Statement:

Reason #1:	Facts, Quotes and Examples:
Reason #2	Facts, Quotes and Examples:
Reason #3	Facts, Quotes and Examples:

Summary:
