

# ABOUT THIS CURRICULUM

*Empowering Students, Challenging Bias: A Middle School Curriculum* is divided into five instructional sections and each section includes lessons for grades 6–8. Educators may find it useful to use a specific lesson or lessons 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.

The social and emotional development of students is a core part of their school experience. We suggest making *Empowering Students, Challenging Bias: A Middle School Curriculum* a regular part of your weekly lesson plans. With thirty lessons in total, it is ideal to do one lesson per week. Each lesson has a core activity as well as extension ideas and many include writing activities and fit within English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum. The 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 lessons to help students 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.

## OVERVIEW OF UNITS

Below is an overview of the curriculum, including the goals for each section as well as the specific lessons for each grade level.

**Unit I: Setting a Respectful Classroom Tone** provides lessons to build a solid foundation for students’ social and emotional skill development. The lessons 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 lessons to build a sense of self and explore the concepts of identity and differences. The lessons 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 lessons to build students’ critical thinking skills in analyzing the information they receive and absorb. The lessons 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 lessons to build an understanding of the bias and injustice young people see in their world. The lessons 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 lessons to empower students to do something about the bias, discrimination and bullying they encounter. The lessons 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 other projects that improve their school, community and world.

## OVERVIEW OF LESSON STRUCTURE

Each section consists of 5–7 lessons. All of the lessons build upon the previous lessons/units and are highly interactive, modeling a participatory process that encourages students to actively engage with issues that affect their classroom, school and community. As students work together, share diverse perspectives and backgrounds, solve problems, brainstorm and discuss 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.

### LESSON STRUCTURE

**Rationale:** a statement that identifies the purpose of the lesson and the topic(s) to be explored.

**Objectives:** the anticipated student outcomes that will occur as a result of the lesson.

**Strategies and Skills:** a list of instructional techniques (e.g. role play) and skills (e.g. writing skills) practiced or reinforced in the lesson.

**Key Words and Phrases:** a list of vocabulary, organized alphabetically, which students will need to know in order to effectively participate in the lesson (see the Appendix for a comprehensive list of all key words).

**Time:** the suggested block of time that teachers will need to schedule for the lesson. Most lessons are 45 minutes.

**Procedures:** step-by-step teacher instructions to implement the lesson. Also included throughout this section are special considerations and cautions to the teacher, highlighted as NOTE (👉) as well as alternative methods for a procedure, highlighted as ↗. Notes are numbered based on the lesson instruction they refer to.

**Flipped Classroom Idea:** suggestions for “flipping” your classroom which include videos you can make and have students watch prior to the lesson. These ideas are designated by the symbol 📺.

**Extension Activities:** a list of additional activities to continue and extend students’ learning of the lesson’s concepts.

**Handouts/Support Documents:** additional materials that are needed to implement lessons can be found at the end of the lesson they accompany.

**Other Materials:** additional items needed to implement the lesson that can likely be found in most middle school classrooms (e.g. paper, art supplies) or a website that will need to be used.

**Academic Standards:** a list of Common Core Learning Standards that are met by teaching the lesson (See the Appendix for a comprehensive list of the standards).

# INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND STRATEGIES

A variety of instructional methods are used to implement the lessons in this curriculum. The strategies provide opportunities for students to talk with each other in order to connect and learn. They also provide opportunities for students to tie historical and contemporary information to their own understanding of bias and discrimination. Other methods invite students to examine information critically and personally clarify their own opinions on a variety of topics. The following five methods are used most often through the curriculum although other techniques are also used.

1. **Directed Discussions:** The lessons include discussion questions that are intended to help facilitate student discussions in pairs, small groups and as a whole class. Some of the questions assess student comprehension of the concepts presented and others ask students to formulate feelings and opinions, draw conclusions or connect material to parallel situations.

The material in Unit I, “Setting a Respectful Classroom Tone,” provides a helpful framework for having these discussions. The material in this section should be reviewed and reinforced regularly and especially when sensitive topics are under discussion.

2. **Small Group Work:** Numerous opportunities for students to work collaboratively are provided throughout. Teachers may want to enlist a variety of grouping methods, including randomly assigned groups, self-selected groups and teacher-selected groups. Providing opportunities for students to interact with as many of their classmates as possible will increase the likelihood that students will be exposed to a greater number of perspectives and communication styles. The instructional techniques also give students the opportunity to learn the behaviors that foster and support effective group process. To maximize student participation in small group work, teachers should make sure that all students clearly understand what is being asked of them and circulate around the room during small group work.
3. **Brainstorming:** Brainstorming sessions are often used as a springboard for discussing new concepts. Because the process of coming up with ideas is distinct from the process of judgment, brainstorming provides an opportunity to generate ideas that have no right or wrong answers. The process can often lead to creative ideas because students build on each other’s thoughts. It is important to remind students throughout brainstorming sessions not to criticize any of the ideas that are shared, to work quickly, not to censor their own ideas and, whenever possible, to expand on the ideas of others.
4. **Role Playing:** One of the most effective ways to get students involved in the learning process is through role play. By experimenting with various roles and considering the implications of each, students begin to understand the complexity of social issues and to develop empathy. Stress to students that the purposes of role playing are to practice new responses, to consider alternative points of view and to experience some of the feelings that occur in real-life situations. Whenever students are asked to develop or act out role plays, it is important that they not use real names of other students or teachers or details about a situation that would reveal something that should be private. It is also important that they act as realistically as possible and avoid the use of stereotypical behaviors during role plays.
5. **Defining Terms:** It is critical that students gain an understanding of the language of diversity, bias and social justice as well as the distinction between words. Often in the lessons, there is a discussion about terminology that is related to the concepts being taught, including words and phrases for which many students may be unfamiliar. In most cases, we suggest providing an opportunity for students to reflect on and share what they may have heard or already know about the term and then provide the definition for the students as well as an example to help them better understand the word. All key words and phrases used throughout the curriculum are defined in the “Glossary.”

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In addition to the resources used to conduct the activities in the lessons, you may also find many of the ADL's online education resources useful at [www.adl.org/educator-resources](http://www.adl.org/educator-resources) including:

**Anti-Bias Education**, [www.adl.org/what-we-do/promote-respect/anti-bias](http://www.adl.org/what-we-do/promote-respect/anti-bias)

Provides information on anti-bias trainings, programs, webinars and other resources offered for schools and campuses.

**Curriculum Resources**, [www.adl.org/educator-resources](http://www.adl.org/educator-resources)

A collection of free original lesson plans and resources that help K-12 educators integrate culturally responsive, anti-bias and social justice themes into their curricula.