

## Understanding Race and Privilege Lesson Plan and Activity Guide for Professionals

The following activity guide can be used to facilitate discussion with faculty and staff based on *Understanding Race and Privilege* (National Association of School Psychologists, 2016). To reinforce principles articulated in this resource, the activity guide will focus on five areas of cultural competence in which educational leaders should engage.

### IMPORTANT NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

Developed by practitioners for practitioners, this lesson plan and activity guide should be used to best support the different needs of professionals in various settings. Specifically, the activities can be facilitated by a variety of individuals, including school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, and administrators. We, however, recommend that in all cases staff members secure administrator support in advance of scheduling these activities. For example, if presenting this information to school staff, a building administrator (e.g., assistant principal or principal) should be present or serve as a cofacilitator. Similarly, if school psychologists will be engaging in these activities with their colleagues, an appropriate director or supervisor should be present and involved during the session(s). Lastly, a cofacilitator, and if possible, multidisciplinary (e.g., school psychologist and teacher; school psychologist, and building administrator), approach is both encouraged and recommended.

Related to group size, most importantly, facilitators should be mindful of fostering active engagement. While some of the activities can be accomplished via a whole group format, most can be adapted to allow attendees to participate in smaller groups (e.g., 6 to 8 people). For example, if these activities were presented to teachers during an after-school professional development or staff meeting, they might be arranged to sit with their grade-level or department colleagues.

Although each of the activities detailed below is important and relevant to serving students, families, and communities, facilitators are not necessarily required to complete each of them in a single session. The Privilege Walk, however, should be completed before the other activities. Depending on the available resources in respective settings, facilitators, in collaboration with the appropriate administrators, should decide the length of the initial session and the need for subsequent follow-up sessions. For example, the entire activity guide could be completed in a single day at a staff back-to-school or leadership retreat. Alternatively, each activity could be used during staff meetings or relevant professional development opportunities throughout the school year. Notably, because some staff members could be engaging in this discussion for the first time or might not feel comfortable with the subject matter, facilitators are encouraged to consider whether a series of relatively short sessions (45 minutes) delivered throughout the school year would be more effective than a lengthier

single session. Lastly, facilitators should remain flexible and attentive to attendees' affective behaviors to make the necessary modifications during sessions.

Prior to facilitating these sessions, school psychologists and other professionals are strongly encouraged to spend considerable time in self-reflection related to race and privilege. Regardless of the facilitators' cultural background, the recommended reading and self-reflection questions below, which were originally published in *Understanding Race and Privilege* (NASP, 2016), provide helpful reading and self-reflection questions.

Due to the sensitive subject matter associated with these sessions, it is essential that facilitators intentionally and quickly establish a culture of respect and openness. Although participants should feel comfortable sharing their perspectives, it is also important to be respectful of individual differences. For example, some participants, although they are not contributing to discussions, are nonetheless actively engaged and attentive to the content that is being shared by facilitators and colleagues. While facilitators should not necessarily expect to encounter resistance from attendees, they should proactively and preemptively create an environment that is conducive to openness, mutual respect for different perspectives, and learning. For further guidance, reference the supplementary document: *Suggestions for Facilitating Challenging Conversations* (NASP, 2017).

Last, the Exit Ticket in the appendix has been provided as a sample closing activity to help facilitators determine the effectiveness of the session and plan for subsequent activities. Facilitators are encouraged to have attendees complete these anonymously and return to them as soon as possible.

### **Recommended Reading**

Because engaging in thoughtful discussion with people of other backgrounds is essential to understanding privilege, prior to the session, facilitators and participants are encouraged to read the following:

1. "White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack," monograph by Peggy McIntosh:  
<https://www.deanza.edu/faculty/lewisjulie/White%20Privilege%20Unpacking%20the%20Invisible%20Knapsack.pdf>
2. "Waking Up White" by Debby Irving.

### **Self-Reflection Questions**

1. When was the last time you had to think about your ethnicity, race, gender identity, ability level, religion, or sexual orientation? What provoked you to think about it or acknowledge it?
2. When watching TV or a movie, how likely are you to watch shows whose characters reflect your ethnicity, race, gender, ability level, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation?
3. When using social media, how diverse is your feed? How diverse are your friends and followers? How diverse are those that you follow?
4. How do you respond when others make negative statements towards individuals of a different ethnicity, race, gender, ability level, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity than yourself?
5. How often do you go to social settings where the majority of individuals are of a different ethnicity, race, gender, ability level, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity than yourself?

6. How diverse is the community in which you live?
7. How do you feel when you are in a community that is different from your neighborhood?
8. How would you make your neighborhood more inclusive and sensitive?
9. If you recognized your privilege, what did you do with this realization?

**Table 1. Areas of Cultural Competence**

<b>Area of Cultural Competence</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Assess One’s Own Culture</b>	Individuals are encouraged to engage in a process of self-assessment to help define their own cultures—the learned meanings and behaviors that are transmitted from within a social activity context for purposes of promoting individual/social adjustment, growth, and development (Marsella & Yamada, 2000). The ability to understand one’s own culture is a prerequisite to effectively and appropriately understanding other cultures.
<b>Value Diversity</b>	The recognition of differences between people and acknowledgment that these differences are a valued asset. Multicultural education respects diversity while teaching all children and youth to become effective and participating members of a democracy (Barkman & Speaker, 1999).
<b>Manage the Dynamics of Difference</b>	The extent to which the curriculum or lesson promotes multiple perspectives. The dynamics of cultural difference are proactively managed, improving the interactions between different cultures (National Centre for Cultural Competence, 2006).
<b>Adapt to Diversity</b>	Cultural knowledge is embedded throughout the hierarchy of the organization, and policy, practices, service delivery, and behaviors are adapted to fit the cultural diversity of the community being engaged (National Centre for Cultural Competence, 2006).
<b>Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge</b>	Because cultural diversity is inevitable, it is necessary to integrate an understanding of different cultures to service delivery and practices (National Centre for Cultural Competence, 2006).

Fundamentally, everyone benefits from privilege. For some, it is the result of their ethnicity. For others, it is the result of their gender, sexual orientation, or disability or socioeconomic status. Importantly, the intersection of various aspects of privilege (e.g., being White, male, heterosexual, college educated, and rich versus being Black, female, homosexual, and poor) also leads some to experience more or less privilege than others. As we serve students and families from various ethnic and income backgrounds, it is important for us to be cognizant of our privileged positions as well as the ways that we can challenge systemic factors that perpetuate privilege in order to champion the leveling of the playing field for all students, families, and communities.

Because school psychologists, counselors, social workers, teachers, and administrators are responsible for supporting all students regardless of their nationality, racialized ethnicity, social class, religion, gender, gender identity, and disability status, an important question to consider is: *What are the implications for students' lives if we don't address systemic inequities?* For example, how will nonmajority students, who are disproportionately placed in special education and unjustly subjected to suspensions and expulsions, be impacted if we don't critically examine the factors that contribute to these outcomes?

## KEY TERMS RELATED TO RACE AND PRIVILEGE

Before continuing with the activities, briefly review the following terms and definitions, which will be helpful to establish a common understanding of race and privilege. These terms are critical to the ensuing activities and discussions.

**Table 2. Key Terms and Definitions**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Race</b>	A social, political, and cultural construct that classifies humans based on common physical features, ancestry, or land of origin. It is a social classification system based on fabrications that race is real (Helms, 1995).
<b>Privilege</b>	Unearned advantages that are highly valued but restricted to certain groups. It oppresses certain groups, whereby members of the privileged group gain many benefits by their affiliation with the dominant side of the power system (NASP, 2016).
<b>Implicit Bias</b>	The cognitive processes and prejudices that operate outside one's conscious awareness but impact one's thoughts, feelings, actions, and behaviors towards specific groups of people; it is often subtle and unintended (Goff et al., 2008).
<b>Micro Aggression</b>	Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people from minoritized backgrounds (Sue et al., 2007).
<b>Cultural Relevance</b>	A multicultural pedagogy that includes relevant information pertaining to minoritized groups, which increases the cultural proficiencies of students and professionals of all culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Moule, 2011).

## INTRODUCTION

Today, we will examine and reflect on race and privilege. As a result, we will have conversations that might be uncomfortable as we discuss the ways that we may have contributed, even inadvertently, to various disparities through implicit bias. As we engage in these activities and discussions, please do your best to avoid thinking about solutions and really spend some time discussing the problem and hypothesizing possible root causes. While there will be time to discuss ways that we can all work to address privilege at the systems level, we want to be deliberate about developing an understanding of the reality of privilege and how it impacts our students, families, schools, and communities.

**Estimated Time: 45–60+ Minutes (Based on the Number of Activities)**

**Materials**

Computer/Laptop

Projector

Paper

Pens

**Table 3. Participant Norms**

<b>Remain Actively Engaged in the Activities and Discussions.</b>	Although everyone has a different learning style and interacts with their peers in a manner that is unique to their personality and comfortability, we believe that you will benefit the most from this experience the more that you are actively engaged with the activities and discussions. When working with others in small groups, feel free to contribute by sharing your thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. If you have a question or comment related to the content, please feel comfortable to share for the benefit of your colleagues. We are all here to learn and grow together!
<b>Expect to Experience Discomfort.</b>	Regardless of your background, these activities and conversations can potentially be uncomfortable. This is okay and often necessary in order to broaden and deepen your understanding. Allow yourself to experience such temporary discomfort knowing that you and your colleagues are growing together.
<b>Speak Your Truth.</b>	Resist the urge to speak on behalf of others, even groups of which you are a part. Instead, speak from your personal perspective and experience.
<b>Expect and Accept a Lack of Closure.</b>	Race and privilege are extremely complex constructs that cannot be completely and adequately addressed in a single session. Because of this, at the end of this session, expect to have additional questions about race and privilege. This is okay. In fact, additional questions and thoughts about these important ideas is healthy and encouraged as they can lead to subsequent activities to further understand race and privilege.

**THE PRIVILEGE WALK**

The following activity and questions are adapted with permission from a lesson plan originally designed by Rebecca Layne and Ryan Chiu from George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (Layne & Chiu, 2016).

**Directions**

- Have participants line up in a straight line across the middle of the room with plenty of space to move forward and backward as the exercise proceeds.

- Have participants hold hands or place one hand on the shoulder of the person to their left or right depending on space constraints. *Important: Make sure to ask participants if they are comfortable touching and being touched by others. If some are not, do not make them and do not make a big deal out of it.*
- You may give an explanation about the activity, how it is intended to educate about privilege, and what privilege is, or you can begin the activity without this background.
- Read the following to participants: “I will read statements aloud. Please move if a statement applies to you. If you do not feel comfortable acknowledging that a statement applies to you, simply do not move when it is read. No one will know whether it applies to you.”
- Begin reading statements aloud in a clear voice, pausing slightly after each one. The pause can be as long or as short as desired or is appropriate.
- When you have finished reading each of the statements (or as many of them as time permits), ask participants to take note of where they are in the room in relation to others.
- Have everyone gather into a circle for debriefing and discussion. If desired, the debriefing and discussion can also occur in small groups. If so, please allow time for each group to share what they discussed with the larger group.

### Privilege Walk Statements

1. If you are right handed, take one step forward.
2. If English is your first language, take one step forward.
3. If one or both of your parents have a college degree, take one step forward.
4. If you can find Band-Aids at mainstream stores designed to blend in with or match your skin tone, take one step forward.
5. If you rely, or have relied, primarily on public transportation, take one step back.
6. If you have attended schools with people you felt were like yourself, take one step forward.
7. If you constantly feel unsafe walking alone at night, take one step back.
8. If your household employs help, such as servants or gardeners, take one step forward.
9. If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.
10. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.
11. If you were ever made fun of or bullied for something you could not change or was beyond your control, take one step back.
12. If your family has ever left your homeland or entered another country not of your own free will, take one step back.
13. If you would never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs, take one step forward.
14. If your household owns a computer, take one step forward.
15. If you have ever been able to play a significant role in a project or activity because of a talent you gained previously, take one step forward.
16. If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence, take one step forward.
17. If you ever had to skip a meal or were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food, take one step back.

18. If you feel respected for your academic performance, take one step forward.
19. If you have a physically visible disability, take one step back.
20. If you have an invisible illness or disability, take one step back.
21. If you were ever discouraged from an activity because of race, class, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation, take one step back.
22. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to fit in more, take one step back.
23. If you have ever been profiled by someone else using stereotypes, take one step back.
24. If you feel good about how your identities are portrayed by the media, take one step forward.
25. If you were ever accepted for something you applied to because of your association with a friend or family member, take one step forward.
26. If your family has health insurance take one step forward.
27. If you have ever been spoken over because you could not articulate your thoughts fast enough, take one step back.
28. If someone has ever spoken for you when you did not want them to do so, take one step back.
29. If there was ever substance abuse in your household, take one step back.
30. If you come from a single-parent household, take one step back.
31. If you live in an area with crime and drug activity, take one step back.
32. If someone in your household suffered or suffers from mental illness, take one step back.
33. If you have been a victim of sexual harassment, take one step back.
34. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take one step back.
35. If you are never asked to speak on behalf of a group of people who share an identity with you, take one step forward.
36. If you can make mistakes and not have people attribute your behavior to flaws in your racial or gender group, take one step forward.
37. If you always assumed you would go to college, take one step forward.
38. If you have more than fifty books in your household, take one step forward.
39. If your parents told you that you could be anything you wanted to be, take one step forward.

### Discussion Questions

1. How did you feel being in the front of the group? In the back? In the middle?
2. Based on this activity, what are some privileges that you have not previously considered, either for yourself or for others?
3. If you broke contact with the person beside you, how did you feel in that moment?
4. What question made you think the most?
5. If you could add a question, what would it be?
6. What do you wish people knew about one of the identities, situations, or disadvantages that caused you to take a step back?

7. How can your understanding of privilege or marginalization improve your relationships with, and service delivery to, students and families?

### **Real-World Application**

Although the directions had everyone starting at the same point (in a straight line), this is not reality. In life, from birth, or even before birth, individuals have different privileges and challenges that lead to already being ahead of, or behind, others due to income status, education opportunities, housing conditions, access to prenatal care, and more. The video below illustrates this point through the lens of race.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBb5TgOXgNY>

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are some of the factors that create privileges for some racial groups over others?
2. What are some of the factors that create challenges for some racial groups?
3. How do students and families experience these privileges and challenges?

### **ASSUMPTIONS ACTIVITY**

Our assumptions influence what we see. We should always keep an open mind and be aware of our assumptions, because everyone's perspective is different based on their life experiences. As we begin this activity, listen to the perspectives of your colleagues as they share the reality of their experiences.

Display each image for 5 minutes. Next, and using the questions below, have participants discuss the images in small groups. After all images have been discussed, facilitate a large group discussion related to race, privilege, and implicit bias.

Note: Do not show participants the captions under each picture. These statements should be revealed during the large group discussion.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What do you see in this image?
2. Do you think this image relates to race, privilege, and implicit bias? Why or why not?
3. Do you think this image shows an explicit or implicit bias towards, or against, a particular group?
4. If seen in public, would you have noticed the inequities in this image?

Figure 1. Red Cross Poster



This American Red Cross ad depicts nonmajority children as “not cool,” bad, or misbehaving while the White children are “cool” and are the only ones who are good/behaving.

Figure 2. Nivea Advertisement



This ad depicts a handsome, well-dressed Black man holding a Black, Afro-ed and bearded head in his hands preparing to throw it into the distance with the words “Look Like You Give a Damn: Re-Civilize Yourself.” Some Twitter and Tumblr users said that the ad, which implied that a Black man with an Afro and beard is uncivilized, was offensive and exploited the racist idea that Black people are more primitive than other races (Wakeman, 2011).

Figure 3. Gap Kids Advertisement



Many saw this ad as culturally insensitive. “While all of the girls are adorable, and indeed all of them should grow up to be and do anything, it becomes problematic when the Black child is positioned to be a White child’s prop.” (Savali, 2016)

Figure 4. *Vogue* Magazine Cover



“A beastly and intense King James appears next to the ethereal Gisele Bündchen in an image that ruffled feathers for playing into a variety of stereotypical depictions of Black manhood. Some saw King Kong in the photo, some saw a generalized depiction of a dangerous Black male and an angelic White woman.” (Complex, 2012)

### Personal Reflection Questions

1. Think about an example of a way in which you've had to adapt to diversity in your education or career.
2. In the future, how might you continue discussions with your colleagues related to race and privilege?
3. What are some cultural factors from your own ethnic background that could potentially impact your relationship with students, teachers or staff?
4. Think about a time when you felt uncomfortable due to a comment or observed behavior towards a person of color or nonmajority individual.
  - a. How did you react to the comment and/or behavior?
  - b. Were you compelled to intervene? Why or why not?
5. If you recognized your privilege, what can you do with this realization?
6. As school psychologists and staff working with student, families, schools, and communities, how can we work towards ensuring that our advocacy is not negatively impacted by our own biases?
7. As a result of these activities, which area(s) of culturally competent practice were addressed the most?
  - a. Assess one's own culture
  - b. Value diversity
  - c. Manage the dynamics of difference
  - d. Adapt to diversity
  - e. Institutionalize cultural knowledge
8. As a result of these activities, which area(s) of culturally competent practice were addressed the least?
  - a. Assess one's own culture
  - b. Value diversity
  - c. Manage the dynamics of difference
  - d. Adapt to diversity
  - e. Institutionalize cultural knowledge

**Appendix. Exit Ticket**

**TODAY I LEARNED ...**

**TODAY THIS WAS CONFIRMED ...**

**BECAUSE OF TODAY, I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT ...**

## RECOMMENDED READING AND RESOURCES

- Adams, M., Blumenfeld, W. J., Castañeda, C., Hackman, H. W., Peters, M. L., & Zúñiga, X. (2013). *Readings for diversity and social justice* (3rd edition). New York, NY: Routledge.
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