

PRIVILEGE, CHARITY

AND JUSTICE:

A REFLECTION

FOR MIDDLE

SCHOOLERS

Privilege, Charity and Justice: An Exercise for Middle Schoolers

Introduction of Today's Goals:

1. Part 1: Understand what "privilege" is - your ideas?

- advantages that some people have that others don't
- Do we have a level playing field in this country?
- This exercise - you'll take on someone's identity - see what their life is like

2. Part 2: Understand charity and justice

- What do these words mean to you? What is the difference between the two?
- Refer to **Charity/Justice Chart**
- Story of the River (have a student read):

One summer in the village, the people gathered for a picnic. As they shared food and conversation, someone noticed a baby in the river, struggling and crying. Someone rushed to save the baby. Then, they noticed another screaming baby in the river, and they pulled that baby out. As time went on, more babies were seen drowning in the river, and the townspeople were pulling them out as fast as they could. More and more kind people volunteered their time: emergency first aid, donations of baby food and clothing, people offering to provide foster care. And yet, despite all of their efforts, each night it just got busier and busier with more and more babies being pulled from the river.

As everyone else was busy in the rescue efforts to save the babies, two of the townspeople started to run away along the shore of the river.

"Where are you going?" shouted one of the rescuers. "We need you here to help us save these babies!"

"We are going upstream to stop whoever is throwing them in!"

- What was charity and what was justice?

3. Let's get started! Go to Part 1.

Part 1: Understanding Privilege Exercise

1. Line everyone up next to each other, with a lot room to move forward
2. At the opposite end of the room, post **"The Goal: Meeting your Needs"**
3. Pass out **"Identity Sheets"** (10 included, make teams if more students)
 - o Any questions about your identity?
4. Ask **"Privilege Questions"** one at a time; kids respond by moving forward when appropriate. Periodically help students decide whether to move forward, ask why they did or did not move, ask outliers how they feel.
5. Once questions are finished, have everyone stop and look around. Ask:
 - o We are told that we have equal opportunity, we're all on level playing field. Is this true? Why not?

Part 2: Life, Charity and Justice Exercise

Intro:

Now that you have a starting place in this "pretend life", things are going to happen to you: random events of life, you'll receive some charity, and some justice issues will also change.

Now, each of you will draw a card. We have three kinds of cards -

1. Life cards - A life event that happens to just you - only **you** have to do what it says.

2. Charity cards - an immediate need is met. Anyone in the group who is affected by the card should do what it says.

3. Justice cards - the cause of the need is addressed. Anyone in the group who is affected by the card should do what it says.

Exercise:

1. Students pick cards - one at a time, read aloud, and decide who moves. (This takes a while.)
2. Go through cards until they are gone, or the group feels "done".
3. Have everyone sit in a circle to debrief.

Debrief/Conclusion:

- Review concept of privilege, whether it is earned
- Address the idea - people with more privilege have more responsibility to work for justice to level the playing field
 - How can we do that?
- Review the ideas of charity and justice - how were you affected by both?

- What are your interests and gifts? Can you see yourself helping in any specific justice or charity cause in the future?

Introduction: Charity and Justice Chart

Charity

Direct Service

Band-aid Work:

Direct response to suffering.
"Treating the symptoms"

Individual

Examples:

***Donating* food, clothing, shelter**

Serving in soup kitchens

Working at homeless shelters

Building houses

Organizing benefits

Free clinics

Supporting charities

Tutoring

English classes

Justice

Social Change

Advocacy Work:

Changing the root causes of suffering.
"Curing the disease"

Systemic, Structural, Institutional

Examples:

Responsible purchasing

Changing corporate policies and practices

Boycotts

Community organizing

Non-violent vigils

Direct actions

Movement building

Civil disobedience

Calling and writing elected officials

Prayer and fasting

Part 1: Identity Sheets

Cut out and pass out to students (feel free to personalize based on your knowledge of each student, their experience and comfort level).

1. Aleena - You recently graduated from a public high school in St. Louis. Now, a few months after graduation, you are unable to find a job, and are tired of living in an overcrowded apartment. You are a Muslim, originally from Afghanistan.
2. Kaitlyn- You are an 8th grade African American. You are being raised by a single mother who is a well-paid accountant in Clayton.
3. Maria - You are a 3rd grader. You live in South St. Louis, and your parents are from Mexico. They both work in a factory. Your family has a car, but food is tight.
4. Kenny - You are a high school senior. You are African American, and your parents are lower-middle class, working in the service sector. You go to a Magnet high school, and have hopes to get a scholarship to college.
5. Marlon - You are 35 years old. You are an African American, and live with your elderly parents. You work full time, receiving minimum wage, and are the only source of income in the household. At times you have difficulty keeping up with all the bills.
6. Laura - You live in University City, and were born with a spinal cord injury. You are white, and have been wheelchair bound all of your life. You are on the honor roll in your high school, despite frequent sickness. Your parents worry about money a lot.
7. Sarah - You are a young white mother of two boys. Your husband was abusive, so you were finally able to leave him several months ago. You are working full time to pay the bills. Money is very tight and you depend on friends and food pantries to meet your family's needs.
8. Roland - You are a 2 year old mixed-race toddler living in a homeless shelter with your mother. Your mom has been offered a job, but is having trouble finding childcare and transportation. Until she gets an income, she will receive assistance from the government in the form of food stamps and a small amount of money every month.
9. Brian - You are a white student at Harvard. You are gay. Both your parents work as professionals.
10. Michael - You are a 70 year old African American man, and your wife died recently. You are dependent on Social Security for your income. You've tried to minimize your expenses, so you depend on public transportation and private programs like meals on wheels.

Part 1: Privilege Questions

Move one step forward if:

1. It has always been legal for ***people like you*** to vote, own property, and pass on wealth.
2. When you watch TV and read history books, you generally find your ***race and culture*** reflected in positive ways.
3. You have ***never*** depended on public transportation to get to school and work.
4. When you go out, you ***don't need to research*** whether there are ramps, wide doorways, and handrails.
5. If you get sick, you or your parents can ***leave work without fear*** of getting fired.
6. If you develop health problems, you can have them treated ***without worrying*** about paying your bills.
7. You have ***never experienced hunger*** because your family couldn't afford food.
8. People like you are ***not generally the target*** of hate crimes.
9. The ***high school*** you attended (or will attend) is free of guns, and offers college preparatory classes.

Part 2: Life, Charity, Justice Cards

(print and cut out individually, fold for students to pick cards):

LIFE CARD

A relative gets a good paying job and helps with the bills.

Move ahead TWO steps.

LIFE CARD

A long lost grandfather dies and leaves you some money

Move ahead TWO steps.

LIFE CARD

The head of our household develops a serious mental illness and is unable to get proper medication for his/her condition.

Move back FIVE steps.

LIFE CARD

You, or the head of your household, gets sick and can't go to work. You're too sick even to call in, and you lose your job.

Move back THREE steps

LIFE CARD

You are in a car accident, and are hospitalized for five days. Your insurance just ran out, so now have over \$10,000 in hospital bills.

Move back FOUR steps

LIFE CARD

Your health condition now requires you to take regular medication, which costs \$250/month, so you choose to pay your light and heating bills rather than taking the medication regularly. You keep ending up in the Emergency Room.

Move back THREE steps.

LIFE CARD

You can't afford the bus ride to and from the grocery store, so you're dependent on your local convenience store for most groceries. You end up getting diabetes from your poor, sugar-heavy diet.

Move back THREE steps

JUSTICE CARD

St. Louis and national budget cuts mean slashed school programs. Your school closes and merges with another. Your class size is bigger, and all the extra-curricular activities are cut. Move back THREE steps

JUSTICE CARD

Pressure from the Occupy Wall Street movement results in new federal funding for education. New college scholarships for minority students are now available, and the cost of a college degree at State schools will now be affordable for working class people. Move forward FOUR steps

JUSTICE CARD

While many local corporations continue to pay almost nothing in taxes, Missouri is low on funds and makes budget cuts. The first thing to get cut is Food Stamps. Move back THREE steps

JUSTICE

As a result of campaigning by social action groups, the government continues to fund Title IX. This program raises the opportunities of girls and women in school. It promotes equality between the genders in student athletics, ensures an equal education for pregnant and parenting students, and for women seeking careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

Move forward THREE steps

JUSTICE CARD

The U.S. invades another country and is now at war, which costs billions of dollars. Programs for the elderly and the disabled are cut, in order to pay for the Pentagon's budget.

Move BACK THREE steps.

JUSTICE CARD

Advocates for public transportation get Metro to open new bus lines and build new Metrolink lines.

Move forward TWO steps

JUSTICE CARD

The U.S. gets nationalized health care, so everyone now can get their health care needs met.

Move forward TWO steps

JUSTICE CARD

You “come out of the closet” to your co-workers, but a week later when the boss finds out, you get fired. You didn’t realize that in Missouri, people can be legally fired just for being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered.

Move BACK THREE STEPS.

CHARITY CARD

A new clinic for un-insured, or under-insured people opens in your neighborhood.

Move forward TWO steps

CHARITY CARD

A local church donates Christmas gifts to your family.

Move forward ONE step

CHARITY CARD

When education budgets are cut, a non-profit group starts doing extra-curricular activities at your school.

Move forward ONE step.

CHARITY CARD

You apply, and get into a job training program, which promises to help train you and help you find employment.

Move forward TWO steps

CHARITY CARD

A local charity group opens a free child care center for working parents.

Move forward TWO steps

CHARITY CARD

A new Catholic Worker homeless shelter opens, so you have somewhere to stay.

Move ahead ONE step.

The Goal: Meeting Your Needs!

good, healthy food

shelter

clothing

education

safety

love

opportunity

Dignity

Fulfilling work