

Ask Teaching Tolerance



Q You recommend that we teach about the undocumented, but I'm concerned about irate parents. How can we teach about controversial issues that have a political undercurrent without making them political?

Take a page from anti-evolutionists: Explain that you're teaching the controversy. Seriously, controversy about public policy is at the heart of living in a democratic society. Students need to learn about controversial issues. The ability to explore a topic or issue deeply and to understand other perspectives is essential, not only for citizenship, but also for college and career readiness. Your best strategy is to focus on the facts and promote discussion of all perspectives.

Your best defense is in the learning standards. Both the Common Core and all social studies standards call for students to identify different points of view and read deeply about current issues.

How can we introduce students to issues like poverty in a setting where some may be personally struggling with the problem and others may be blissfully unaware?

You've taken the first step: recognizing that this is a tough problem. The next

step is to examine your own beliefs about poverty and people living in poverty. It's important to recognize that poverty is a condition—sometimes temporary—and not an identity characteristic. The final step is to teach about the social forces that contribute to poverty, then to build empathy by looking at how poverty affects people's lived experiences.

During school spirit week, a teacher objected to the planned "Nerd Day." How can I support this

teacher to other colleagues and administrators?

Preachers and teachers often share the mission to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Point out that when the purpose is to build spirit, it's self-defeating to do so by poking fun at people, especially unpopular or marginalized people. Whatever the proposed day, be it nerd, hillbilly, red-neck or ghetto (and we've heard about them all)—ask the question: Is this going to make someone who's probably already feeling excluded feel better or worse? Then decide.

I have colleagues who boast about being colorblind. What do I say to them?

Let them know that no one likes to feel invisible or have their everyday reality denied. Ours is a society in which one's race—sadly—has a real impact on one's lived experience. Remind your colleagues that their race may be conferring privileges that others don't have, and that it's important to open their eyes to see how race affects our lived experiences. And reassure them: Recognizing race doesn't make them racist. Judging people based on their race is the problem.

ASK TEACHING TOLERANCE!

Need the kind of advice and expertise that only Teaching Tolerance can provide?

Email us at editor@tolerance.org with "Ask TT" in the subject line.