

THE POWER OF WORDS

LESSON 10

SOCIAL JUSTICE WORDS

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TEACHING GOAL

Students will develop an awareness of various terms and phenomena associated with the social justice movement(s).

LEARNING ACTIVITY SUMMARY

Students will formulate a plan for social justice in the United States.

TERMS/CONCEPTS ADDRESSED

Words related to social justice, including: discrimination, diversity, feminism, prejudice, racism (for many more, see *Wimmin, Wimps and Wallflowers: An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Gender and Sexual Orientation Bias in the United States* and *The Color of Words: An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Ethnic Bias in the United States*; both available from www.interculturalpress.com).

Diversity (*The Color of Words*, pp. 70-71): Most often a reference to the varied national, ethnic and racial backgrounds of U.S. citizens and immigrants but also to categories of class, gender and sexual orientation. Diversity, however, has come to mean a number of things in our multicultural society and has taken on new significance with the rise of the politics and economics of diversity. Its meanings and uses depend to a great extent on the social, economic or political view of the user.

... In the United States, there have been mixed feelings about ethnic diversity and the affirmation of separate ethnic identities.

... In spite of the many objections to the idea of diversity, however, much of the country holds some positive feelings for its mixed cultural and racial heritages and the benefits they bestow (analogous to the biologist's contention that a population benefits from maintaining a large gene pool). In fact, diversity, while a problem or curse to some, is a symbol and a cause for celebration by poets, politicians and educators alike.

Feminism (*Wimmin, Wimps and Wallflowers*, pp. 95-97): [Feminism is] a belief in the full equality of men and women.

... There has always been confusion about what feminism is and attempts to attack it as a kind of aberration of femaleness. ... As with feminist, considerable bias has been attached to the word, making it virtually a term of reproach among many men and anti-feminists.

We can say generally that it has taken on at least two broad,

related senses. The first is a perspective on social, economic and political inequality between the sexes. The other is an organized movement, also known as the feminist or women's liberation movement, concerned with furthering the rights and interests of women and giving them equal status with men, if not a world better than that in which there is mere social equality.

Prejudice (*The Color of Words*, pp. 185-186): An attitude toward a category or group of people or toward individuals by virtue of their membership in the group. Although this attitude may be favorable or positive, common usage connotes (and sociological usage denotes) an unfavorable or disparaging attitude, including bigotry and hatred.

Discrimination (*The Color of Words*, pp. 185-186): Behavior that denies equal treatment to people because of their membership in some group – parallels the beliefs, feelings, fantasies and motivations of prejudice. Stereotypes, or generalizing beliefs about others; ethnocentrism, which judges others on the basis of one's own group standards; and racism, rooted in the notion of the biological inferiority of other groups, are all related to prejudice and often entwined with it.

Racism (*The Color of Words*, pp. 193-195): A system of beliefs, held consciously or otherwise, alleging the inferiority of members of one supposedly biologically different group to those of one's own group. Racism focuses on perceived innate or "natural" differences between groups. It is grounded in the assumption that the differences are associated with (or even determine) behavior, culture, intellect or social achievement.

TYPE OF LEARNING ACTIVITY

Problem-solving • Research • What-if scenario

MATERIALS NEEDED

- This lesson plan
- Access to research materials: library, Internet, etc.

TIME RANGE

- Several hours for research
- 2-5 class periods, for presentations, election and discussion

GROUP SIZE

Medium to large (10 to 20+), depending on the number of candidates, or the size of the “committee” group. Large groups may want to divide into smaller groups for discussion.

LEARNING ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

You are running for President of the United States on the platform “Creating a Just World.”

1. Individually or in groups, develop that platform, including your plan to ensure social justice (equality) on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, age, ability and other factors, in one or more of the following areas:

- Health, safety, and well-being
- Health care and medicine
- Education
- Government assistance (for individuals, agencies, corporations, etc.)
- Peace
- Employment and workforce issues
- Foreign relations
- Marriage and family life
- Access to resources
- Media
- Social and scientific research
- The law
- Immigration
- Nationalism/national identity
- Any other area you are assigned or wish to include

2. Answer the following questions:

- What would a just (fair) world be like?
- What do we need to do to get there?

3. Shape your plan using one of the following strategies:

- Research some or all of the following currently available resources and report how you will include them in your plan:
 - Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC): www.splcenter.org/index.jsp
 - Tolerance.org: www.tolerance.org
 - American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): www.aclu.org/
 - National Organization for Women (NOW): www.now.org/

- Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF): www.feminist.org/

- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP): www.naacp.org/

- Greenpeace International: www.greenpeace.org/international_en/

- Anti-Defamation League: www.adl.org/adl.asp

- Simon Wiesenthal Center: www.wiesenthal.com/

- Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG): www.pflag.org/

- Human Rights Campaign: www.hrc.org/

- Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network: www.glsen.org

- Any other social justice or advocacy organization you wish to include

- Using the model of candidate Dennis Kucinich in the 2004 Presidential election, develop a proposal for a “Department of Peace” to parallel the current “Department of Defense.” Include a structure, budget, operating procedures, areas of responsibility, mission statement and the like.

- Use a just and effective local or state agency as a model to develop your national “just world” platform. Follow the instructions above.

4. Present your platform, in the form of a speech, debate, television advertising campaign or other format as assigned.

5. Hold an election! Use the two-party system and hold a primary, etc., or come up with a new system of your own. Vote for the candidate (or group) of your choice.

DEBRIEF

Discuss the results. Questions for debriefing:

- What were some of the more creative or imaginative platforms? Who saw the “biggest picture”?
- Which were the best researched?

- Which were the most convincing?
- Which were the most realistic?
- What were your group's priorities? What values, programs or ideas did they vote for?
- Did anything surprise you? If so, what was it? Why was it surprising?
- Did this exercise give you any new ideas? If so, what are they?
- Will you change any of your language or behavior as a result of doing this exercise? If so, how?
- In what ways can you put your chosen platform into practice today?

VARIATION

Your group is the President's "Just World Committee." Develop and report on your plan for a just world, following the instructions above.

The Power of Words curriculum is based on cultural anthropologist Philip Herbst's ground-breaking dictionaries, *The Color of Words: An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Ethnic Bias in the United States* (ISBN# 1-877864-97-8, \$29.95) and *Wimmin, Wimps and Wallflowers: An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Gender and Sexual Orientation Bias in the United States* (ISBN# 1-877864-80-3, \$44.95). Both are available from:

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