

Anti-Racism Activity: The Sneetches

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Overview:

In this early grades activity, students learn about unfair practices in a simulation exercise and then create plans to stand up against discrimination.

Perspective Before conducting this activity, educators may want to discuss historical information about racism and diversity issues. In the story *The Sneetches*, written by Dr. Seuss, yellow bird-like creatures take students on an adventure where green stars become the symbol of discrimination and privilege. After reading the story aloud, let students participate in the following activities that can be adapted with or without the story.

A special note on the simulation activity: The simulation exercise included here can help children understand the emotional impact of unfair practices. The follow-up activity on discrimination helps ensure that students understand that the goal is to change those practices, not the characteristics that make us different from one another.

Objectives:

- Students will experience discrimination and develop a sense of fairness and equity.
- Students will apply literature to real life experiences.
- Students will become empowered to take responsibility for their environment.
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Time: Varied, with more time allowed for older students

Materials

- *The Sneetches* by Dr. Suess (Random House, ISBN# 9780394800899, \$14.95)
- Green construction paper, sticky dots, or washable marker
- Safety pins

Suggested Procedures: Read *The Sneetches* aloud as a whole class or in small groups. Make a class list of class privileges, i.e. lining up first, extra points for tasks, homework passes, extra center time.

Divide the class into two groups by assigning students odd/even numbers. Half the class wears a green star or dot, using paper or a washable marker.

The group with green stars/dots is granted the privileges on the class list.

Allow an extended time for all students to have time in each group; those privileged with stars and those without stars or privileges.

Students discuss *The Sneetches* and students' experiences in small groups:

- How do the Star-Belly Sneetches look? How do the Plain-Belly Sneetches look?
- How is the language different for plain and Star-Belly Sneetches?
- When you were without a star, how did you feel about classmates with stars?
- What kinds of things do we use as "stars" that make people feel special?
- What makes you feel like a Plain-Belly Sneetch, a Star-Belly Sneetch?
- What feelings did you have during the class activity?
- What lessons did you learn?
- List three actions you will take to help everyone feel like they belong.

Small groups share reflections and action ideas with the whole class.

Building on the action ideas from small group discussions, the class should brainstorm and make a list of suggestions for ending discrimination in the class or school, e.g. stop teasing. Discrimination can be defined as "unfair treatment of a person or a group."

Challenge the class to put their class list into practice and work to end discrimination.

Assist students in pairing with a classmate that is outside their usual circle of friends.

The pairs become "Fairness Teams" for several days and keep a journal of ways that they -- or others they observe -- help end discrimination.

Allow a brief time each day for teammates to share their experiences and discuss journal entries.

After several days, the whole class meets and discusses the journal entries. Each Fairness Team reflects on what they learned about putting an end to discrimination. Encourage students to set goals for extending the activity to their homes and communities.

Team reflections and assessments can be an ongoing activity.

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