Investigating Discrimination [Sample Lesson Plan]. (n.d.). The Critical Thinking Consortium. Retrieved December 10, 2021, from https://tc2.ca/uploads/TTT/Discrimination.pdf

This TC2-developed critical challenge was previously published as a Tools for Thought resource. Please refer to our Tools for Thought collection to access the tools referenced in this critical challenge.

Investigating discrimination



Objectives:

- Understand the meaning, contexts, and cause of discrimination;
- Encourage students to act responsibly in the face of discriminatory actions and language;
- Introduce and apply the concepts and literacy strategies featured in this resource.

Use the following activities to selectively investigate the issue of discrimination

Introduce the topic

➤ Create sets of cards in two colours (e.g. red and blue). Cut enough cards to provide one per student but create more reds than blues (e.g., with 30 students create 20 red cards and 10 blue cards). Mix the cards in a pile. Place a jar of candies at the front of the class.

➤ At the beginning of class randomly distribute one card to each student. Instruct the students with red cards to sit at the front of the class. Greet each red card-holding student individually, shaking their hand and acknowledging their presence in class. Instruct the students with blue cards to sit at the back of the room and do not greet them. Explain to students that class today will begin with a spelling test but the students with red cards do not need to take the test. They will have free reading time. Inform the students with red cards that they are welcome to take a candy from the treat jar at the front of the class. Point out that these treats are only for the students with red cards. Introduce other age-appropriate privileges for the red card-holding students (5 minutes longer at recess, leave the room without permission, use cell phones, wear hats). If possible, continue class for 5-10 minutes, conducting the spelling test and treating the two groups of students differently.

➤ Explain to students that this introduction was a brief experiment. Invite students from both groups to discuss how it felt to have privileges granted and withheld. Explain to students that in 1968, after Martin Luther King was assassinated, a third grade teacher, determined to help her students understand what discrimination felt like, conducted a similar kind of experiment for two days. The exercise has become world famous and frequently used as training for raising discrimination sensitivity.

➤ Information about the 1968 blue eye/brown eye experiment, *A Class Divided*, can be found at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/. If appropriate, show students portions of the video and discuss the consequences of discrimination for both the victim and the perpetrator.

Define discrimination

➤ Write the words *discriminate* and *discrimination* on the board. Invite students to discuss their meanings. Point out that to discriminate between two or more things is to be aware of differences. For example, discriminating between a black bear and a grizzly bear requires that one notice the differences between the two kinds of bears. This does not represent a negative action.

➤ Discuss with students when discrimination becomes negative. Point out that it is the consideration of fairness that separates positive and negative discrimination. For example, the students with the blue cards were denied privileges simply because they had blue cards, and not because of any justifiable difference.

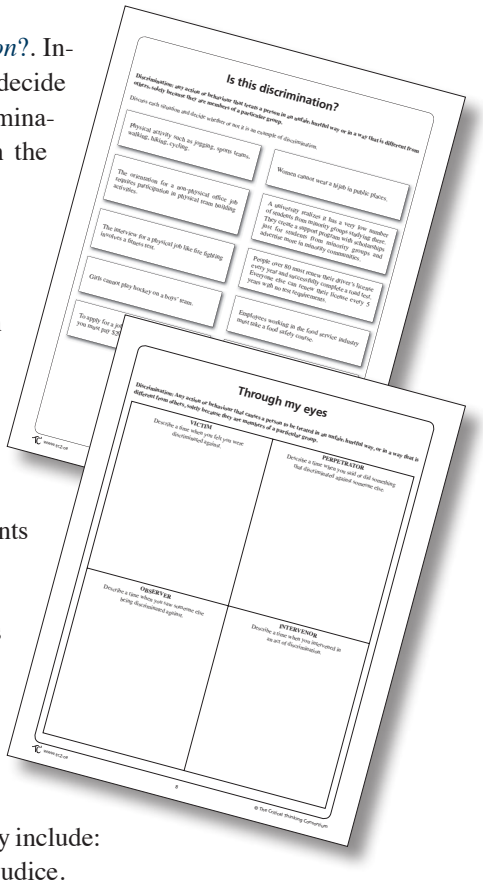
➤ Offer the following definition of discrimination: **any action or behaviour that treats a person in an unfair, hurtful way, or in a way that is different from others, solely because they are members of a particular group.**

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➤ Invite students to brainstorm words that have similar meaning to discrimination (e.g., racism, prejudice).

➤ Point out that the original brown/blue eye experiment specifically addressed discrimination based on skin colour. Invite students with a partner to discuss the question "Does discrimination still exist today?" Brainstorm with students the basis for targets of discrimination (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, mental challenges, physical disabilities, religion, poverty, obesity, age).

➤ Suggest that discrimination occurs on many levels and in a variety of circumstances. It can be present in public spaces and laws, and in individual actions and words. Discrimination can be obvious or direct (e.g., teasing, ignoring, bullying, being watched in a store, lower wages for equal work, telling jokes), or subtle or indirect (e.g. rules such as dress codes, friends choose to do things you can't afford or aren't allowed to do).



➤ Provide students with a copy of *Is this discrimination?*. Invite students to work in groups of two or three and decide whether or not the situations are examples of discrimination. With ELEMENTARY students, work through the examples as a class.

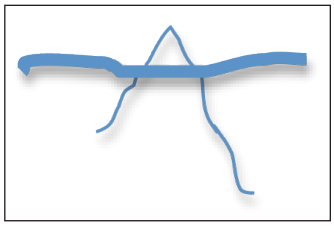
➤ Ask students whether they have been involved with or witnessed discrimination. Provide students with a copy of *Through my eyes*. Invite students to think of a time when they were either the victim, perpetrator, observer, or intervener in an act of discrimination. If necessary, provide personal examples to help students think of their own experiences. Instruct students to record their ideas on the activity sheet.

➤ Organize students in groups of three or four to discuss their experiences. Select students to share with the class.

Understanding discrimination

➤ Pose the question: "What is at the root of discrimination?" Invite students to discuss the question with a partner. Share student ideas with the class. Ideas may include: fear, hatred, suspicion, stereotyping, power, and prejudice.

➤ Invite a volunteer to stand at the front of the class. Ask the other students what factual information they can tell about this student by looking at him/her. Record their observations on the board. Suggestions may include: male/female, age, skin colour, and physical appearance.



➤ Draw a picture of an iceberg illustrating both the part above and below the water. Suggest to students that our immediate understanding of a person based on observation represents only the tip of the iceberg in knowing or understanding him/her. Invite students to brainstorm aspects of a person's identity that may not always be visible (e.g., beliefs, values, family, roles, sexuality, community, home, education, occupation, interests). Suggest to students that people often make judgments about others based on what they see at the tip of the iceberg. These judgments may also be informed by preconceived ideas we have about people.

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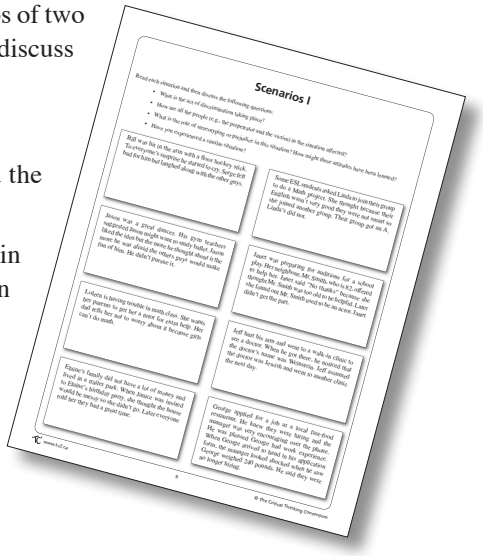
➤ Introduce the term "stereotype". Invite students to offer definitions of the term. Suggest to students that we may all hold stereotypes or mental images of groups of people. Invite students to participate in a word association game. Call out a variety of groups of people and ask students to say or write down the first words they associate with this group, (e.g., teachers, lawyers, nurses, old people, doctors, Chinese people, First Nations people, Black people, French Canadians, English Canadians, teenagers, refugees, Ethiopians).

➤ Discuss with students whether or not they all held the same image or stereotype and whether or not they held a stereotype for their own group. Point out that stereotypes can be negative (e.g., teachers are mean) or positive (e.g., rock stars are cool).

➤ Introduce the term "prejudice". Invite students to discuss the difference between stereotype and prejudice. (Prejudice is a negative opinion formed without sufficient knowledge).

➤ Provide students with a copy of *Scenarios I*. In groups of two or three, invite students to read each situation and discuss the following questions:

- What is the act of discrimination taking place?
- How are all the people (e.g., the perpetrator and the victim) in the situation affected?
- What role does stereotyping or prejudice play in this situation? How might these attitudes have been learned?
- Have you experienced a similar situation?


Scenarios I

Read each situation and then discuss the following questions.

- What is the act of discrimination taking place?
- How are all the people (e.g., the perpetrator and the victim) in the situation affected?
- What is the role of stereotyping or prejudice in this situation? How might these attitudes have been learned?
- Have you experienced a similar situation?

Bill was hit in the arm with a floor hockey stick. To everyone's surprise he joined in the laughter. Bill had let him feel laughed along with the other guys.

Some ESL students asked Linda to join their group to do a Math project. She thought because their English wasn't very good they were not smart so she joined another group. They group got an A. Linda's did too.

Jason was a great dancer. He, even teachers recognized him as the best dancer. Jason filled the class but the one thing he thought about is that he was afraid the other guys would make fun of him. He didn't perform it.

Janet was preparing for auditions for a school play. Her best friend, Mr. Smith, who is also a neighbour, told her that she was perfect for the part. Janet was confused as she knew Mr. Smith loved to be in front of the camera. Janet didn't get the part.

Lokem is having trouble in math class. She wants her parents to get her a tutor to help. Her dad tells her not to worry about it because girls don't do math.

Jeff had his arm and went to a walk-in clinic to see a doctor. When he got there he noticed that the doctor's name was Weinberg. Jeff assumed the doctor was Jewish and went to another clinic the next day.

Elaine's family did not have a lot of money and lived in a trailer park. When Jessica was invited to Elaine's birthday party, she thought the house would be messy or dirty. She thought the house told her they had a great time.

George applied for a job at a local fast-food restaurant. He knew they were hiring and the manager was very encouraging over the phone. When George arrived for his interview, however, the manager looked at his application form, then looked at George and said, "Sorry, we no longer hiring."

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➤ Discuss students' responses and draw out the consequences of discrimination.

Explore discrimination using some or all of the following critical challenges

Critical challenge #1

Create or find a song, photo, or poem that best illustrates the connection between empathy and discrimination.

➤ Invite students to review the situations when they acted as an ally for someone who was experiencing discrimination. Discuss with students what caused them to intervene.

➤ Introduce the strategy found in *Empathic* (part of the Tools for Thought collection).

➤ Discuss with students the role of empathy in discrimination. Invite students to suggest why some people are more empathic than others.

➤ Show students the video story of Jessie, a young person trapped by poverty. The video, http://www0.un.org/works/sub3.asp?lang=en&id=96, corresponds to the second image in the right-hand column. Invite students to imagine what it would be like to be Jessie. Encourage students to work with a partner to create a web of Jessie's emotions, goals, physical feelings, and hopes for the future.

➤ As a class, discuss what it would be like to be Jessie. If students watched the video, *A Class Divided*, available at http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/, compare Jessie's feelings to those of the children who were discriminated against in that video.

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➤ Suggest to students that an actual physical experience of discrimination would likely help people become more empathic. However, this is not always possible. Suggest that other efforts are being made to help people develop empathy. Invite students to find poems, songs, videos, and posters designed to promote empathy. Challenge students to find the best product that illustrates the connection between empathy and discrimination or to create their own representation.

Critical challenge #2

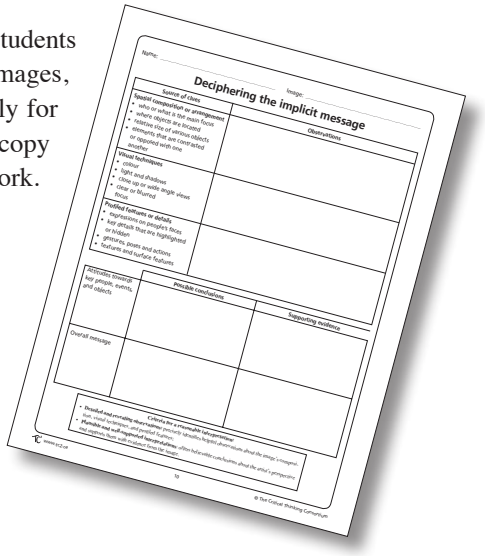
Evaluate images to identify any (implicit) messages of discrimination.

➤ Remind students that discrimination can be subtle or obvious. Review with students the common types of discrimination. Show students controversial images from the following websites:

- http://images.google.com/images?client=safari&rls=en&q=aunt+jemima&oe=UTF-8&um= (pictures of Aunt Jemima)
- http://www.angelfire.com/ca7/loyaltubist/pejorative.html (images of discrimination in advertisements)
- http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2007/04/25/bc-murals.html (the story of the removal of the demeaning First Nations murals from the BC legislature)

➤ Introduce the strategy found in *Implicit messages in images* (part of the Tools for Thought collection).

➤ Bring a variety of magazines to the classroom. Invite students to select a magazine or a textbook, to examine the images, and to select several images to examine more closely for evidence of discrimination. Provide students with a copy of *Deciphering the implicit message* to support their work.



Critical challenge #3

Assess the extent to which discrimination exists in our classroom/school.

➤ Write the following statement on the board: "Discrimination does not exist in our classroom (or school)." Ask students to think about the extent to which they agree with the statement. Post one of the following cards in each corner of the classroom: strongly agree; agree; disagree; and strongly disagree. Instruct students to stand in the corner that represents their decision.

➤ Invite students in the same corner to discuss with each other the reasons for their decision. Select several students to share ideas with the class.

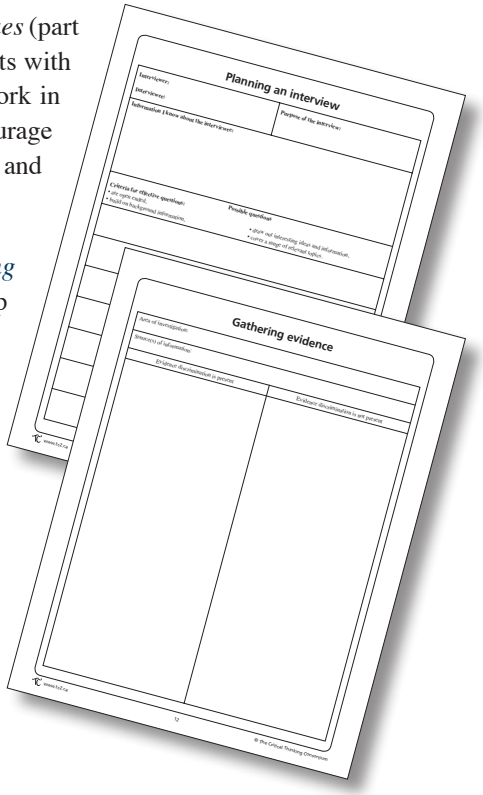
➤ Organize students in groups of three or four. If possible form groups that include students who stood in different corners. Provide time for group members to talk about their responses to the statement.

➤ Explain to students that each group will investigate the truth of this statement and report their findings to the class. Brainstorm with the class where they can find evidence to help them come to a conclusion. Suggestions may include: school mission statement; modes of communication

such as newsletters and the school website; images in the school; access to school events; access to sports teams and types of events; and opinions and experiences of students and teachers.

➤ Remind students of the definition of discrimination: any action or behaviour that treats a person in an unfair, hurtful way or in a way that is different from others, solely because they are members of a particular group. Invite students within each group to select two avenues of investigation. All students must conduct an interview.

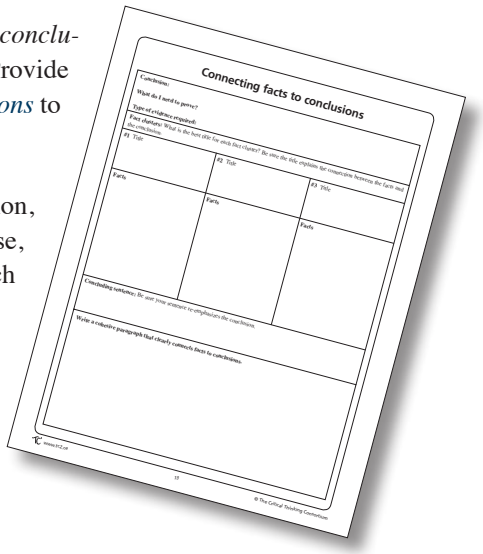
➤ Introduce the strategy found in *Interviewing techniques* (part of the Tools for Thought collection). Provide students with a copy of *Planning an interview* to support their work in interviewing one or more students and teachers. Encourage students to collectively decide who they will interview and then to prepare and conduct the interview(s).



➤ Provide each student with three copies of *Gathering evidence*. Encourage students to use this sheet to help organize their information.

➤ Ask students to prepare a written response to the question about the existence of discrimination in their classroom (or school).

➤ Introduce the strategy found in *Connecting facts to conclusions* (part of the Tools for Thought collection). Provide students with a copy of *Connecting facts to conclusions* to help them prepare their written response.



➤ When each group has conducted their investigation, arrived at their conclusion, and written their response, encourage students to share their paragraphs with each other.

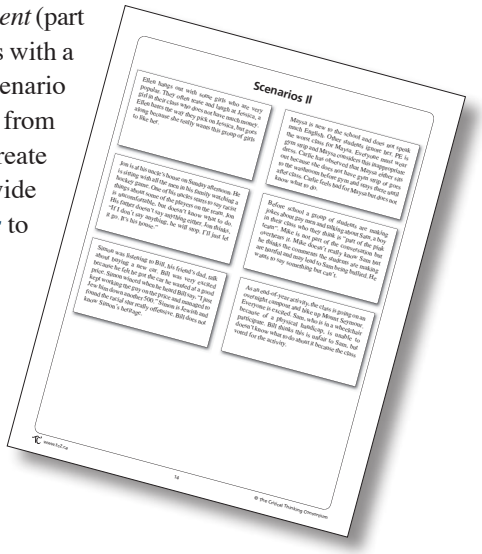
Critical challenge #4

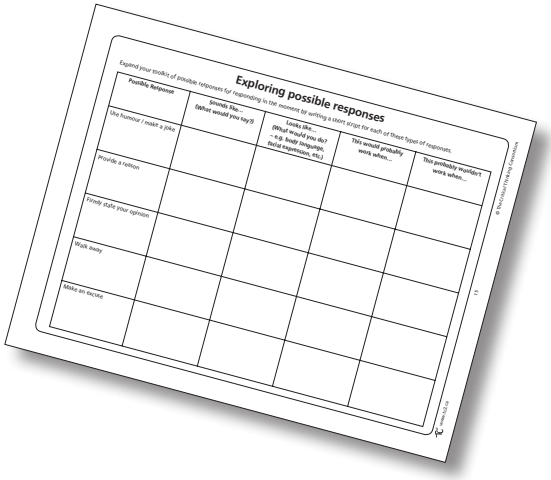
Create an effective response to the situations provided.

➤ Ask students to think back to their experiences as witnesses of discrimination. Invite several students to share their experiences. Discuss with students how they felt in these situations. Brainstorm the reasons why it is often difficult to intervene in a situation even though something needs to be done.

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➤ Introduce the strategy found in *Responding in the moment* (part of the Tools for Thought collection). Provide students with a copy of *Scenarios II*. Invite students to read each scenario with a partner and discuss what prevents the character from intervening in the situation. Challenge students to create a powerful response that may alter the scenario. Provide students with a copy of *Exploring possible responses* to support their work.





➤ After students have discussed all the scenarios, challenge them to decide which of their responses is the most powerful. That is, which response would make the most difference in the situation? Instruct students to rewrite the selected scenario to include the characters' responses to the situation. Encourage students to share their new scenarios with several other groups.

Is this discrimination?

Discrimination: any action or behaviour that treats a person in an unfair, hurtful way or in a way that is different from others, solely because they are members of a particular group.

Discuss each situation and decide whether or not it is an example of discrimination.

Physical activity such as jogging, sports teams, walking, hiking, cycling.

Women cannot wear a hijab in public places.

The orientation for a non-physical office job requires participation in physical team building activities.

A university realizes it has a very low number of students from minority groups studying there. They create a support program with scholarships just for students from minority groups and advertise more in minority communities.

The interview for a physical job like fire fighting involves a fitness test.

People over 80 must renew their driver's license every year and successfully complete a road test. Everyone else can renew their license every 5 years with no test requirements.

Girls cannot play hockey on a boys' team.

Employees working in the food service industry must take a food safety course.

To apply for a job as a server in this resort, you must pay $200.

Women will be paid less than men for the same work.

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Through my eyes

Discrimination: Any action or behaviour that causes a person to be treated in an unfair, hurtful way, or in a way that is different from others, solely because they are members of a particular group.

VICTIM Describe a time when you felt you were discriminated against.	**PERPETRATOR** Describe a time when you said or did something that discriminated against someone else.
OBSERVER Describe a time when you saw someone else being discriminated against.	**INTERVENOR** Describe a time when you intervened in an act of discrimination.

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Scenarios I

Read each situation and then discuss the following questions:

- What is the act of discrimination taking place?
- How are all the people (e.g., the perpetrator and the victim) in the situation affected?
- What is the role of stereotyping or prejudice in this situation? How might these attitudes have been learned?
- Have you experienced a similar situation?

Bill was hit in the arm with a floor hockey stick. To everyone's surprise he started to cry. Serge felt bad for him but laughed along with the other guys.

Some ESL students asked Linda to join their group to do a Math project. She thought because their English wasn't very good they were not smart so she joined another group. Their group got an A. Linda's did not.

Jason was a great dancer. His gym teachers suggested Jason might want to study ballet. Jason liked the idea but the more he thought about it the more he was afraid the others guys would make fun of him. He didn't pursue it.

Janet was preparing for auditions for a school play. Her neighbour, Mr. Smith, who is 82, offered to help her. Janet said "No thanks" because she thought Mr. Smith was too old to be helpful. Later she found out Mr. Smith used to be an actor. Janet didn't get the part.

Loleen is having trouble in math class. She wants her parents to get her a tutor for extra help. Her dad tells her not to worry about it because girls can't do math.

Jeff hurt his arm and went to a walk-in clinic to see a doctor. When he got there, he noticed that the doctor's name was Weinstein. Jeff assumed the doctor was Jewish and went to another clinic the next day.

Elaine's family did not have a lot of money and lived in a trailer park. When Janice was invited to Elaine's birthday party, she thought the house would be messy so she didn't go. Later everyone told her they had a great time.

George applied for a job at a local fast-food restaurant. He knew they were hiring and the manager was very encouraging over the phone. He was pleased George had work experience. When George arrived to hand in his application form, the manager looked shocked when he saw George weighed 240 pounds. He said they were no longer hiring.

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Name: _____ Image: _____

Deciphering the implicit message

Source of clues	Observations
Spatial composition or arrangement • who or what is the main focus • where objects are located • relative size of various objects • elements that are contrasted or opposed with one another	
Visual techniques • colour • light and shadows • close up or wide angle views • clear or blurred focus	
Profiled features or details • expressions on people's faces • key details that are highlighted or hidden • gestures, poses and actions • textures and surface features	

	Possible conclusions	Supporting evidence
Attitudes towards key people, events, and objects		
Overall message		

Criteria for a reasonable interpretation:

- **Detailed and revealing observations:** precisely identifies helpful observations about the image's composition, visual techniques, and profiled features;
- **Plausible and well-supported interpretations**: offers believable conclusions about the artist's perspective and supports them with evidence from the image.

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Planning an interview

Interviewer: **Interviewee:**	**Purpose of the interview:**

Information I know about the interviewee:

Possible questions

Criteria for effective questions:

- are open ended,
- build on background information,
- draw out interesting ideas and information,
- cover a range of relevant topics.

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Gathering evidence

Area of investigation:	
Source(s) of information:	
Evidence discrimination is present	Evidence discrimination is not present

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Connecting facts to conclusions

Conclusion:

What do I need to prove?

Type of evidence required:

Fact clusters: What is the best title for each fact cluster? Be sure the title explains the connection between the facts and the conclusion.

#1 Title	**#2** Title	**#3** Title
Facts	**Facts**	**Facts**

Concluding sentence: Be sure your sentence re-emphasizes the conclusion.

Write a cohesive paragraph that clearly connects facts to conclusions.

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Scenarios II

Ellen hangs out with some girls who are very popular. They often tease and laugh at Jessica, a girl in their class who does not have much money. Ellen hates the way they pick on Jessica, but goes along because she really wants this group of girls to like her.

Maysa is new to the school and does not speak much English. Other students ignore her. PE is the worst class for Maysa. Everyone must wear gym strip and Maysa considers this inappropriate dress. Carlie has observed that Maysa either sits out because she does not have gym strip or goes to the washroom before gym and stays there until after class. Carlie feels bad for Maysa but does not know what to do.

Jon is at his uncle's house on Sunday afternoon. He is sitting with all the men in his family watching a hockey game. One of his uncles starts to say racist things about some of the players on the team. Jon is uncomfortable, but doesn't know what to do. His father doesn't say anything either. Jon thinks, "If I don't say anything, he will stop. I'll just let it go. It's his house."

Before school a group of students are making jokes about gay men and talking about Sam, a boy in their class who they think is "part of the pink team". Mike is not part of the conversation but overhears it. Mike doesn't really know Sam but he thinks the comments the students are making are hurtful and may lead to Sam being bullied. He wants to say something but can't.

Simon was listening to Bill, his friend's dad, talk about buying a new car. Bill was very excited because he felt he got the car he wanted at a good price. Simon winced when he heard Bill say, "I just kept working the guy on the price and managed to Jew him down another 500." Simon is Jewish and found the racial slur really offensive. Bill does not know Simon's heritage.

As an end-of-year activity, the class is going on an overnight campout and hike up Mount Seymour. Everyone is excited. Sam, who is in a wheelchair because of a physical handicap, is unable to participate. Bill thinks this is unfair to Sam, but doesn't know what to do about it because the class voted for the activity.

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Exploring possible responses

Expand your toolkit of possible responses for responding in the moment by writing a short script for each of these types of responses.

Possible Response	Sounds like… (What would you say?)	Looks like… (What would you do? – e.g. body language, facial expression, etc.)	This would probably work when…	This probably wouldn't work when…
Use humour / make a joke				
Provide a reason				
Firmly state your opinion				
Walk away				
Make an excuse				

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