



Blue Eye / Brown Eye KS1/2 Activity

Curriculum Links

Citizenship:

Unit 01: Taking part - developing skills of communication and participation

Unit 02: Choices

Unit 05: Living in a diverse world

Unit 07: Children's rights - human rights

Literacy:

EN1 Speaking & Listening

Objectives

To engage pupils in discussion and debate about prejudice, discrimination and human rights issues.

Overview

Blue Eye / Brown Eye is an experiment first performed in the USA by Jane Elliot in 1968. The experiment was performed by Elliot on the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, to demonstrate what prejudice was to her third grade class.

This activity enables pupils to experience, first hand, what prejudice is like. Pupils are involved in a classroom “experiment” (or role-play) in which those with blue eyes are treated very differently to those with brown eyes. The activity

compels pupils to question discrimination and to discuss fundamental human rights.

Pupils develop skills in participation, communication, inquiry and decision-making.

Preparation

- You may wish to make some signs for the classroom, which enforce the instructions you will be giving to the class- for example “Blue eyed people only allowed in this area!”, “Brown eyed people must sit on the floor!” or “No playtime allowed for brown eyed people!” etc.

Suggested Activity Times

This is a flexible activity which could be adapted to last from as little as one hour, to a whole day. (Although it is advisable to plan for a change over of the groups- to allow those pupils who have been “inferior” to experience being “superior” and vice-versa.)

Important!

There are some ethical questions raised by this experiment. Strictly speaking, this activity does not constitute an “experiment” as such - rather, it is a work of drama or a role-play. However, if not explained before hand, the nature of the activity may upset some particularly young or sensitive pupils. Only you, as their Teacher, can decide how far to take this activity with the pupils and decide whether or not your class should be kept in ignorance of the fact that this activity is “pretend”.

Suggested Activity Content

- You may wish to put some signs (see above) around the classroom to increase the impact of the activity on the pupils.

- When your class arrives in the morning or after a break, explain that you are going to split them into two groups- those with blue eyes (or green eyes) and those with brown eyes (or hazel eyes).
- At this point you may wish to tell the pupils that you are conducting an “experiment” to look at what prejudice is. Or alternatively you may decide to keep them in ignorance of what is happening.
- Separate the class into two halves - those with blue eyes and those with brown. Then tell them that the pupils with blue eyes are superior to the pupils with brown eyes.
- Tell the brown eyed pupils that they are not allowed access to play equipment, and that they are not allowed to socialise with members of the “superior group”. They are also not allowed any more breaks.
- Tell the brown eyed pupils that you think that they are not as clever as those with blue eyes and that they will have to work through their breaks to catch up.
- You may wish to allow pupils to work for a short period of time, abiding by these rules. (Alternatively- move straight onto the next point.)
- Discuss the following with your class:
 - Do the class think that your actions were fair? Why / Why not?
 - What rights did you take away from those with brown eyes?
 - What special privileges were you giving those with blue eyes?
 - What evidence did you have to make the statement about brown-eyed pupils being less clever than blue-eyed pupils?
 - Do the class think that prejudice is normally based on evidence?
 - Can the class think of any examples where prejudice happens?
 - What did this exercise tell the pupils about prejudice?
 - Why do the pupils think prejudice happens?
 - If we can “create” prejudice this easily- can we “destroy” it just as easily?
 - What can we do about prejudice?
 - What actions can we take as individuals, in our day-to-day lives?