



Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Define oppression, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and speciesism.
- Identify several ways that people have effectively created change.

Time Needed

45 minutes

Materials

- Chart paper
- Markers

Insider Tips

- This lesson deals with very challenging issues. It is important to create a safe space where everyone is respectful in sharing opinions and listening to others.
- When students are deciding if their list of “reasons” for and “ways” of oppressing people are also the same for animals, most will probably agree that the reasons and ways are similar, but some may disagree. If students disagree allow for discussion and for students with differing opinions to share their perspectives.
- Explain that the comparisons are not meant to suggest that people and nonhuman animals are the same, but to illustrate that the roots and execution of the oppression are similar.

Lesson 6: Looking at the Root

Overview: Students will consider the root causes of oppression by considering the reasons and the ways that people have oppressed other people and animals. Students will also consider the ways in which people have struggled to create a more equal and just world.

Procedure:

Introduction

1. Introduce the topic by asking the students if they know what the word *oppression* means. Allow students time to define it. Write the word on the board with an official definition:

Oppression: an unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power.

2. Ask the students if they can think of a few examples of oppression. Allow students to answer. (Possible answers: the Holocaust; slavery in America; and indigenous people forced onto reservations.)
3. Explain to students that they will examine root causes of oppression.

Getting at the Root

1. Divide the class into two groups. Give each group a sheet of chart paper.
2. Ask one group to write “**Reasons**” on the top of the chart paper and list all the reasons that one group of people would oppress another group of people. (Possible answers: power; belief of superiority; control; financial gain.)
3. Ask the other group to write “**Ways**” on the top left of the paper and to write down the ways one group has oppressed another group. (Possible answers: violence; slavery; separation of families; and derogatory names.)
4. When the groups are done, post both sheets of paper in the front of the classroom. Ask the students from each group to present their ideas and ask the other group if there are any ideas they want to add.
5. Ask students to consider if the “reasons” listed are the same reasons that people hurt animals. Ask them to explain. Draw a star next to each reason that is the same. Do the same for the list of “ways.”
6. Write the following words on the board and ask the students if they know what the words mean. Ask the students how they feel about racism, sexism, or heterosexism and facilitate a discussion.

Racism: To believe that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.

Sexism: To believe gender differences produce an inherent superiority over another gender.

Heterosexism: To believe sexual orientation differences produce an inherent superiority over another.

- **Take home point:** Even though people and other species are different, if we see the roots of oppression are similar and the roots of justice are similar, we can work together to create a more humane world for both people and other species. Hold a discussion exploring these issues and asking if students agree or disagree and why.

Classroom Teachers

- As an extension project, ask students to research specific examples of human and animal oppression that are similar, such as research experiments on people and research testing on animals (e.g., the Tuskegee Syphilis experiment on African American men and AIDS research on chimpanzees). Ask students to explain what happened and then discuss the differences and the similarities in both situations.
- This activity aligns to Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards 1 and 4.

Outside Humane Educators

- Students may have a difficult time brainstorming the “reasons” or the “ways” at the beginning. You may need to give them one or two suggestions to start. Also, if you are not familiar with the group you might just have the whole class brainstorm together instead of breaking the class into two groups.

Lesson 6: Looking at the Root (continued)

7. Then ask students if they know what speciesism is. Challenge them to compare it to the other words just defined and help them to break the word down if needed: “species” and “ism.”

Speciesism: To believe that species differences produce an inherent superiority over another species.

8. Lead a discussion around this concept. Ask the students if they agree with speciesism or not. Challenge them based on their opinions around racism, sexism, and heterosexism. Ask them to consider whether or not they support or oppose speciesism in their actions.
9. Ask students what they think we can learn from this exercise.
10. As part of the discussion, share the following quotation by Henry David Thoreau: *There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.*

Ask the students the following questions:

- *What do you think this quotation means?*
- *Do you agree with it or not, and why?*
- *Do you think it is more effective to create change by working on a single issue or on the root cause of multiple issues?*
- *Do we sometimes need to do both?*
- *Can you think of any examples to support your opinion?*

Making a Difference

1. Go back to the chart paper on the board and turn the papers around. Write “**Reasons**” on the top again and this time ask students to brainstorm all the reasons that people choose not to oppress others. (Possible answers: love; compassion; equality; empathy; justice; and Golden rule.)
2. Write the word “**Ways**” at the top of the other paper. Ask students to brainstorm the ways that people have struggled to end oppression. (Possible answers: campaigns; marches; protests; letter writing; boycotts; getting to know one another; and education.)
3. Ask if all these reasons and ways can apply to promoting kindness and respect toward other species. Facilitate a discussion around this topic.

Wrap Up:

Ask the students the following questions:

- *What connections did you make today about people and animals?*
- *What connections do you see between our treatment of other people and animals?*
- *Would you change any of your behaviors or attitudes toward people or animals based on what you learned today? If so, what?*