

# Understanding That We Are One

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## **Introduction**

“No one is white before he/she came to America.”<sup>1</sup> I came across this idea reading Allan G. Johnson’s book on privilege and prejudices and it made me think of how it is true about me. I was born and raised in Hungary, a country smaller than North Carolina. My family and I were living in the capital, the heart of the country, the place considered to make your dreams come true. In the early 70s and 80s the only color I saw around me was that of my own and occasionally a few Roma people. At that time they made up only about 1% of the population compared to the estimated 6-8% today. Interestingly, the labels used to group people were ‘Hungarian’ (majority) and ‘Roma’ (minority), which did not refer to the color of their skin, so I never identified myself as white, even though I am.

As the political system started to change, we could see an increasing number of visitors, students and businessmen/women coming to Hungary from all over the world. Some of them liked it there so much that they never left. We had a chance to experience a wider scope of diversity, but in the Hungarian Census you cannot find a classification according to race even today. That again might explain why I had never had to state my race before I came to the United States. Also I never felt any of the positive and negative implications of being white. I simply did not know what it meant as I wasn’t a part of a system that would define me as such. Maybe ‘know’ is not the most accurate word here, since through my studies I learned about racial tension, white supremacy and the privileged situation white people experience in the United States (and in other parts of the world), but I was not ‘living’ it.

I cannot honestly say though that I had never seen any acts of discrimination back in Hungary. Most of them were and are aimed at the Roma population and increasingly at immigrants (from Asia and Africa); however, these incidents are typically not racially biased, but rather issues of power and the false idea of possible loss of privileges. My first chance to experience racial bias in person was when I started teaching in the United States. I am saddened by the fact that many people still think that they are superior to

others just because of the color of their skin. To be honest, I am quite dumbfounded by the idea of somebody being superior to others. I believe that we need to acknowledge our differences and instead of regarding them as something to fear and hate, it's time to celebrate them.

## **Background**

I teach one of the most entertaining subjects: English 1 for ESL students. Teaching English is fantastic in itself, but when you teach it to ESL students it becomes even more exciting. Currently, I have five boys and five girls in my class (Do I have it easy! At least that's what it looks like at first sight...) who come from seven different countries, three different continents and speak six different languages. Add to that they have a Hungarian teacher. We truly have an international class with all the beauties and challenges that encompass our melting pot. I have a socially, culturally and racially diverse group that makes teaching this curriculum unit very fitting.

This classroom diversity is present throughout the school: 61% of the students are black, 3% white, 25% Hispanic, 9% Asian and 1.5% multiracial.<sup>2</sup>

The school is located in a socio-economically challenged area, which is reflected in the high number of students that are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch. Many of the students arrived here as refugees, or were forced to come to the country because of various reasons. Often they have a hard time fitting in and not only for their cultural differences and language barriers, but also because of their reluctance to be here. For example, some of them would rather work than come to school every day and find little value in being educated. Others want to do well and have high expectations regarding their future, but their interrupted or insufficient former education impedes them from achieving their goals. For different reasons, these students need to endure and attempt to overcome a lot of frustration both at home and at school. This frustration is often hard to be contained and kids get into verbal and physical fights, often over matters that could have been settled through calm discussion, if only they had the means. I hope that by teaching this unit, my students will become more insightful and aware of more peaceful methods of conflict resolution.

## **Objective**

I have always been the peace-keeper in all my relationships since I was a toddler. I cannot endure seeing other people being mad at each other, so I often take the role of the mediator. I also have a very strong sense of justice and as a result I often get involved in situations where somebody is mistreated. By teaching this curriculum unit I would like to plant some of this social sensitivity into my students and also empower them with the necessary knowledge to notice injustice and to stand up for the ones who are in need of help instead of taking “the path of least resistance”<sup>3</sup>.

Day after day we are witnessing acts of discrimination from subtle, hardly noticeable indecencies to extreme, mind boggling incidents of violence in the media and in our personal lives. The widespread and celebrated concept of individualism, competitiveness and the increasing alienation that we see in modern, capitalist societies pose a danger to peace. By peace I mean peace of mind, peace in our relationships, peace in and with our wider communities. Acceptance. Assistance. Respect. The need to get to know the other person, to learn about their culture, history, motivation, so that we can avoid misunderstandings and fights over putative differences. To stop hate.

‘Hate’ is a dreaded concept for me. Hate blinds people and closes their minds. They become unreachable and unreasonable. They get out of control. As Dr. Steinberg stated, “Hatred is a complex, affective state alloyed with aggression. It is aroused by the experience of frustration and, in its most stark and uncompromising manner, by events that are felt to threaten life. If sustained and unresolved, hate may entail revenge in the form of a criminal act.”<sup>4</sup> These offenses fall into the category of hate crime. “This kind of crime is motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender’s bias against the victim’s race, religion, ethnic or national origin, gender, disability, or sexual orientation.”<sup>5</sup> Hate crimes have a detrimental effect on society: they generate fear and they divide communities. They make people identify either with the offender or with the victim which in extreme cases may lead to serious conflicts between groups which in effect might manifest in fights and riots. Hate crimes pose special threats to teenagers in more ways than one. Given their vulnerability due to the stage they are at in their psychological development, they are both easily influenced by new ideas and also present themselves as an easy target for a hate crime offender. Unfortunately we often hear about teenagers committing suicide because of being bullied or harassed based on one of the above mentioned biases. The news stories also mention that the perpetrators were in most cases their peers, so there is proof for teenagers being easy to get infected with the wrong ideas that can turn into violent acts.

If we look at the hate crime statistics, it is alarming to see the rate of increase from one year to another. I followed the North Carolina hate crime statistics from 1999 to 2008 based on the reported cases that the Federal Bureau of Investigation recorded.<sup>6</sup> The reported number of hate crime offenses was 31 in both 1999 and 2000 and showed similarities regarding the percentages of the different biases. Around 80% of the offenses were racially biased and there was only 1 sexually biased case in both years. In 2001 however, there were 85 reported offenses, out of which ‘only’ about 50% were racially biased (almost twice the number compared to the previous year, though), compared to the huge increase in religiously biased crimes, which was 5 times more than the previous year. Just to put it into perspective, according to the FBI the reported religious-bias incidents grew “by more than 1,600 percent over the 2000 volume. In 2001, reported data showed there were 481 incidents made up of 546 offenses having 554 victims of crimes motivated by bias toward the Islamic religion.”<sup>7</sup> This huge jump shows an evident connection with the tragic events of 9/11. This effect was still traceable in 2002 where the rate of religiously biased hate crimes was still higher than previously (7 compared to 1 in 1999 and 2000), but the overall number of reported hate crime offenses dropped down to 62. Another turning point can be seen in the increase of the number of sexually biased crimes from this year on. It was around the same number of cases (10) annually for the following few years. In 2003 the overall number was 77, and then a slight drop to 66 in 2004, and then back up to 89 in 2005, way up to 100 in 2006, a less painful year in 2007, when the number of offenses was 75 and finally an astonishing 124 in 2008. As they say, the data speaks for itself, and it is true to a certain extent. The fact that within 9 years the number of reported hate crimes quadrupled raises a lot of concerns, to say the least. For us, educators, these numbers have to mean even more: we need to take a stand and think about successful measures of prevention, especially in light of what researchers warn about. “Among hate crime offenders, juveniles and young people appear to be disproportionately represented. However, the lack of definitive data collection regarding juvenile hate crime activity has limited the development of an evidence base.”<sup>8</sup> What it really means is that these data cannot account for all the offenses juveniles are involved in, since a lot of them do not result in arrest. According to Levin and McDevitt’s 1995 estimation, juvenile offenders are responsible for committing approximately 70% of hate crimes.<sup>9</sup>

In order to find a cure for a disease, we need to look beyond the symptoms and search for the cause. In doing so, Levin and McDevitt<sup>10</sup> looked at the motivations of hate crime offenders and placed them in three categories. The largest group is what they call the “thrill-seekers” who commit crimes for an ego-boost, to feel stronger and superior, or simply out of boredom, or in need of excitement. They are usually young people who

want to impress their friends and try to fit in, like most bullies who make some students' lives a misery. Offenders belonging to the next category, the "reactionists" think that they need to protect certain values that are threatened by certain groups of people. We all hear about incidents when immigrants are attacked for (allegedly) taking away jobs from Americans. The third group, "mission offenders", take it to another level, and want to eradicate the group that they think is inferior, or evil, the ones "who are bent on destroying *his* culture, *his* economy or the purity of *his* racial heritage."<sup>11</sup>

I wanted to share this overview with you to show you why I chose to focus on prejudice, discrimination, alienation and the remedial strategies to empower students to be tolerant, understanding and proactive in conflict resolution. The frightening aspect of hate crimes is that hate crime offenders all start at a very young age and sometimes adults are not even aware of it. Although, most of the time the way school children bully and harass each other is not against the law, their actions can result in life-long scars, serious injuries, or fatal tragedies. The responsibility of teachers and parents is inevitable. We cannot let even a passing name-calling go unnoticed. No matter how pressed we are for time, we need to address those incidents in a calm, non-humiliating manner, and make the child, or young adult understand that jokes made at the other person's expense are unacceptable and inexcusable. Nothing happens without consequences.

## **Strategies**

### Overview

I have planned this curriculum unit to be used with students aged 13-16, but with the appropriate modifications, the activities may be used with other age groups as well. As I've mentioned before, I teach ESL English, so my subject allows me (and also requires) more flexibility regarding the materials I use and the lessons I plan, which gives me more freedom to incorporate activities aimed at raising awareness to various issues, including tolerance. I understand that some subjects have more rigid curricula and it is harder to find time and opportunity to fit extracurricular topics in. With that in mind, I designed this unit so that everyone can use it according to the nature of his or her subject. You might implement it as consecutive lessons, reoccurringly throughout the year, or just pick a few activities as part of a lesson.

To be honest, the content and strategies of this unit have changed a lot since I started. When I first sat down (to be more precise, when I was walking on the treadmill, or lying in bed getting ready to sleep) to think about what materials I would be using to get my students where I wanted them to be, I had my middle school students in mind, whose life (although coming from different countries) was relatively safe and sheltered, who loved

to spend time just playing and were not really interested in issues outside their lives. This year, on the other hand, I have students aged 14-17, who have experienced a lot in life. Some of them have a lot of responsibilities and they seem to be curious to know what goes on in the world. As it is often typical of teenagers, they haven't really decided which way to go, and although they are very sensitive to social issues and injustice, they don't always see how they are wrong when they bully each other or make somebody feel inferior, which means they have a lot to learn.

The topics I planned to cover and the materials I decided to use defined what strategies to utilize. I find it very important to address multiple intelligences during instruction, so that all students can feel successful and enjoy the learning process. Since it is an English class, apart from adhering to the state mandated objectives and meeting the goal to have students ready for the end-of-course test, I would like my students to learn to love reading, so there would be a lot of reading involved. On the other hand, since my students' reading level is currently at that of a third grader, I will have to use a lot of modifications, pre-teaching, graphic organizers, collective note-taking, and plenty of discussions to help comprehension and also improve their higher order thinking skills. Since my students' language competency is far from that of the native speakers, they rely on visual aids even more than regular students, so conveying the message with the use of a photo, a short video or a movie is more helpful for them. For that reason I will be using the movie 'Freedom Writers' to introduce and discuss the concepts of prejudice, stereotypes, intolerance, discrimination and responsibility. We will be building on this base by examining racial, religious and national bias via using short videos and researching the internet. Since linguistics has always been one of my favorite areas of study, we are going to explore how the language we speak speaks about us, and the students will get acquainted with the concept of linguistic discrimination. The focus of my unit just cries for including a project that requires the students to work together and reach out to people outside their immediate community, so as a unit closing assignment they will have to use their creativity, problemsolving, planning and collaborative skills. After this brief overview I would like to invite you to get a closer look at the strategies and lessons I envisioned for this curriculum unit.

### 'Pride and Prejudice'

I borrowed this title as the name of the first section, because in my view the two concepts are very strongly connected. Sometimes we are too easy to make judgements based on superficial evidences and then we are just too proud to revise them and admit that we are wrong. And don't we all love to be right? In most instances however, being right is just not that important and sometimes it is simply dangerous. As Eckhart Tolle says

investigating the ego: „ Being right is identification with a mental position – a perspective, an opinion, a judgement, a story. For you to be right, of course, you need somebody else to be wrong.”<sup>12</sup> Watching the movie, 'Freedom Writers' made me think of this quotation. The students in Erin Gruwell's class all have a story, and a very strong conviction that the way they see the world is right. *They* are right. Hence, whoever had a different view had to be wrong. Being wrong meant they were not on the same side. They were enemies.

In this powerful movie Erin Gruwell, a freshly graduated teacher starts her career teaching freshman English in Long Beach, CA in a gang-infested neighborhood. Her students have horrible life stories and no positive outlook for the future. They are caught up in family and gang problems and are not interested in what the school has to offer for them. Sadly, most of the teachers there don't expect them to behave any differently. Erin, on the other hand, is not ready to give up on them and with her relentless support turns the children around. It is one of those movies where you wish you were able to do what the protagonist has accomplished. But of course, the movie is not included in the curriculum unit for purely entertainment purposes. Among many other ways to use it, this movie lends itself to introduce the concept of privilege, prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, injustice, tolerance, respect and responsibility.

As I mentioned before, I try to incorporate strategies that address multiple intelligences. The Line Game (for description see Activities) that I am going to start this unit with is a great way to involve students, whose kinesthetic intelligence is higher, and also the ones whose interpersonal intelligence is lower, since it is a safe way to communicate. After the discussion that follows the game, we are going to watch the movie. I am going to pose a few questions for them to think about while watching the movie, but nothing too detailed, since we are going to break it down in the next few classes to analyze its themes in depth. Apart from analyzing the kids' behavior, lives and the changes they are going through, I will also point my students' attention to the teacher and her actions. Detailed lesson plans and the description of the activities can be found below.

### Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination

In this section we are going to explore the different ways a person can be discriminated against. Since discrimination is widely present in our lives, I expect my students to be active participants in our discussions and given the sensitive nature of the topic, I will have to set the ground rules so that everybody can feel safe to share his or her views. We are going to read Sharon G. Flake's book, 'The Skin I'm In' which will serve as the basis to talk about how race determines our life. We are also going to discuss newspaper

articles with stories from outside the United States, which will give the students an opportunity to reflect on their lives back in their home country.

Talking about religion in the school is not welcome in many school systems, although we need to distinguish between informative sessions and 'recruitment'. I believe that knowing about the different religions is part of the general knowledge that everybody should have and would definitely help diminish religious bias. In order to make that happen, my students will participate in an activity called Webquest. They are going to search the internet to find specific information mostly about the main religions. (See the know-how below.)

Ethnic discrimination is very much present even among students who are otherwise of the same race. I have noticed it among my Hispanic students mostly. I would not like to draw the attention directly to that problem, rather hope that they would make the necessary conclusions and learn from the short videos that I am going to use to present the problem. I found some parts of the NBC news series called 'What Would You Do?' (on youtube), in which every episode portrays some kind of discrimination based on stereotypes or prejudice. For example, a muslim woman does not get served in the bakery, or the Mexican workers don't get served in a cafe. The whole situation is a set-up and the participants are actors. What the creators were interested in is how the other customers react. Do they stand up for the people who suffer these indecencies or will they remain quiet. After having discussed what we saw, I will ask my students to collect stereotypes about different nationalities. This is a great time to raise their awareness of the notion 'politically correct' and have them practice how to participate respectfully in a discussion. (Details below.)

#### Linguistic discrimination

I think this topic will also be a sensitive one for my students, since coming from another country and speaking English as a second language quite often puts them on the spot. Their accent is telling and sometimes so strong that it impedes understanding. The short youtube videos they will see show how speaking English a certain way can affect their lives. We are going to discuss dialects and accents and they will understand that everybody has an accent and although they need to strive to make their speech as clear as possible, they should not be ashamed of their pronunciation. To take their understanding to another level and also to have some fun, the students will collect speech samples from the staff and the students of the school, and then we will analyze those.

#### Final project



Since the title and the guiding line of the curriculum unit is 'we are one', that is our similarities outweigh our differences both in number and importance, the students will have to come up with a project that promotes tolerance and unity. It can be anything from creating posters and posting it around the school, or organizing a school event in the name of tolerance, putting up a play, to creating a magazine. I would not like to limit them in any way as long as they are promoting the positive values of tolerance. This would be a great opportunity for them to synthesize all the knowledge they gained throughout the unit, and also put their creativity and cooperative skills into practice. The students will be responsible for the whole process, which will require a lot of thinking, planning, organizing, and they will learn how to delegate tasks, how to work together for a common goal and how to take responsibility for their tasks.

### **Lesson plans**

#### 'Pride and Prejudice'

This section of the unit is planned around the movie 'Freedom Writers'. As I mentioned before, I am going to introduce the topic by playing the Line Game. In this game there is a line drawn or taped in the middle of the classroom, or where you can find enough space to line your students up on either side of the line. Once the students are lined up facing each other about two steps from the line, the teacher starts to ask questions. To indicate that their answer is a 'yes', the students have to move one step closer to the line. The idea behind the game is to show how similar the students and their lives are. First it is advisable to start with neutral, not too sensitive questions and gradually move toward more serious ones that target the concepts we would like to draw their attention to. Here is a list of possible questions to ask: Do you live in (the name of the city)? Do you go to (name of the school)? Do you like school? Do you come from a different country? Do you have problems understanding your new environment? Do you feel unappreciated by others? Do you easily get angry? Do you find it easy to understand somebody whose opinion is completely different from yours? Do you think there is only one way to solve a problem? Do you believe in violence? Have you ever been verbally or physically attacked? Have you ever attacked somebody? These are just some ideas and the questions are supposed to be modified according to the characteristics of the class and the problems we would like to examine. In my case, my students all come from a different country and not only do they have to adjust to the culture of their new country, but also accept and tolerate the different cultures present in the classroom. They have to adapt, adjust, reassess and modify their actions and reactions every day.

After the game we will have a discussion about what they learned from this game and how (if) they found it relevant to their life and what they think was the purpose of the activity. Hopefully we can elicit some of the concepts that we are aiming to focus on. In my class, I would love to hear tolerance, discrimination, racism or privilege, since these are the most important concepts my unit aims to explore.

Since the movie is longer than one class session (123 minutes), we will start watching it after this discussion and finish it in the next class. I will ask the students to watch the movie with the following questions in mind: In what way are you similar to the kids in the movie? How are you different from them? Which character do you feel the closest resemblance to and why? Which character was the hardest to understand? What do you think about the teacher's actions? It is hard to stop with questions because this movie has so many levels, but we shouldn't worry, because we will have time to ask the remaining questions during the discussion after the movie.

We are going to start our third class of this section with a matching game. After having defined and clarified the concept of prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination and injustice, students have to label events and scenes from the movie with the right concept. For instance, the way the principal describes the class Erin is supposed to teach is a great example for prejudice and stereotypes; the incarceration of a black kid whose friend shot himself, just because the color of his skin would be labeled as injustice. This activity gives way to more discussion about the above concepts and the movie. The students can also bring in examples from their own lives. One of my objectives is not only to raise awareness, but also find solutions, so we are going to talk about ways we can correct inappropriate actions and behavior.

This movie presents great opportunities for Language Arts teachers to teach and practice elements of a story and characterization. We are going to make a plot diagram and analyze the different types of conflicts the movie presented. For this we are going to view relevant parts of the movie and the students are going to work in small groups. Different groups are going to be given different characters to practice characterization. We are going to finish this class with the students presenting their findings about the different characters and the others reflecting on it.

The first activity of the final class of this section was inspired by one of the scenes of the movie. Marcus, who had been living on his own on the streets, realizes that he needs the stability of his home and asks her mother to let him return. The mother gives permission without saying a word. I will play this scene to the students to illustrate how we can convey ideas without words and inspire them to make up their own scenes where they are telling us something without speaking. It is a great opportunity to talk about and practice metacommunication. The class will continue in the theme of art and students will choose

their favorite scene or character of the movie and create a piece of art about it. They can choose to make a poster, a painting, write a poem or act it out.

As a closing and also to assess how much they gained from our discussions, the students will write an essay about one of the following: Describe one of the characters in details using the different forms of characterization; Explain how the teacher influenced the student's and her own life; Explain how this movie has affected you.

Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination

Of ten kids identify race with the color of the skin, and since this is the easiest way for them to relate to the concept, they are going to read Sharon G. Flake's book, 'The Skin I'm In'. It is going to be an independent novel study and they will have to complete a reading guide. As they read along, they will have to answer questions that test their understanding and improve their critical thinking skills. At the end of this section we are going to have a discussion about the book where the students can share their findings and their feelings about the book. This book is especially relevant to students coming from a different country, since apart from the racial aspect, it is dealing with concepts like identity, self-perception, self-esteem, how to stand up for themselves and react to hostility. I will hand out the books and the reading guide at the beginning of the first class of this section and introduce the book by asking the students to make predictions about the story based on the title and the cover of the book.

To provide some conceptual basis for the book we are going to talk about what race is. I expect the students to share their ideas and I would just like to be the facilitator of this discussion, which will lead to first watching a short historic overview of race and then part of the film, 'Understanding Race'. From this section of the movie the students will learn that genetically we are 99% identical, and that makes it hard to think about different races as different subgroups of the human race. After viewing this section, students will have to fill in the missing words of the study guide. If needed, we can show the video for a second time.

As the next activity, students are going to work in two groups and read two different articles from The New York Times, modified according to the students' reading levels. One group is going to read The Seat Not Taken by John Edgar Wideman about a man who feels he is being discriminated on the train. It is important that students understand that racial problems are present all over the world, so the other group will be engaged in learning about racial problems in Germany. Their article is: German Official Defends Comments on Race, by Judy Dempsey. After having read and discussed their articles in their own groups, students will tell about what they read to the other group.

In the following lesson we are going to expand on the global presence of racial problems first by watching some videos on racial discrimination from other parts of the world. Students will see that people are encountering similar problems all over the world, however, they might come in a different form and intensity. One of the videos is going to show the situation of the Roma (gypsy) population in Eastern Europe, namely in my home country, Hungary. The other one is about a more serious and heartbreaking subject, the Darfur genocide. I would like to call my students' attention to the dangers of extreme discrimination, hate and ignorance. Some of them probably have never heard about it, but I'd like to show them how history tends to repeat itself. After having discussed what we saw in the videos, the students are going to depart on a 'WebQuest'. In a WebQuest students are given a Quest Guide with question for which they have to find the answer on certain websites. In this case they are going to use the Global Issues websites, mostly the section on racism. Depending on our students' independence and language skills we can decide how much help we provide and how in-depth our questions are. This is a great way to familiarize our students with research methods and encourage independent work. I find it very important to provide opportunities for oral presentation, partly to help remember new information and also to improve the students' communication and presentation skills. For this end, I will differentiate and give students Quest Guides for different areas of the world to explore racism in Europe, Asia, Africa, and in the Middle East. When they have completed their assignment, they can get in groups with the ones who had the same assignment, compare their findings, complete the missing questions and then present their findings to the other teams.

In the next class we are going to move from racial problems to ethnic discrimination. First we are going to define the meaning of the term 'ethnic group'. According to Wikipedia "An ethnic group (or ethnicity) is a group of people whose members identify with each other, through a common heritage, consisting of a common language, a common culture (often including a shared religion) and a tradition of common ancestry."<sup>13</sup>

After this I will ask my students to name some ethnic groups and will encourage them to think about their home countries too. Next we will discuss the perception of different ethnic groups in different countries and talk about stereotypes. These discussions lead up to viewing two videos of the 'What Would You Do?' series. The first video that we are going to watch portrays a coffee shop worker who refuses to serve a Muslim woman because of her ethnicity. The other video is about two Mexican workers who do not get served in a deli. The situation (moreover, the actor who plays the server) is the same, the reactions of the other customers are varied and very provocative. This is a sensitive issue

for everybody who respects and values equality and decency, so I hope that it will inspire an insightful discussion. As a closing activity I will ask my students to do a Gallery Walk and think about stereotypes for the ethnic groups presented in the posters around the room. There will be a blank sheet of paper next to the posters where they are encouraged to write stereotypes about that particular group. To wrap up the class we are going to have a discussion about how stereotypes influence our actions.

To introduce the topic of the next two classes we are going to watch a short video promoting religious tolerance. It is full of beautiful images and happy people practicing their religion. After we watched it I will ask my students to name some of the religions they recognized in the video, then we are going to watch it again. This time I am going to stop the video to help them to identify what they can see in the images. I will then ask them what they think the purpose of this video is. I would like to lead the discussion towards discrimination and tolerance. Students will be able to express their feelings and also share their experiences. As it is a very sensitive topic, we have to be cautious and remind them to carefully think over what they intend to say.

This activity will be followed by the next WebQuest of this curriculum unit. This time the Quest Guide will contain questions about the major world religions: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Judaism. The students will be directed to the appropriate websites to find the information about the religion they are expected to research. They will work in groups of five and each group member will have a specific religion assigned to them. (If it is possible, it is desirable to assign one different from his or her own religion.) When they have found the answers to the questions, the group members get together, discuss their findings and create a diagram to show the similarities and differences among these religions. Finally the groups compare their diagrams.

In the next class we are going to expand our knowledge about tolerance. In the previous class we were talking about spirituality, different religions and how it is important to accept and respect the different religious beliefs, however we did not touch upon another important aspect: the acceptance and respect of people who do not belong to any religious group, the atheists. I find it very important to draw their attention to the growing intolerance atheists are treated with in the United States. Since they are in minority, they suffer discrimination as any other minority group. I am going to show a video to initiate conversation about the topic. To make my students' understanding deeper, we are going to read an article, 'The Right of Unbelief', published on the Teaching Tolerance website. This writing gives some insight to how atheists think about the world and what values they have. As a closing activity I will ask my students to design a poster or a comic strip

to promote religious tolerance. We will showcase them by displaying them around the classroom. For further engagement, I will assign my students to watch the 'Religions of the World' series on the Discovery Education website as a homework assignment.

### Linguistic discrimination

We are going to watch three YouTube videos to listen to different accents. One is featuring the Russian Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, the next one is a funny snippet from the movie 'Pink Panther 2', the famous "I would like to buy a hamburger" scene, and the third one is a funny language school commercial emphasizing the importance of correct pronunciation. We are going to discuss why people have different accents and if it is a problem or not. Students are going to discuss their experiences in using a second language and if they have ever felt discriminated against because of the way they speak. In the next activity we are going to listen to some stories of linguistic discrimination and discuss what the students think about it. Do they think it is real or are these people just imagining it? Are the people who are discriminating against them right? What could we do to stop this?

In the remaining class time I am going to explain the project that they need to do. The students will be working in pairs and will have to collect speech samples from the staff and students who speak with different accents. Our school has great resources with our international student body and staff. Every pair needs to collect at least 2 samples and fill in a form about the person they recorded. They will have to put down their age, their gender and where they are from. As an interesting detail, they will also ask how long the recorded person has been in the country. Of course, if the person is a native speaker, this question is irrelevant. We will discuss that one part of the speech samples should be identical in order to have a good basis of comparison. For example, students can have the interviewees read a paragraph of a given text. The rest of the interview is up to the interviewers. In the recording they can talk about whatever interests them, except about where the person comes from, because that would ruin the upcoming game.

When the students have their samples, we are going to have an audio exhibition that we are turning into a game. I will ask my students to play their recording without saying anything about the person who is speaking. I like to keep my students engaged by making them guess about some details of our activities. This time they will have to guess where the person in the recording is from. After we took the votes, the presenter will tell us the correct answer. We are going to keep scores and the winner will get a prize. (The other participants will get something too, since they were also trying, and I don't like anyone to be left without a treat.) After this activity, we are going to compare some samples and discuss which ones were the easiest to understand and why. We will also think about

ways people can make their speech clearer and methods to improve pronunciation, which is especially important for ESL students.

Our next class will be dedicated to the introduction and planning of the final project. As I have mentioned above, I would like to give a lot of freedom to my students to decide on the form and execution of the product that shows their understanding of the concepts covered in this unit. To help the ones who might be lacking ideas, we are going to brainstorm together to collect a list of possible ways to go. This will also be the time to form their groups and sketch up an outline of what their project will be about. They will have to assign responsibilities to each group member and come up with a timeline and the sequence of the necessary steps and activities, as well as the materials needed. They will have a week to finish up their project and I will provide 15 minutes of my class time for this project if needed. At the end of the week, I will be eagerly waiting for the groups to present their projects.

## **Conclusion**

I have really been enjoying exploring ways and finding resources for my students to get involved in raising awareness to these crucial issues of tolerance. My hope is that apart from presenting them with interesting activities using different media, I am able to initiate some changes in their point of view. I am not saying that they need to radically change their ways of thinking, because most of them are goodhearted, responsible teenagers, who notice when others are not doing the right thing. However, they are still in their formative years and at times they do get lost, and selfishness or egoistic behavior resurfaces that leads them to make the wrong decisions, which might end up in acts of injustice, intolerance or simply indifference. I hope that by watching the videos, the movie, reading the articles and having all those discussions will make them realize that not doing something, staying inactive when an incident calls for action is as bad as participating in it. Trivial as it may sound, I would like them to take responsibility in creating a better world.

## **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Johnson, Allan. *Privilege, Power and Difference*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Publishers, 2006,17.

<sup>2</sup>School data files, Math and Science at Garinger High School, Charlotte

<sup>3</sup>Johnson, Allan. *Privilege, Power and Difference*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Publishers, 2006, 78-84

<sup>4</sup>Steinberg, M.D., Annie, Jane Brooks, M.Ed., and Tariq Remtulla, B.A.. "Youth Hate Crimes: Identification, Prevention and Intervention." *The American Journal of Psychiatry* May (2003), last accessed October 29, 2010,  
<http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/160/5/979>

<sup>5</sup>ibid.

<sup>6</sup>"FBI - Crime Statistics." FBI Homepage, last accessed November 7, 2010,  
<http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/crimestats>

<sup>7</sup>ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Steinberg, M.D., Annie, Jane Brooks, M.Ed., and Tariq Remtulla, B.A.. "Youth Hate Crimes: Identification, Prevention and Intervention." *The American Journal of Psychiatry* May (2003), last accessed October 29, 2010,  
<http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/160/5/979>

<sup>9</sup>ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Dobratz, Betty A., Lisa K. Waldner, and Tim Buzzell. *The Politics of Social Inequality* . Amsterdam: New York, 2001, 38.

<sup>11</sup>ibid

<sup>12</sup>Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. New York: Plume, 2006, 67.

<sup>13</sup>"Ethnic group - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, last accessed November 7, 2010, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic\\_group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_group)

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Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1992.

Messerschmidt, James W.. *Nine Lives: Adolescent Masculinities, The body, and Violence*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000.

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"Teaching Tolerance." Teaching Tolerance, last accessed November 7, 2010, <http://www.tolerance.org/>

Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. New York: Plume, 2006.

## **Resources for teachers and students**

### Books and websites

1. "ADL: Fighting Anti-Semitism, Bigotry and Extremism." ADL: Fighting Anti-Semitism, Bigotry and Extremism, last accessed November 27, 2010, <http://www.adl.org/?s=topmenu>

The Anti-Defamation League's website has a very noble objective: to raise Awareness and fight against hate and all forms of intolerance. We can find up-to-date information of events and current issues as well as articles to be used as part of our lessons. Students are welcome to browse it as a homework.

2. Anderson, Elijah. *The Code of the Streets*. New York: Norton Publisher, 1999. This book is a must-read for teachers, especially if you are new to inner-city neighborhoods. Very insightful and helps us understand our students' motivations and circumstances.

3. "Global Issues : social, political, economic and environmental issues that affect us all "

Global Issues, last accessed November 7, 2010, <http://www.globalissues.org/>

Extensive collection of different articles on social, economic and environmental issues that have global relevance. Great site for research projects.

4. Johnson, Allan. *Privilege, Power and Difference*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Publishers, 2006.

Very informative and entertaining book on differences and privilege, that also gives us guidance how to deal with these issues to make them better. Students and teachers can both benefit from reading it.

5. Kozol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1992.

Read it if you teach in a privileged school to find out that there are more unfortunate schools out there. Also read if you are teaching in one of the underprivileged schools to realize that things have not really changed in the past twenty years.

6. "Teaching Tolerance." Teaching Tolerance, last accessed November 7, 2010, <http://www.tolerance.org/>

A great treasure box for teachers and students: full of articles, lesson plans and activities that promote tolerance.

7. Tolle, Eckhart. *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. New York: Plume, 2006.

How to get control of your thoughts and life? How to make your 'ego' diminish? Original ideas to promote tolerance. Definitely needs a lot of background building if you wish to use the original text in the classroom.

8. "Welcome to Discovery Education." Welcome to Discovery Education, (accessed November 7, 2010, <http://www.discoveryeducation.com/>

A fantastic tool for teachers and students to make learning more exciting. You can download or stream videos, play games, find lesson plans or build your own. You need to be a member, but hopefully your school/school district realizes what an exceptional value is offered here.

Materials used in the activities of the curriculum unit

1. Associated Press. "YouTube - What would you do Muslim ." YouTube – Broadcast

Yourself, last accessed November 27, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3jZjm8xMwg&feature=related>

This video is used in the “Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination” section of the curriculum unit.

2.ABCNews. " YouTube - What would you do: racism and illegal immigration ." YouTube – Broadcast Yourself” , last accessed 29 Nov. 2010.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5LDgOMr6jw&feature=related>

This video is used in the “Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination” section of the curriculum unit.

3.Adamson, Marilyn. "Buddhism-Islam-Hinduism Beliefs - World Religions View of

God." Ask Questions about Life and God, last accessed November 7, 2010

<http://www.everystudent.com/features/connecting.html>

This website is recommended to be used for the WebQuest on religions.

4.amiablewalker. "YouTube - Linguistic Profiling, African-American English Origin,

Gullah ."YouTube – Broadcast Yourself, last accessed November 7, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPGx1icFdLQ&feature=related>

5.Barrow, Mandy. "Christianity for Kids." Woodlands Junior School, Tonbridge, Kent

UK, last accessed November 7, 2010,

[http://www.woodlands-](http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/religion/christian.htm)

[junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/religion/christian.htm](http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Homework/religion/christian.htm)

This website is recommended to be used for the WebQuest on religions.

6.ChurchofScientology. " YouTube - Respect the Religious Beliefs of Others ." YouTube - Broadcast Yourself , last accessed November 29, 2010,

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFDBLZl\\_9xw&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFDBLZl_9xw&NR=1)

This video is used in the “Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination” section of the curriculum unit.

7.cnam2000. "YouTube- Linguistic Discrimination in School AfricanAmerican English."

YouTube - Broadcast Yourself, last accessed November 7, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWIbIA9BlQ>

8.Dempsey, Judy. “ German Official Defends Comments on Race” The New York Times, 2010, last accessed November 29, 2010,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/31/world/europe/31iht-german.html>

This article is used in the “Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination” section of the curriculum unit.

9. Flake, Sharon. *The Skin I'm In*. New York: Jump At The Sun/Hyperion Books for Children, 1998.

The novel used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit.

10. *Freedom Writers*. DVD. Directed by Richard LaGravenese. Hollywood: Paramount, 2007.

The movie used in the "Pride and Prejudice" section of the curriculum unit.

11. fromthepants. "YouTube - what are youW`thinking about? ." YouTube – Broadcast Yourself, last accessed November 7, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zkZ3f8DnKs>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zkZ3f8DnKs>

Funny video to be used with the linguistic discrimination activities.

12. iamromafilm. " YouTube - Roma Intro ." YouTube - Broadcast Yourself, last accessed November 29, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3jjS4aDhSc&feature=related>

The video is used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit for the discussion of racism around the world.

13. LiberalViewer. " YouTube - Paula Zahn - discrimination against atheists part 1 ." YouTube - Broadcast Yourself, last accessed November 29, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiyJzWy3CDQ>

The video is used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit.

14. Reflex112. "YouTube - Vlad Speaks! (English)." YouTube - Broadcast Yourself,

last accessed November 7, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIDoJpz-aYk>

The video is used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit to illustrate the Russian accent.

15. SeductiveSoul0. "YouTube- pink panther - I would like to buy a hamburger ."

YouTube - Broadcast Yourself, last accessed November 7, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUCDhvbQFmU>

This funny video is used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit to illustrate the French accent and also just to have a laugh.

16. "The Right of Unbelief | Teaching Tolerance." Teaching Tolerance, last accessed

November 7, 2010,

<http://www.tolerance.org/supplement/right-unbelief>

This article is used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit for the discussion of atheism.

17. "UnderstandingRace." YouTube- UnderstandingRace." last accessed November 5, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8aaTAUAEyho> (

The video is used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit.

18. "Understanding Shorts: Race is Fiction" TLC, last accessed November 27, 2010,

<http://tlc.discovery.com/videos/understanding-shorts-race-is-fiction.html>

The video excerpt is used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit.

19. Wideman, John Edgar. "The Seat Not Taken" The New York Times, 2010, last accessed November 27, 2010,

[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/07/opinion/07Wideman.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/07/opinion/07Wideman.html?_r=1)

This article is used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit.

20. xJordyDeathx. "YouTube - Darfur Genocide (SAVE DARFUR)." YouTube – Broadcast Yourself, last accessed November 27, 2010,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAowVcRaMRk&feature=related>

This dramatic video is used in the "Racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic discrimination" section of the curriculum unit.