

A Guide to *THE ANGRY EYE*

THE ANGRY EYE, a 35-minute video, features Jane Elliott conducting her *Blue Eyed/Brown Eyed* exercise with college students.

Jane Elliott was a third grade teacher in Riceville, Iowa when she developed the *Blue Eyed/ Brown Eyed* exercise to teach the effects of racism. She began this work in response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Featured in television documentaries and training videos, Ms. Elliott has since repeated the exercise with dramatic results in many different settings.

An internationally known teacher and lecturer on diversity issues, Ms. Elliott is the recipient of the National Mental Health Association Award for Excellence in Education and of The Christine Wilson Medal for Equality and Justice.

This exercise demonstrates that racism is a learned response and that education and awareness are the solutions to discrimination.

This Manual has been specifically designed for use with **THE ANGRY EYE** video.

Using this Manual

Facilitating training sessions about racism and other equality issues can be very challenging. Some participants may have strong emotions about the topics raised; others may have personal experience of being discriminated against or treated unfairly and seeing the video may remind them of a painful past. It is therefore very important that you are as prepared as you can be so that you will be able to deal with varied responses.

Preparation for teaching THE ANGRY EYE

1. View the video **THE ANGRY EYE** and familiarize yourself with its content.
2. Find out about your organization's current policies and procedures in this area, as well as any relevant legislation.
3. If you are co-facilitating, discuss in advance how you will work together.

Goals


1. *Open a dialogue about the language, tone and systematic way racism operates;*
2. *Recognize the multiple effects of discrimination; and*
3. Understand the individual's responsibility to challenge discrimination in any context.

Suggested Teaching Time

Ninety Minutes

Structure:

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| Short introduction (Background and instructions by facilitator)..... | 5 minutes |
| Large group viewing..... | 35 minutes |
| Group Discussion..... | 45 minutes |
| Close..... | 5 minutes |



"White people's number one freedom in the United States is the freedom to be totally ignorant about those who are other than white. We don't have to learn about those who are other than white. And our number two freedom is the freedom to deny that we are ignorant."
- J. Elliott.

In this video, we shall see Jane Elliott conduct an exercise she describes as "an injection of the live virus of racism". It gives the people who participate the opportunity to discover how it feels to be something other than white in this society. It also gives them a clear understanding of the systematic way in which racism works so that they will be motivated to challenge discrimination.

The participants, on this occasion 24 college students who attended voluntarily, are divided into brown-eyed and blue-eyed groups and treated differently according to eye color. This exercise is not without precedent - eye color was one of the ways Hitler decided who went into the gas chambers during World War II.

Although we are not participating in the exercise today we hope that seeing this video will encourage you to actively challenge racist, sexist, homophobic, religious and age discrimination whenever you encounter it.

Participants should focus on the following so that they can contribute to the discussion afterwards:

1. The behavior and reflections of the students in the blue-eyed group who are discriminated against;
2. The behavior and reflections of the students in the brown eyed 'superior' group;
3. Jane Elliott's role throughout the exercise.

Show the video.

After showing the video.

Group discussion

With large groups, you may divide up into smaller groups for discussions. Assign one question to each group. Each group will select a spokesperson to present key points to the larger group.

Remind the participants that Jane Elliott briefed and gained the co-operation of the brown-eyed students before the blue-eyed students were allowed to enter the room.

"We are going to accuse them of not being as smart as we are. We are going to accuse them of not being as clean as we are. We are going to lower our expectations of them. We are going to force them to live down to our expectations of them, and when they do, we are going to blame their inability to perform, on the color of their eyes."
- J.Elliott

1) LEAH

- The white female student who had left her pencil and paper in her bag (Leah) was quite stubborn and defensive at first. However, as Jane persisted, Leah became angry. When asked why she was angry, Leah answered that it was because Jane was yelling at her. Jane maintains that she was not yelling, but Leah felt she was. As Jane says "Perception is everything."
- Later, as Jane continues to test and question her, Leah cries because her feelings are hurt by the harsh manner she is being spoken to and treated.
- Through this exercise and on this one occasion Leah is learning what it is like to be discriminated against (something the students of color experience regularly) without the threat of violence. Jane refers to James Byrd, Jr. or Matthew Shepard who were victims of hate crimes.

NOTE:

On June 7, 1998, James Byrd Jr., a man of color from Jasper, Texas, was brutally murdered by being kidnapped, beaten unconscious, spray painted in the face with black paint, tied to the back of a pick-up truck, pants dropped down to his ankles, dragged 2.5 miles over pavement through a rural community, leaving his skin, blood, and bits of his body strewn along the highway.

On October 6, 1998, Matthew Shepard, an openly gay 21 year old University of Wyoming student, was savagely attacked, burned, beaten, and tortured so badly, passersby thought the body they saw which had been strung up on a wooden fence in a crucifix position for more than 12 hours in 30 degree weather was a scarecrow.

- A few minutes later Leah admits that she is trying hard not to be angry, or to look at or react to Jane. It takes a lot of energy. Leah is certainly distressed but her distress is temporary and she is in no danger.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Identify three possible effects of being a target for bias a) on you as an individual, b) on your family, and c) on your community. What are the wider consequences for our society?

2) BEN

- Jane refers to one of the blue-eyed male students (Ben) as ‘darling’.
Jane: You’ve got a real open body posture, don’t you darling?
Ben: “I guess so.”

DISCUSSION POINTS

Ben does not say whether or not he minds being called ‘darling’ but if he does, do you think he would say so? Particularly as he appears to be trying to fit in - as a ‘good’ one - and not draw attention to himself. How is this similar to harassment in school or in the workplace? Have you ever been in this position?

3) STEPHANIE

- The white female student with the spectacles and headscarf (Stephanie) tolerates some unfair treatment when she says she is ‘unsure’ as to which card she should read. However, she becomes increasingly frustrated and belligerent when she is unable to argue her point. When she raises her hand while Jane is speaking, it is considered to be evidence of poor listening skills.
- Stephanie bursts into tears as Jane points out that she is not in any physical danger. Stephanie gets up and leaves.
- A female student of color commented "Her walking out showed frustration... We all want to walk out, we all want to get away from the problem, but we can't."
- Later Stephanie returns but, as she is able to exercise a freedom that people of color don't have i.e., the freedom to walk away from a racist environment, Jane says she can only rejoin the group if she apologizes to every person of color. Her words "I'm sorry there is racism in this country." are not acceptable because, although she is acknowledging that there is institutional racism, she is refusing to take responsibility for her own actions.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Does Stephanie choose to leave the exercise or is she forced out? When have you felt uncomfortable in a group? How did you react and what did you do? Have you ever made somebody uncomfortable in a group?

4) KERI and RASUL

One of the blue-eyed female students, Keri, believes that her own experience of pain and prejudice is considered by Jane to be less valid than the issue of race because it is less prominent.

Jane Elliott asks Keri and Rasul, the tall man of color, to stand next to her to dramatize her point.

DISCUSSION POINTS

How would you describe each of them? What do you see as the differences between them? What are the similarities? Do you agree with Jane Elliott that Rasul cannot walk away from his issue and that Keri can?

As with us all, Keri and Rasul's gender, color and ethnicity influence who they are. Give four examples of what influences who you are.

5) THE BROWN-EYED GROUP

Even though some of the students may not have been conscious of a 'system' beforehand, when Jane said that their blue-eyed colleagues were going to be "on the receiving end of the treatment which we mete out to people of color on a daily basis in this country", they immediately understood that that meant treating them as though they were inferior.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Even when their blue-eyed colleagues were being treated harshly none of the students in the "superior" group challenged Jane or asked her to stop. For the students of color was this because of the recognition that such treatment, and far worse, is part of their everyday experience or is it just not wanting to buck authority?

The brown-eyed participants recognized that language is used to reinforce inequality. When asked "What do we call men to keep them in their childlike state?" their instant response was "Boys." It is easy to see how 'bluey' can therefore become a derogatory term. Compare "bluey" with other offensive labels.

6) JANE ELLIOTT

Jane Elliott establishes a microcosm of a racist society. She gives the blue-eyed students the opportunity to experience the kind of the treatment regularly meted out to people of color and others who are considered ‘different’.

- a. She identifies a group of people by a particular characteristic – eye color.
- b. She discriminates against them and lowers her expectations of them.
- c. She forces them, by her discriminatory treatment, to look and act inferior.
- d. She blames their inferiority on their eye color.

If participants can clearly see the negative effects of discrimination and understand the system that reinforces racism, they are more likely to change their own behaviors.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Who/what sets the rules for us in society? Explore specific examples in education, media, religion and government policy.

Summary

- Racism works in a systematic way with notions of superiority internalized by white people and notions of inferiority internalized by people of color. Laws and policies support the system.

“We make laws to support white superiority. And to reinforce white superiority. And when you catch on to how it works, then we change the laws.”
– J.Elliott

- Negative behaviors are not the result of a genetic predisposition. Even scientists agree that there are more differences within any of the so-called ‘races’ than between them.
- This video shows that discriminatory treatment leads to negative behaviors. These behaviors are often cited to characterize people of color, women, homosexuals and diverse religious and ethnic groups.
- The video encourages you to think about and to take responsibility for the part you, as an individual, can play in challenging racism and all discriminatory treatment.
- Ask participants to think about what they can do to challenge discriminatory treatment.

- Ask them how they can network and support each other and take action to make a difference.

Points to consider when planning to use *THE ANGRY EYE*

THE PARTICIPANTS

People come to training on racism and equality issues for many reasons – some voluntary and some required (such as students), with different expectations and with varying degrees of anxiety.

Some participants may fear

- revealing their own prejudices,
- being ridiculed for not knowing the right answers,
- not knowing what to expect,
- that the training may trigger personal problems,
- that they will be made to feel guilty.

They may expect

- to learn more about racism and how to tackle it.
- to learn more about other cultures.
- to understand more about themselves in relation to racism.

Others may:

- not see the necessity of training, as they don't think there is a problem.
- see training as a waste of money.
- resent being told to attend.
- think other oppressions take priority and should be discussed first.

In advance, try to find out

- Is attendance voluntary or compulsory?
- What has prompted the training at this particular time? ie, has a racist incident occurred?
- What other training (if any) participants have had?
- Does the group represent a range of attitudes about racism?
- Is there a mix of people of color/white female/male participants?
- What status participants have within the organization?
- Do participants know each other or will they be meeting for the first time?
- What support there is for the training within the organization, particularly at senior management levels, and the wider community?

Guide written by Gillian Neish

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