

FRONTLINE: A CLASS DIVIDED (1984, PBS)

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Produced and directed by

William Peters

Correspondent

Charlie Cobb

Written by

William Peters

Charlie Cobb

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NARRATOR: Tonight, a third grade class gets a traumatic lesson in discrimination...

JANE ELLIOTT: Blue-eyed people are smarter than brown-eyed people. They are cleaner than brown-eyed people. They are more civilized than brown-eyed people.

JOHN: Russell called me names and I hit him...

JANE ELLIOTT: What did he call you?

JOHN: Brown eyes.

NARRATOR: Tonight on FRONTLINE...the story of one teacher...her lesson...and what happened to A CLASS DIVIDED.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Good evening.

It was the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed in 1968. A class of third graders in a rural Iowa town came to school upset and confused.

Dr. King had been their "Hero of the Month" the previous February. The children couldn't understand why he had been murdered.

So their teacher, Jane Elliott, tried a daring exercise to teach them a lesson about discrimination she hoped they would never forget.

What those children learned and how it changed their lives is our story tonight.

"A Class Divided" is produced and directed by William Peters who first covered this story for ABC News in 1970.

A few months ago, Peters returned to Riceville, Iowa, to a reunion of Jane Elliott's third graders, to answer the question of whether after fifteen years her students would still feel the sting of their first lesson in discrimination.

Our reporter for FRONTLINE is Charlie Cobb.

CHARLIE COBB: August, 1984. A high school reunion brings some 50 former students to Riceville, Iowa. Eleven of them--some with their spouses and children--arrive early for a special reunion with their former third-grade teacher, Jane Elliott.

Fourteen years earlier, when they were students in her third-grade classroom, ABC News filmed a two-day exercise for a documentary, "The Eye of the Storm". Now, at their request, they will see that film again and relive the experience of her unique lesson in discrimination.

Scene from "The Eye of the Storm"

Voices Singing "God Bless America"

Jane Elliott: This is a special week. Does anybody know what it is?

Children: Brotherhood.

Jane Elliott: National Brotherhood Week. What's brotherhood?

Girl: Be kind to your brothers?

Jane Elliott: Okay, be kind to your brothers...

Boy: ...like you would like to be treated.

Jane Elliott: Treat everyone the way you would like to be treated. Treat everyone as though he was your...

Children: Brother...

Jane Elliott: Brother. And is there anyone in this United

States that we do not treat as our brothers?

Children: Yeah...

Jane Elliott: Who?

Children: Black people.

Jane Elliott: The black people. Who else?

Sandra: Indians?

Jane Elliott: Absolutely, the Indians. And when you see, when many people see a black person or a yellow person or a red person, what do they think?

Sandra: Look at that...dumb people.

Jane Elliott: Look at the dumb people. What else do they think sometimes? What kind of things do they say about black people?

Greg: They call them Negros, niggers...

Jane Elliott: In the city, many places in the United States, how are black people treated? How are Indians treated? How are people who are of a different color than we are treated?

Greg: Like they're not part of this world. They don't get anything in this world.

Jane Elliott: Why is that?

Greg: Because they're a different color.

Jane Elliott: Do you think you know how it would feel to be judged by the color of your skin?

Children: Yeah...

Jane Elliott: Do you think you do? No, I don't think you'd know how that felt unless you had been through it, would you? It might be interesting to judge people today by the color of their eyes...would you like to try this?

Children: Yeah!

Jane Elliott: Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Since I'm the teacher and I have blue eyes, I think maybe the blue-eyed people should be on top the first day.

Boy: And up here?

Jane Elliott: I mean the blue-eyed people are the better people in this room.

Boy: Huh uh.

Jane Elliott: Oh yes they are--blue-eyed people are smarter than brown-eyed people.

Children: Huh uh.

Brian: My dad isn't that...stupid.

Jane Elliott: Is your dad brown-eyed?

Brian: Yeah.

Jane Elliott: One day you came to school and you told us that he kicked you.

Brian: He did.

Jane Elliott: Do you think a blue-eyed father would kick his son?

My dad's blue-eyed, he's never kicked me. Ray's dad is blue-eyed, he's never kicked him. Rex's dad is blue-eyed, he's never kicked him. This is a fact. Blue-eyed people are better than brown-eyed people. Are you brown-eyed or blue-eyed?

Brian: Blue.

Jane Elliott: Why are you shaking your head?

Brian: I don't know.

Jane Elliott: Are you sure that you're right? Why? What makes you sure that you're right?

Brian: I don't know.

Jane Elliott: The blue-eyed people get five extra minutes of recess, while the brown-eyed people have to stay in.

Brian: Ooooh.

Jane Elliott: The brown-eyed people do not get to use the drinking fountain. You'll have to use the paper cups. You brown-eyed people are not to play with the blue-eyed people on the playground, because you are not as good as blue-eyed people. The brown-eyed people in this room today are going to wear collars. So that we can tell from a distance what color your eyes are. On page 127--one hundred twenty-seven. Is everyone ready? Everyone but Laurie. Ready, Laurie?

Child: She's a brown-eye.

Jane Elliott: She's a brown-eye. You'll begin to notice today that we spend a great deal of time waiting for brown-eyed people. The yardstick's gone, well okay. I don't see the yardstick, do you?

Rex: It's probably over there.

Raymond: Hey, Mrs. Elliott, you better keep that on your desk so if the brown people, the brown-eyed people get out of hand...

Jane Elliott: Oh, you think if the brown-eyed people get out of hand, that would be the thing to use. Who goes first to lunch?

Children: The blue eyes.

Jane Elliott: The blue-eyed people. No brown-eyed people go back for seconds. Blue-eyed people may go back for seconds. Brown-eyed people do not.

Brian: Why not the brown-eyes?

Jane Elliott: Don't you know?

Child: They're not smart.

Jane Elliott: Is that the only reason?

Child: ...afraid they'll take too much.

Jane Elliott: They might take too much. Okay, quietly now...not a sound.

Child #1: It seemed like when we were down on the bottom, everything bad was happening to us.

Child #2: The way they treated you, you felt like you didn't even want to try to do anything.

Child #3: It seemed like Mrs. Elliott was taking our best friends away from us.

Jane Elliott: What happened at recess? Were two of you boys fighting?

Children: Russell and John were.

Jane Elliott: What happened, John?

John: Russell called me names and I hit him. Hit him in the gut.

Jane Elliott: What did he call you?

John: Brown eyes.

Jane Elliott: Did you call him brown eyes?

Child #1: They always call us that...

Child #2: Come here, brown eyes...

Child #3: They were calling us blue eyes.

Child #4: I wasn't.

Child #5: Sandy and Donna were...

Child #6: Yeah.

Jane Elliott: What's wrong with being called brown eyes?

Roy: It means that we're stupider and--well, not that...

Raymond: Oh, that's just the same way as other people call black people niggers.

Jane Elliott: Is that the reason you hit him, John? Did it help? Did it stop him? Did it make you feel better inside? Make you feel better inside? Did it make you feel better to call him brown eyes? Why do you suppose you called him brown eyes?

Brian: Because he has brown eyes?

Jane Elliott: Is that the only reason? He didn't call him brown eyes yesterday and he had brown eyes yesterday. Didn't he?

Child: We just started this...

Brian: ...yeah, ever since you put those blue things on.

Child: They tease him.

Jane Elliott: Oh, is this teasing?

Brian: No...when he did it, it was.

Jane Elliott: Were you doing it for fun--to be funny, or were you doing it to be mean?

Russell: Mean?

Jane Elliott: I don't know, don't ask me.

JANE ELLIOTT: I watched what had been marvelous, cooperative, wonderful, thoughtful children turn into nasty, vicious, discriminating, little third-graders in a space of fifteen minutes.

Jane Elliott: Yesterday, I told you that brown-eyed people aren't as good as blue-eyed people. That wasn't true. I lied to you yesterday.

Brian: Ooh boy, here we go again.

Jane Elliott: The truth is that brown-eyed people are better than blue-eyed people.

Children: (Laughter)

Jane Elliott: Russell, where are your glasses?

Russell: I forgot them.

Jane Elliott: You forgot them. And what color are your eyes?

Russell: Blue.

Children: (Laughter)

Jane Elliott: Susan Ginder has brown eyes. She didn't forget her glasses. Russell Ring has blue eyes and what about his glasses?

Children: He forgot them.

Jane Elliott: He forgot them. Yesterday we were visiting and Greg said, "Boy, I like to hit my little sister as hard as I can, that's fun." What does that tell you about blue-eyed people?

Children: They're naughty...in fact, they fight a lot...

Jane Elliott: The brown-eyed people may take off their collars. And each of you may put your collar on a blue-eyed person. The brown-eyed people get five extra minutes of recess. You blue-eyed people are not allowed to be on the playground equipment at any time. You blue-eyed people are not to play with the brown-eyed people. Brown-eyed people are better than blue-eyed people. They are smarter than blue-eyed people and if you don't believe it, look at Brian. Do blue-eyed people know how to sit in a chair? Very sad. Very very sad. Who can tell me what contraction should be in the first sentence? Go to the board and write this, John. Come on, let's do it again, loosen up. Up up up! Come on. That's better. Now, do you know how to make a W? Okay, write the contraction for we are. Now that's beautiful writing! Is that better?

Children: Yes.

Jane Elliott: Brown-eyed people learn fast, don't they?

Children: Yeah.

Jane Elliott: Boy, do brown-eyed people learn fast. Very good. Greg, what did you do with that cup? Will you please go and get that cup and put your name on it and keep it at your desk. Blue-eyed people are wasteful. Okay. Want to be timed this morning?

Children: Yeah

JANE ELLIOTT: I use phonics. We use the card pack, and the children, the brown-eyed children were in the low class the first day and it took them five and a half minutes to get through the card pack. The second day it took them two and a half minutes. The only thing that had changed was the fact that now they were superior people.

Jane Elliott: You went faster than I ever had anyone go through the card pack. Why couldn't you get them yesterday?

Donna: We had those collars on.

Jane Elliott: You think the collars kept you...Oh, and you couldn't think as well with the collars on. Four minutes and eighteen seconds.

Raymond: I knew we weren't going to make it.

Child: Neither did I.

Jane Elliott: How long did it take you yesterday?

Children: Three minutes.

Jane Elliott: Three minutes. How long did it take you today?

Children: Four minutes and eighteen seconds.

Jane Elliott: What happened?

Child: Went down.

Jane Elliott: Why? What were you thinking of?

Rex: This.

Jane Elliott: I hate today.

Rex: You do? I hate it too.

Jane Elliott: Because I'm blue-eyed.

Rex: See, I am too.

Jane Elliott: It's not funny, it's not fun, it's not pleasant. This is a filthy, nasty word called discrimination. We're treating people a certain way because they are different from the rest of us. Is that fair?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: Nothing fair about it. We didn't say this was going to be a fair day, did we?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: And it isn't. It's a horrid day. Okay, you ready? What did you blue--people who are wearing blue collars now find out today?

Child: I know what they felt like yesterday.

Greg: I do too.

Jane Elliott: How did they feel yesterday?

Greg: Like a dog on a leash.

Raymond: Yeah--like you're chained up in a prison and they throw the key away.

Jane Elliott: Should the color of some other person's eyes have anything to do with how you treat them?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: All right, then should the color of their skin?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: Should you judge people...

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: By the color of their skin?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: You're going to say that today. And this week and probably all the time you're in this room. You'll say, (in a mocking, sing-song fashion) Nooo, Mrs. Elliott...

Children: Nooo...

Jane Elliott: Every time I ask that question.

Children: No, Mrs. Elliott.

Jane Elliott: Then when you see a black man or an Indian or someone walking down the street, are you going to say, "Ha ha, look at that silly-looking thing"?

Children: No, Mrs. Elliott.

Jane Elliott: Does it make any difference whether their skin is black or white?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: Or yellow? Or red?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: Is that how you decide whether people are good or bad?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: Is that what makes people good or bad?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: Let's take these collars off. What would you like to do with them?

Children: Throw them away.

Jane Elliott: Go ahead! Now you know a little bit more than you knew at the beginning of this week.

Children: Yes...a lot...

Jane Elliott: Do you know a little bit more than you wanted to?

Children: (In a joking sing-song) Yes, Mrs. Elliott.

Jane Elliott: This isn't an easy way to learn this, is it?

Children: (In a joking sing-song) No, Mrs. Elliott.

Jane Elliott: (Pretending anger) Oh, will you stop that!

Children: (Laughter)

Jane Elliott: Okay, now let's all sit down here together, blue eyes and brown eyes. Does it make any difference what color your eyes are?

Children: No.

Jane Elliott: Down, girl...

Children: (Laughter)

Jane Elliott: Okay, ready to listen now? Okay, now are you back?

Children: Yes!

Jane Elliott: Does that feel better?

Children: Yes.

Jane Elliott: Does the color of eyes that you have make any difference in the kind of person you are?

Children: (Mockingly) No, Mrs. Elliott.

Jane Elliott: Does that feel like being home again, girls?

Children: (Mockingly) Yes, Mrs. Elliott.

Jane Elliott: (Pretends to be angry) Oh, will you stop it?

CHARLIE COBB: This was the third time Jane Elliott had taught her lesson in discrimination. The first, two years earlier, was in April of 1968.

JANE ELLIOTT: On the day after Martin Luther King was killed, I--one of my students came into the room and said they shot a king last night, Mrs. Elliott, why'd they shoot that king? I knew the night before that it was time to deal with this in a concrete way, not just talking about it, because we had talked about racism since the first day of school. But the shooting of Martin Luther King, who had been one of our heroes of the month in February, could not just be talked about and explained away. There was no way to explain this to little third graders in Riceville, Iowa.

As I listened to the white male commentators on TV the night before I was hearing things like who's going to hold your people together, as they interviewed black leaders. What are they going to do? Who's going to control your people? As though this was--these people were subhuman and someone was going to have to step in there and control them. They said things like when we lost our leader, his widow helped to hold us together. Who's going to hold them together? And the attitude was so arrogant and so condescending and so ungodly that I thought if white male adults react this way, what are my third graders going to do? How are they going to react to this thing? I was ironing the teepee--we studied an Indian unit, we made a teepee every year. The first year the students would make the teepee out of pieces of sheet, we'd sew it together. And the next year we'd decorate it with Indian symbols.

I was ironing the previous year's teepee, getting it ready to be decorated the next day. And I thought of what we had done with the Indians. We haven't had much progress in these 200, 300 years. And I thought this is the time now to teach them really what the Sioux Indian prayer that says, oh great spirit, keep me from ever judging a man until I have walked in his moccasins, really means. And for the next day I knew that my children were going to walk in someone else's moccasins for a day. Like it or lump it, they were going to have to walk in someone else's moccasins.

I decided at that point that it was time to try the eye color thing, which I had thought about many, many times but had never used. So the next day I introduced an eye color exercise in my classroom and split the class according to eye color. And immediately created a microcosm of society in a third-grade classroom.

CHARLIE COBB: Riceville hasn't changed much in the seventeen years since then. It's still a small farming community surrounded by corn fields. Its population is still under a thousand. And it's still all white and all Christian. And though Jane Elliott has continued to teach her lesson in discrimination, there has been little outward local reaction: no objections from school authorities or the parents of the 300-odd students who have by now been through it.

JANE ELLIOTT: Okay. Let's--let's get in a circle.

CHARLIE COBB: The reunion of her former third-graders was Jane Elliott's first chance to find out how much of her lesson her students had retained.

JANE ELLIOTT: Raymond. Why--I want to know why...you...were so eager to discriminate against the rest of these kids. At the end of the day, I thought, the miserable little Nazi. (Laughter) Really, I just--I couldn't stand you.

RAYMOND: It felt tremendously evil. You could--all your inhibitions were gone. And no matter if they were my friends or not, any pent-up hostilities or aggressions that these kids had ever caused you, you had a chance to get it all out.

Young Raymond (From "The Eye of the Storm"): Yeah, I felt like I was--like a king, like I ruled them brown-eyes, like I was better than them, happy.

Jane Elliott: And you did it all day.

Raymond: Yeah.

JANE ELLIOTT: How did you feel when you were in the out-group?

VERLA: Boy, that day, after we went home--(laughs), oooh, you know, talk about hating somebody.

WOMAN: Yeah.

VERLA: It was there.

JANE ELLIOTT: You hated me.

VERLA: Yeah--of what you were putting us through. Nobody likes to be looked down upon. Nobody likes to be hated, teased or discriminated against. And it just boggles up inside of you--you just get so mad.

JANE ELLIOTT: Were you just angry or was there more than that?

RAYMOND: I felt demoralized, humiliated.

JANE ELLIOTT: Is the learning worth the agony?

EVERYONE: Yes.

WOMAN #1: Yes.

WOMAN #2: Yes.

ROY: It made everything a lot different than what it was. We was--we was a lot better family altogether, even in our houses we were probably, because it--it was hard on you; when you have your best friend one day and then he's your enemy the next, it brings it out real quick in you.

JANE ELLIOTT: Some of the remarks were the kinds of things I would have wished I could have programmed into them, if I had been able to program them. They are the things I would have wanted them to say. Some of the things were just mind blowing.

SANDRA: You know you hear these people talkin' about, you know, different people and how they're, you know, different and they'd like to have 'em out of the country: "I wish they'd go back to Africa", you know an' stuff. An' sometimes I just wish I had that collar in my pocket. I could whip it out an' put it on and say, "Wear this, and put you--put yourself in their place". I wish they would go what I, you know, do what I went through, you know.

VERLA: We was at a softball game a couple weekends ago and there was a black guy, "Hi Verla", you know--and we hugged each other and everything, and some people really looked just like, "What are you doin' with him", you know. An' you just get this burning feeling--sensation--in you that you just want to let it out and put 'em through what we went through to find out; they're not any different.

SUSAN: I still find myself sometimes when I see some people together and I see how they act--you know, I think, "Well, that's black". And then right in the next second--I won't even finish the thought--I'm saying, "Well, I've seen whites do it. I've seen other people do it. It's not just the blacks". It's--everyone acts differently. It's just a different color is what hits you first. And then later, as I said, I don't even finish that thought before I remember back when I was like that and then I remember not, you know--everyone acts the same way; it's just your way of thinking is the difference.

SHEILA: Like when my grandparents or somebody and they start talkin' about old times and they say, "the Japs" and all this an' that, and they start, you know, holdin' that against them. I think, "How'd you like to have been them--Japanese-Americans get thrown into these camps just because they happen to be part-Japanese." You know, I--I just said, "You, you calm down and think about it", but when they get older they're set in their ways and that's not gonna change.

JANE ELLIOTT: When you get older.

SHEILA: I'll be set in my ways but they're different ways than their ways.

JANE ELLIOTT: I was absolutely enthralled--Sandy Dohlman's statements that "When my son comes home with the word 'nigger' and the other things that he hears downtown, I say to him, 'Listen, that isn't the way we judge people. You don't judge people by how they look. You judge them by what's on their inside, not their outside.'"

SANDRA DOHLMAN'S HUSBAND: I'm glad that she's teachin' them not to hate because even though he does hear this from the other people, he--if he goes home and he thinks, "Well, Mom and Dad like the black people; I'm gonna like 'em too," so I don't think he's gonna pick nothin' bad up out of it.

JANE ELLIOTT: You chose your husband well. (Laughter)

SANDRA: He chose me.

JANE ELLIOTT: You chose her well. (Laughter) But is

BRIAN: Little kids'll take it--you know, they'll listen to a lot of other people too, so they're gonna end up kinda confused over it.

JANE ELLIOTT: But if she keeps on telling him

BRIAN: Yeah.

JANE ELLIOTT: Is he going to be the kind of person you kids are? Or is he going to be the kind who judge people by the

BRIAN: Well, he'll know right--somewhat right from wrong.

SHEILA: He'll know that.

BRIAN: He'll know that he will....

SHEILA: ...but he'll have the, the ideas. He won't be judging 'em by their color but he won't know what we know fully, having been through it.

WOMAN #1: He won't learn the--collar thing.

WOMAN #2: The prejudice from us.

SUSAN: He won't--he won't learn prejudices first-handed.

WOMAN: Yeah

SUSAN: He won't learn to be prejudiced he--they won't learn to discriminate between people from us. They may--he might hear it from others but never from us.

JANE ELLIOTT: Okay, what's it like to be like that?

SHEILA'S HUSBAND: When I was gonna marry Sheila, I knew I--for my future that I was goin' into the military. At first I thought, "Is she gonna be able to handle being with all the different nationalities?" And then I read The Storm--read the book.

JANE ELLIOTT: "A Class Divided."

SHEILA'S HUSBAND: "A Class Divided" before we got married and before I joined the Army, and I said, "Hey, she's not gonna have any problems."

JANE ELLIOTT: Should every--should every child have the exercise or should every teacher?

EVERYBODY: Everybody.

WOMAN #1: Everybody, not just...

WOMAN #2: Everybody who has...

RAYMOND: Every school ought to implement something like this program in their early stages of education.

CHARLIE COBB: If Jane Elliott's lesson in discrimination changed the way these young people feel about discrimination and racism, it also had a totally unexpected result.

JANE ELLIOTT: The second year I did this exercise I gave little spelling tests, math tests, reading tests two weeks before the exercise, each day of the exercise and two weeks later and, almost without exception, the students' scores go up on the day they're on the top, down the day they're on the bottom and then maintain a higher level for the rest of the year, after they've been through the exercise. We sent some of those tests to Stanford University to the Psychology Department and they did, sort of an informal review of them, and they said that what's happening here is kids' academic ability is being changed in a 24-hour period. And it isn't possible but it's happening. Something very strange is happening to these children because suddenly they're finding out how really great they are and they are responding to what they know now they are able to do. And it's happened consistently with third graders.

CHARLIE COBB: The film made of Jane Elliott's third graders in 1970 has been widely used with students and teachers--and by government, business, and labor organizations concerned about human relations. Perhaps the most unusual use of it is here, at Green Haven Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison in Stormville, New York. Here, in a sociology course taught by Professor Duane W. Smith of Dutchess Community College, his almost exclusively black and Hispanic classes have been seeing the film for more than ten years.

PROFESSOR SMITH: What I'd like to do is introduce the subject of prejudice and discrimination through this film called "The Eye of the Storm."

Jane Elliott: Blue-eyed people are smarter than brown-eyed people.

Child: Huh uh.

Jane Elliott: They are cleaner than brown-eyed people.

Child: Huh uh.

Jane Elliott: They are more civilized than brown-eyed people.

Announcer: Sandra's brown-eyed friends didn't like that day, but Raymond did.

Raymond: I felt like I was a king, like I ruled them brown eyes...

PROFESSOR SMITH: Do you think the children by this process really learned the meaning of discrimination?

MAN #1: Most of the children, before the film started, they had played and lived together in harmony and a certain action coming from the teacher and seeing the teacher as an authoritarian figure and someone to respect, they accepted the views that was being given to them. But I think that at the end of the lesson they could clearly see that prejudices and other forms of discrimination are things that people deal with in their minds. They are not actual physical barriers that say, "No, you can't cross the street."

MAN #2: The one kid I would really agree with was at recess, he's a brown-eyed kid. He had this inner turmoil against this feeling of being divided or prejudiced against where he would hit another kid that he's known for so many years in the gut. Whether--he also stated that, it didn't help any so, that automatically should be a lesson to every adult in the world. Violence doesn't help any, and, you know, this is a film that I hope my children get to see.

CHARLIE COBB: Unlike New York, Iowa is 98 percent white Anglo-Saxon; yet even here, minority groups account for more than 20 percent of the prison population. To make sure its prison system employees are sensitive to the concerns of this large minority, the Iowa Department of Corrections last fall hired Jane Elliott to give her lesson to some of them. The group, which included prison guards and parole officers, was told only that it would be attending a day-long workshop. David Stokesbery.

DAVID STOKESBERY: Most of our training you go to, people give you information and you learn that way.

Man: Blue-eyed?

DAVID STOKESBERY: When I first came with the sign-up and such and got put in the group, I didn't know--when I started seeing the signs around you know, brown-eyes only, and such, I figured they were the better group because they had a lot of spaces available and there were none for the blue-eyes. So when I got put in blue-eyes group and put the collar on, I knew then that I was going to be in the deprived group, I guess.

Woman: ...now you can stay in this area...

DAVID STOKESBERY: The workshop was supposed to begin at nine. They took the brown-eyes in about nine and left us standing in the hall. I literally stood because there

weren't enough chairs and I didn't know whether I wanted to fight to take a chair down, I didn't know if somebody would come and take the chair away from me if I did.

CHARLIE COBB: While David Stokesbery and the other blue-eyed people waited, inside the meeting room, Jane Elliott prepared the brown-eyed people for what was going to happen.

Jane Elliott: Now this is not something I can do alone. This exercise won't work without your cooperation. Blue-eyed people aren't allowed to smoke, blue-eyed people aren't allowed to sit in these empty chairs. Do not let a blue-eyed person sit next to you. You know you can't trust them and besides which they don't smell good. Everybody knows that about blue-eyed people. You don't know what you can catch from a blue-eyed person.

DAVID STOKESBERY: By nine-twenty I felt some antagonism, I'm stuck out here for twenty minutes standing waiting

Man: I still say we ought to see what kind of a reaction we'd get by everyone just simply going in. Anyone who wants to do it?

Woman #1: Nobody seems to have the courage in his convictions. They do a lot of talking but nobody takes any action.

Woman #2: Maybe we should oppose it by all singing a song or doing something really loud, you know.

Man: "We shall overcome?"

Woman: Yeah. All right (Laughter)

Man: I need to have you keep it down. I don't know how many times I need to give that instruction, but you need to keep it down so you don't bother the people in the, in the workshop.

DAVID STOKESBERY: So I was pretty well ticked off by the time we got taken in there.

Man: ...we need to have you put your purse and your coat in the corner.

Jane Elliott: It would be to your advantage in the future, people, if you'd get to meetings on time. It would also be to your advantage if you'd put your gum away.

K.R.: I'll leave.

Jane Elliott: Put your gum away.

K.R.: I'll leave.

Jane Elliott: Do you want to get paid for today?

K.R.: Uh huh.

Jane Elliott: Well then stay, but put your gum away.

K.R.: I don't have a purse, so I don't have any place to put my gum.

Jane Elliott: I'm sure that you are inventive enough to find a place for the gum.

Now I'd like for you to notice where she put her gum. You have this problem with blue-eyed people. You give them, give them something decent, and they just wreck it. You'll also notice that blue-eyed people spend a lot of time playing 'look at me, see how cute I am, I can be funny. I can make a joke of this. This is amusing, I'm amused by this.' Another thing that is obvious about blue-eyed people is that they are poor listeners. The first thing you have to do when you get--when you are teaching in a segregated situation, when you're working in a segregated situation, is teach the listening skills. The listening skills are: number one, good listeners have quiet hands, feet and mouths. Everyone needs to write these down...I'd like for you to look at the man in the back, in the black jacket. The game we're playing is, playing it cool. 'Nobody can bother me, man. I can handle this. I don't have to do this. I'm gonna ignore this whole thing.' Number two, good listeners keep their eyes on the person who is speaking...I take it you don't have a pencil?

Woman: No.

Jane Elliott: Nor you?

Woman: No.

Jane Elliott: Perhaps you could borrow one from one of your neighbors...Sir, I realize that you feel that you don't need to write it down, but whether or not you write it down, perhaps you could remember it.

Roger: I'll borrow a pen.

Jane Elliott: Good listeners have quiet hands, feet and mouths. Do you know what that means?

Roger: I'm not sure.

Jane Elliott: Do you want me to explain it to you?

Roger: No, that's okay. I'll get a pencil and write this down directly.

Jane Elliott: Look, blue-eyed people, all--many of you have pencils. Will one of you please lend him a pencil? Or don't you trust him? Which I can understand--in the last ten minutes, what have you observed about blue-eyed people?

Man: Blue-eyed people are very stubborn, very self-centered, and wish to control as much of their surrounding as possible, people-wise I mean. Very inconsiderate people. I don't even know why you have them here in the first place.

Jane Elliott: We have them here, because we are required to have them here.

Man: We, we have to, huh?

Jane Elliott: This is one of the things you have to put up with.

Man: Oh.

Jane Elliott: Number three, good listeners listen from the beginning to the very end. Good listeners decide to learn something. And this is the thing you'll have the most difficulty with with blue-eyed people. They decide not to learn something. Some of you have had trouble with blue-eyed people in your home environment. Some of you have had trouble with blue-eyed people in your workplace. Does anybody have an example of that that they'd like to talk about? Anyone?

Woman: Yeah. I have two nephews, and one is blue-eyed, and one's brown-eyed. And the blue-eyed one, like, he never cleans his room, and he's real lazy. And the brown, you know--and he doesn't seem to have a lot of energy, the blue-eyed one. But the brown-eyed one, he's real out-going, and he plays his sports, and he's pretty good at it. And, he just seems like a better kid. So if I have kids, I hope they have brown eyes.

Jane Elliott: You, are you married?

Woman: No.

Jane Elliott: Then it's a good thing you don't have kids, isn't it?

Woman: Right.

Jane Elliott: Then you will know what to do when, when you choose a mate.

Woman: Right.

Jane Elliott: Would you like to read that first listening skill to me?

Roger: I haven't got it on my paper yet.

Jane Elliott: Oh, why is that?

Roger: I haven't borrowed the pencil to write it down as yet.

Jane Elliott: And you think it's unnecessary?

Roger: Well at this particular point, yes, I do.

Jane Elliott: Why?

Roger: Well...I, I have it in my head for the most part.

Jane Elliott: There's a lot of space up there for it, isn't there, friend. Do you suppose you could tell me what it is?

Roger: It has something to do with keeping your hands and feet still, as I recall.

Jane Elliott: Has something to do with that (Laughter). I find it interesting that you're amused by our having to stand here and wait for this man to do something that everybody else has already done. I find that highly interesting. Stupid, but interesting. If, if you are in a situation where someone is constantly, constantly refusing to do what the people in authority ask them to do, what do you know about them? What do you know about that person?

Man: Well, I think it's a game with them. Attention.

Jane Elliott: Has it gained anything for this gentleman?

Man: Disrespect from, I think, the brown-eyed people.

Jane Elliott: Has it proven anything to brown-eyed people?

Man: Yes. It, this is a typical trait of a blue-eyed person.

Jane Elliott: Now read the second one.

Roger: I don't have the second one. Can I read it off hers?

Jane Elliott: You don't have the second one, either?

Roger: No.

Jane Elliott: You have, you were keeping it in your head. What happened to that plan?

Roger: Just the, just the first one I had in my head, not the second one.

Jane Elliott: Oh, the other three aren't important?

Roger: Well they're probably important.

Jane Elliott: But not important enough for you to write down, right?

Roger: Well, they're important. I should've written them down, most probably.

Jane Elliott: Most probably? Does anybody back there know? You don't have it written down either? I want you to take a look at these two so-called gentlemen. Now, we need to hear the good listening skills from you. I don't want you to think that I'm badgering you boys. But on the other hand...

Roger: I don't think that.

Jane Elliott: On the other hand, you're here to learn something. And if you learn nothing else today, it would be nice if you would learn the listening skills. What do you know now about blue-eyed people that you didn't know before?

Man: I'm finding I'm gonna have to explain things a bit more explicitly to a blue-eyed person than I would to a brown-eyed person.

Jane Elliott: How many times did I have to repeat the listening skills for Roger?

Man: Well, brother Roger is having a rough time today, isn't he? It was about six or seven different times.

Jane Elliott: You think that's amusing, Roger?

Roger: Apparently somewhat amusing.

CHARLIE COBB: As part of the lesson, the Corrections Department employees took a written test.

Jane Elliott: All right. I need these names and the scores.

Man: I have K.R., eleven.

Jane Elliott: I'm sorry I can't hear you.

Man: K.R. Just initials. Eleven.

Jane Elliott: K.R. Just an initial? No last name?

Man: No names.

Jane Elliott: How many?

Man #1: Eleven.

Man #2: And Churdin, or Charles, I'm not sure.

K.R.: Thank you, sir.

Jane Elliott: Tell me the name again.

Man: Ahh, Churdin?

Jane Elliott: You can't read the name?

Man: No, I can't.

Woman: It's probably mine.

Jane Elliott: What's your name?

Woman: My name is Chambers.

Jane Elliott: First name?

Woman: Jeanine.

Jane Elliott: What was her score?

Man: Six.

Jane Elliott: Next?

Woman: E. Riley, with a five.

Jane Elliott: E?

Woman: E. Riley?

Jane Elliott: Will E. Riley please stand?

E. Riley: It's mine.

Jane Elliott: You know, it's--what you do to the image of blues, with your behavior, is unfortunate. What you three people do to the image of women, with your behavior, really makes me angry. The fact that you do this kind of thing and this kind of sloppy work reflects badly on women. I resent that doubly. Yes?

K.R.: Ma'am, I'd really appreciate it if you'd call us by name. When you say you three people, we don't know who you're speaking to. It could be anyone here.

Jane Elliott: My dear, if you wanted me to call you by name, you'd have put your name on your paper.

K.R.: It's on my coat.

Jane Elliott: It was to be on your paper.

K.R.: You didn't see my papers, ma'am.

Jane Elliott: I didn't get your name either, because it wasn't on your paper.

K.R.: That's right.

Jane Elliott: All right. Now how could one call you by your name if you don't care enough about your name to put it on your paper. Don't expect me to...

K.R.: You can't even read?

Jane Elliott: Don't expect me to worry about it if you don't put it on your paper. Don't sit here and say my name is important to me after you have just deliberately not put it on your paper.

K.R.: I don't remember saying my name was important to me. I remember saying, "I'd like to know who you're speaking to," when you say "you three".

Jane Elliott: Then what should you do?

K.R.: Ask you to use my name, which I did.

Jane Elliott: And where should your name have been?

K.R.: Right where it is...

Jane Elliott: On your paper?

K.R.: ...and on my birth certificate.

Jane Elliott: Is it on your paper?

K.R.: No, ma'am.

Jane Elliott: Where 'd you get a birth certificate?

K.R.: Same place you got yours. Out of a slot machine, same as you did, lady.

Jane Elliott: I think you're probably right about your own.

K.R.: At least I know who my parents are, ma'am.

Jane Elliott: Is she being rude?

Man: Yes.

Jane Elliott: Is she being inconsiderate?

Man: Very.

Jane Elliott: Is she being uncooperative?

Man: Very.

Jane Elliott: Is she being insulting?

Man: Yes.

Jane Elliott: Are all those the things that we've accused blue-eyed people of being?

Man: Yes.

Jane Elliott: Is she proving that we're right?

Man: Yes.

Jane Elliott: Does anyone have any comments to make at this point?

Man: Do you feel that there are important blue-eyed people?

Jane Elliott: There are exceptions to every rule.

Man: And what are those exceptions?

Jane Elliott: There are a few important blue-eyed people.

Man: Very few.

Jane Elliott: You said that.

Woman: Do you think that you are one of them?

Jane Elliott: No.

Woman: That's good.

Man: Then why are you up there then?

Jane Elliott: I'm blue-eyed. The difference between you and me is, I have a brown-eyed husband and brown-eyed offspring, and I've learned how to behave in a brown-eyed society. And when you can act brown enough, then you, too, can be where I am.

K.R.: I wouldn't want to be where you are.

Jane Elliott: Are you certain?

K.R.: Absolutely positive.

Jane Elliott: You like where you are?

K.R.: I love where I am.

Jane Elliott: You like it so much that you don't even identify yourself on your paper.

K.R.: I don't need to, lady.

Jane Elliott: Her using the term "lady" where I'm concerned, what do you think she's trying to do? Is it ignorance, or is it deliberately insulting?

Woman: I would say it was deliberately insulting.

Jane Elliott: If it's ignorance, she needs to be taught that to many of us, the word lady is a pejorative. I don't appreciate it. It is, it's a put down. And it's used to keep women in their place.

K.R.: I promise in the future to call you by the correct name.

Jane Elliott: I'm sorry.

K.R.: I will call you by the correct name after this. I won't be kind.

Jane Elliott: That was kindness on your part?

K.R.: Yes, I think to call someone a lady is a kindness.

Jane Elliott: Then your problem is ignorance.

K.R.: You can call me lady any time you like.

Jane Elliott: I wouldn't do that to you.

K.R.: No, I know you wouldn't.

Jane Elliott: I really wouldn't. I, I think that, and that's part of the problem. Is a total lack of awareness at what sexism amounts to and how much you contribute to the sexism that keeps you where you are.

K.R.: I like where I am, lady. I did it again, didn't I.

David Stokesbery: I'm getting kind of fed up with this whole bunch of garbage.

Jane Elliott: Why?

David Stokesbery: Brown-eyed peoples are, are, are no different than we are. I hate to tell them that. They, they have false delusions and such.

Jane Elliott: Are they being disruptive?

David Stokesbery: No, you trained them very well. I think that's what they did with the storm troopers in Germany, also. You guys do a real good job sitting up there.

Jane Elliott: You think that what's happening here today feels like it would have felt to be in Nazi Germany?

David Stokesbery: Yes.

Jane Elliott: Where, where do you think you are in that then?

David Stokesbery: Where do I think I am?

Jane Elliott: Who are you? If you're in Nazi Germany, who are you?

David Stokesbery: Ah, the Jews?

CHARLIE COBB: After a break for lunch, Jane Elliott helped the Corrections Department employees analyze what had happened.

Jane Elliott: Did you learn anything this morning?

Roger: I think I learned from the experience a feeling like I was in a glass cage and I was powerless, there was a sense of hopelessness, I was angry, I wanted to speak up and yet I - at times I knew if I spoke up, I'd be back in a powerless situation, I'd be attacked, a sense of hopelessness. Depression.

Jane Elliott: Had you experienced that before?

Roger: I realized this morning that there were very few times in my life that I've ever been discriminated against. Very few.

Jane Elliott: And you were this uncomfortable in an hour and a half?

Roger: I was amazed at how uncomfortable I was in the first fifteen minutes.

Jane Elliott: Can you empathize at all then with blacks, minority group members in this country?

Roger: I'm hoping better than before.

David Stokesbery: If we tried to argue with you you would use just the mere argument as reason for us being lesser than the brown-eyed folks, you know, you couldn't win.

Jane Elliott: Yeah, but don't we do that everyday?

David Stokesbery: I think some do, yeah, but I would hope that I never get so unreasonable. I--you know, the statements you were making were groundless and such, and yet we couldn't argue with them because if we argued then we were argumentative and you know, not listening and getting out of our place and all that stuff. And that was frustrating to me. And then frustrating to me was the other--the little green tags who were sitting on their hands. My group here was--I didn't think boisterous enough in opposition to the whole thing.

Jane Elliott: Why didn't you people support one another? Why didn't the blue-eyed people--the blue-eyed people on this side just sat there. And let's face it, you covered your asses. Right? Why did you just sit there?

Man: I think that's symptomatic of the problem as a whole. We see that, you know, in society in general. We see a few people who are making a lot of noise and the rest of the people sitting back waiting to see what they're going to do.

Jane Elliott: Okay, as long as I was picking on him and I was leaving you alone, right?

Man: Right.

E. Riley: I'd say a lot of people accept that. They let--have a few people to do their fighting for them and they stand back and if this person's going to win, then they'll get on this side. But if that person's not going to win, they'll stay back over here, you know. That's just how it works.

Jane Elliott: If you were in a real situation where you had to do something about racism, would you stand up and be counted?

Man: What I would do I don't know. It would depend on...

Jane Elliott: But you would do something.

Man: I would have to do something. I couldn't go home tonight and face my kids if I didn't.

Jane Elliott: How did you brown-eyed people feel while this was going on?

Man: A sense of relief that I wasn't a blue-eyed person.

Jane Elliott: Sense of relief that you had the right color eyes.

Man: Right.

Jane Elliott: Absolutely.

Man: I really understood, at least I felt that I understood what it was like to be in the minority.

Jane Elliott: Why were you angry?

K.R.: Because, first of all, because it was unreasonable. Secondly, because I felt discriminated against. Thirdly, I think that all of us, every one in this room has dealt with discrimination on both sides.

You don't have to be black or Jewish or Mexican or anything else to have felt discrimination in your life, and as you become an adult you learn to deal with those feelings within yourself and you learn to handle those. And when you feel yourself in a situation that you can't get out of, which we couldn't--we were a captive audience and it was not a normal situation because normally you aren't badgered.

Jane Elliott: What if you had to spend the rest of your life this way?

K.R.: I don't know how to answer that.

Woman: You don't wake up every morning knowing that you're different. You wake up as a white woman who is going to her job at eight o'clock or whatever. Where a black person is going to wake up knowing from the minute they get up out of the bed and look in the mirror they're black and they have to deal with the problems they've had to deal with ever since they were young and realize that I am different and I have to deal with life differently. Things are different for me. And I don't think you can really say that you have felt--maybe you have felt some sort of discrimination, but you haven't felt what it is like for a black woman.

To go through the daily experiences of arguing and saying 'listen to me, my point of view is good', you know, 'what I have to offer here is good'. And no one wants to listen because white is right, that's the way things are.

JANE ELLIOTT: I think the necessity for this exercise is a crime. No, I don't want to see it used more widely, I want to see it--the necessity for it wiped out. And I think if educators were determined that we could be very instrumental in wiping out the necessity for this exercise. But I want to see something used. I'd like to see this exercise used with all teachers. All administrators. But certainly not with all students unless, unless it's done by people who are doing it for the right reasons and in the right way. I think you could damage a child with this exercise very very easily and I would never suggest that everybody should use it. I think you could have training classes for teachers, bring them in, put them through the thing, explain what happened, do the de-briefing and then practice doing this until teachers, until a group of teachers were able to do it on their own. And I--teachers are not disabled learners, they could learn to do this obviously. If I can do it most anyone can do it. It doesn't take a super teacher to do this exercise.

CHARLIE COBB: What began in a third-grade classroom has spread from students to teachers to corrections officers. At the center is still a single teacher determined to inoculate her students, both young and old, against the virus of bigotry.

JANE ELLIOTT: After you do this exercise, when the de-briefing starts, when the pain is over and they're all back together and you're all one again you find out how society could be if we really believed all this stuff that we preach, if we really acted that way, you could feel as good about one another as those kids feel about one another after this exercise is over. You create instant cousins. I thought that maybe that lasted just while they were in my classroom because of my superior influence, but indeed these kids still feel that way about one another. They said yesterday--over and over the remark was made--"We're kind of like a family now." They found out how to hurt one another and they found out how it feels to be hurt in that way and they refuse to hurt one another in that way again. And they said we're kind of like a family now, and indeed we were.

Update

JUDY WOODRUFF: Twenty years ago this week, Martin Luther King, Jr. led the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. 28,000 joined him in the struggle to end discrimination, which, in King's own words, means

"...the pain of watching young children grow up with clouds of inferiority in their mental skies...it means being harried by day and haunted by night by a nagging sense of nobodiness and constantly fighting to be saved from the poison of bitterness. It means the ache and anguish of living in so many situations where hopes unborn have died."

"A Class Divided"

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Produced and Directed By
WILLIAM PETERS

Correspondent
CHARLIE COBB

Written By
WILLIAM PETERS
CHARLIE COBB

Director of Photography
LLOYD FREIDUS

Film Editor
DAVID HANSER

Sound
LARRY LOEWINGER
DANNY MICHAEL
ED NOVICK

Rerecording
PETER PAGE

Additional Photography By
CARL KRIEGESKOTTE

Associate Producer
JEROME COBB

Assistant Camera
BARRY MARKOWITZ
JIM WILLIAMS
STEPHEN MCNUTT

Sound Editor
KATHY KILEEN

Gaffer
MATTHEW KATZ

Boom
HENRY BARNSTON

Production Manager

DIANA EDMONDS

FOR FRONTLINE:

Anchor

JUDY WOODRUFF

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Post Production Supervisor

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Camera

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Audio

MARGO GARRISON

Video

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Videotape Recordist

DAN JONES

Videotape Editors

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