

THE ESSENTIAL BLUE EYED

(50 min. Trainer's Version only. The debriefing is not included in this transcript.)

Jane Elliott:

I want every white person in this room, who would be happy to be treated as this society in general treats our citizens, our black citizens. If you as a white person would be happy to receive the same treatment that our black citizens do in this society - please stand! - You didn't understand the directions. If you white folks want to be treated the way blacks are in this society - stand! - Nobody is standing here. That says very plainly that you know what's happening. You know you don't want it for you. I want to know why you are so willing to accept it or to allow it to happen for others.

Jane Elliott:

What does that say?

M:

Name.

Jane Elliott:

What is your name? Can you read that?

M:

Sure.

Jane Elliott:

Well, I can't. Cross it out and write it so I can read it.

M:

O.k.

Jane Elliott:

What does that say?

M:

Louis A. Wright.

Jane Elliott:

Cross it out and write it so I can read it.

M:

I'm done.

Jane Elliott:

No, don't pat me number one, and number two you either follow the rules or you leave.
Now, put your name on there so I can read it.

M:

That's -, they were asking for my signature and that's it.

Jane Elliott:

Write your name on here so I can read it.

M:

No, Ma'am.

Jane Elliott:

This man is out of here.

Jane Elliott:

Sit!

Go to meeting room C and stay there till we come for you.

Sign in here according to your eye-color.

M:

I am not brown eyed.

Jane Elliott:

I'm going to give you a piece of advice. Whether or not you like what is happening here,
you either follow the rules or you're out of here. You have a choice.

Now, get rid of the gum.

M:

O.k.

Jane Elliott:

Now! There's a waste basket right back there, put it in there. Well, go to the meeting
room, seat and stay there until I come for you.

M:

O.k.

Jane Elliott:

So you do print. -

Sit down.

Move your legs. I don't have to straddle your leg.

I'm going to warn you - you may be big and you may be tall, but you'll do exactly what I
tell you to do today, do you understand that?

M:

Well, I don't have a problem with that at all.

Jane Elliott:
Good for you.

IN THE WORKSHOP

Jane Elliott:
The purpose of this exercise is to give these nice blue eyed white folks the opportunity to find out how it feels to be something other than white in the United States of America. And these people today are going to learn more than they want to know. The purpose of this exercise is to help these people walk in the mocassins of a person of color for a day. What I'm going to do is assign to these people on the basis of their eye color alone all the negative traits that we have assigned to females, to people of color, to gays and lesbians, to people who have disabilities of any kind, to those who are obviously physically different. We are going to lower our expectations for these people and we are going to force them to live down to our expectations of them.

F:
How have they been prepared to come in here?

Jane Elliott:
Not at all. We just sat them into a room in which there are three chairs for seventeen people -

F:
It's hot in there.

Jane Elliott:
It's hot in there. Is it hot in there? Well, then it's probably smelly, isn't it, because blue eyed people sweat a lot and you know they don' smell good, so I wouldn't want to be in that room after they have been in there. And we don't tell them anything, we just send them to the holding room.

Jane Elliott:
A new reality is going to be created for these folks this morning. Now, we are going to treat these people negatively on the basis of the color of their eyes. And the reason I use eyes is, because eye color is caused by the same chemical that skin color is caused by. If you have lots and lots of Melanin in your hair, your skin, your eyes, you have very dark hair, dark skin and dark eyes. If you have only a little Melanin in your hair, your skin and your eyes, you have light skin, light hair and light eyes. Now, having light skin, the first people on this earth, the first human beings on this earth, evolved near the equator in subherent Africa in about 280.000 years ago. They needed lots and lots of Melanin to protect theirselves from the raise of the sun. That's what Melanin does for you. As people

migrated farther and farther north, their bodies were exposed to less and less sunlight, so their bodies produced less and less Melanin. So people in northern climates have much less Melanin in their skin, their hair and their eyes than people in southern climates did evolve at that time. Now folks, as people's hair and skin got lighter, it didn't have a bad effect on their brains, but as their eyes got lighter, it allowed more and more light to enter their eyes, pierce their brains and damage their brains. And that's why people blue eyed people aren't as smart as brown eyed people. Makes sense to you? Why are you laughing? It's ridiculous, isn't it? People, it is no more ridiculous to make that statement about eye color than it is to make the statements that we traditionally have made about the skin color. If it makes good sense to judge people by the amount of Melanin in their skin, then it makes equally good sense, more good sense, to judge them by the amount of Melanin in their eyes. And that's what we are going to do this morning. All we are going to do is spend about two and a half hours treating these people negatively on the basis of a physical characteristic over which they have no control. Now, they aren't going to like this. If you do your job right, they aren't going to like this. Is that going to make me happy?

F:
Yes.

Jane Elliott:
Yes, yes. Because I want them to be uncomfortable and I want you to help them to be uncomfortable.

HOLDING ROOM

M:
Keep the noise down! Keep the noise down! I'm not playing. Everybody keep the noise down. I'm not playing. Who ever messed with the door - leave it alone. Who was this? Keep the noise down!
In the workshop

Jane Elliott:
Blue eyed people aren't as smart as brown eyed people. I can prove that to you by giving you and them the Dove Counter Balance Intelligence Test. Now, this is an intelligence test, that is developed by a black male a number of years ago and the purpose of this test is to give white folks the opportunity to find out how it feels to take a test about which you know virtually nothing and have your IQ based on your ability to pass the test, about which you know nothing, which you have learned nothing about. We do this with people of color and with immigrants in this country all the time. We base (their,) - our judgement of their IQs on their ability to respond to items about which they haven't learned. The blue eyed people aren't going to know many of these answers, because they aren't very intelligent, because they haven't had to learn about people who are different from themselves, because they have only had to learn about white culture.

You people, you brown eyed people, are going to know at least half of these answers, because you are smart, you are caring and you are curious about those who are different from yourselves and you've learned a whole lot about those who are different from yourselves. And I'm going to give you the even number of responses.

Jane Elliott:

The rules for the day are going to be that you will not look at these people unless you either frown or smirk at them. It's alright to laugh at them but do not laugh with them. How many of you have friends in the blue eyed group? - Let me put it this way: How many of you used to have friends in the blue eyed group? Now, some of these people are going to leave here very very angry. Make no mistake about this. That is their choice. When they leave here and they say they're angry, you need to be prepared to say to them "Wait a minute, you had it for two and a half hours, your home wasn't threatened, your family wasn't threatened, your job wasn't threatened, your income wasn't threatened, your future wasn't threatened. And you had it for two and a half hours and you knew it was temporary. You knew it was going to be over at least by six o'clock this afternoon. Why are you so angry? And if you are so angry after two and a half hours, can you apply that the way you feel about that anger what it must be like to live with this for a lifetime.

Interview Jane Elliott at home

Jane Elliott:

I got the idea of the blue eyed-brown eyed exercise from reading about what the nazis did during what has become to be called the holocaust. Hitler was going to found a nation of people, of arian people, who were going to be blue eyed and blonde haired and fair skinned and they were going to rule the world. And one of the ways they decided who went into the gas chamber during the holocaust was eye color. I decided on the day after Martin Luther King was killed that I would do what Hitler did. I knew it worked for him, I thought it might work for me. I decided that I will pick out a group of people on the basis of a physical characteristic over which they had no control and I decided that it would be eye color.

In the workshop

Jane Elliott:

Now we are going to call these females girl, honey, sweet, baby, chick darling - what are we going -, what do we call males?

M:

Boy.

Jane Elliott:

Boy. Boy, and you don't say 'boy', you say 'boy'. When it's properly said it's a two syllable word. Boy!

And we use 'boy' to keep black males in their place on a daily basis. All we have to do to lower someone to the age of five, to twelve, is call him a boy. And we do it to accomplish black males over the age of seventy. And we get away with it. Now, for two and a half hours we are going to make these people look inferior and feel inferior. How many of you think these white folks can take this?

Now, people, think about what you've just admitted! You've just admitted that you think that adult, sophisticated, educated white males in positions of some power - in a couple of cases I think real power - can't stand for two and a half hours what you expect the child of color to live with from the moment he or she is born. Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that these white people can't stand two and a half hours of being treated verbally the way they treat other people for a lifetime? Because if you do, you've just admitted something extremely interesting. You have just said that people of color are stronger than white folks.

That we have created a situation in this country in which we have built tremendous strength into people of color and in which we have not built the same tremendous character strength into white folks, particularly white males. Does that bother you at all?

M:

It's called survival.

Jane Elliott:

It's called survival, absolutely, it's a survival skill. Keep in better mind that these people are in their child ego state and that's where they are going to stay, because people are most -, are easiest to control when they are in their child ego state. So, these people are being treated like children and they are going to act like children and it's what we do with females in this country every day. We treat them like children and when they act like children, we say "See, you're acting like that, because you are female".

Now, people, if you are tempted to look at some of these people and wink at them to let them know - without me catching you - that you really don't mean any of this, I'll change your eye colors so fast as it'll make your heads turn. So just let me catch you looking at your tall white friend, just let me catch you doing that, let me see your eyes. Oh, you'll join quick, right away. Do you want to be with them? O.K., browny, you are going to be a bluey. It will not make you comfortable.

Jane Elliott:

Now, people, all I'm asking you to do is - act white. That's all I'm asking you - just act white. You white people know how to act white, you can do it all your lives.

And people of color know how to act white, the way to get ahead in this society, if you are a person of color, is to act as white as you possibly can. Now, am I exaggerating here? Is that the message that this society sends?

M:
Assimilate.

Jane Elliott:

Assimilate really means - act white. Assimilate means - be as similar to the power group as you possibly can be, which means act white. And you can turn intelligent, bright, committed conscientious, ambitious people into people who act lazy and slubberly and stupid and slow and unmotivated and you can do it in fifteen to twenty minutes and that's what you're going to do this morning.

Houses in Osage
Hotel Neon
Interview Jane Elliott terrace

Jane Elliott:

Martin Luther King was killed in April 4th, 1968, I was teaching third grade in an all white all christian community. I needed to explain the death of Martin Luther King to my students. I didn't know how to do it except by allowing them to walk in the shoes of a child of color for a day. The first time I did it no-one knew until my students wrote essays about it and those were published in the paper. And then the Johnny Carson Show called and asked me if I could come and do the Johnny Carson Show. Then people in the community found out about it. Then all kinds of unpleasant things happened. I got vicious calls in the night, we got probably between 500 and 600 letters, a third of them so ugly and so obscene that I couldn't share them with my third graders. In that fall when people came to register their children for school, their offspring for school, 20% of those who had children coming in the third grade said to the principle "Don't put my kid in Elliotts classroom".

Every year after that the same thing happened, only sometimes parents would call in and say "I don't want my kid in that niggerlover's classroom". And the principle never had to say "Which niggerlover do you mean?", because we all knew there was only one. My children were beaten and spit on, my own offspring, we have four children, they were abused by their peers, by their teachers, by the parents of their peers. My parents lost their business, my father died totally isolated three years ago in the community in which his great grandfather was one of the first settlers - isolated because he had raised the town's niggerlover. I've learnt a whole lot about racism.

Jane Elliott:

I wouldn't trust that bluey, but you can if you want to.
Now, I want those collars on the outside of your coats' collar or dress collar or blouse collar or shirt collar or whatever it is you're wearing and I want the collars taken good care of at all times and I want the pin under your chin. Put the tag of her dress in, would you do that, she got half dressed this morning.
Now, people, before - you can arrange that properly?

M:
I guess not.

Jane Elliott:
I guess not. Fix it!

Jane Elliott:
Now, do you have any physical problems that will be made worse by sitting on the floor for an extended period of time?

M:
I doubt.

Jane Elliott:
Don't give me "I doubt". Yes or no?

M:
No.

Jane Elliott:
No back problems, no hip problems, no leg problems, no heart problems, no high blood pressure, nothing like that. - How about you?

M:
No.

Jane Elliott:
How about you? - You?

M:
You care?

Jane Elliott:
No, but I have to know, because if something happens during this, you're able to file a lawsuit so I want to know going into whether or not you have any problems. I don't want to make them worse, because I don't want to have to take a lawsuit out of this. Do you understand that?

M:
No.

Jane Elliott:
No? You don't understand that, while your low IQ is another one of the problems I'll have to deal with today.- Now, do you have any physical problems that will be made worse by sitting on the floor for an extended period of time? Yes or no?

M:
I say no.

Jane Elliott:
If he is going to 'say no', does that mean he doesn't have or does that mean he is going to say no now and later he is going to accuse me of having made him -

M:
You can trust it.

Jane Elliott:
Can I trust this boy?

M/F:
No.

Jane Elliott:
No. Is he playing games? - Yes - Am I going to put up with it? - No. - Do you have any physical problems that will be made worse by sitting on the floor for an extended period of time? Yes or no? Do you or do you not?

M:
You don't care.

Jane Elliott:
Honey, honey, if you want caring, go to your mother. Do I look like your mother to you?

M:
She's dead.

Jane Elliott:
Then go to some other nurturing female in your environment.
That is not what I am about. Do you have any physical problems that will be made worse by sitting on the floor for an extended period of time? What is difficult about answering that?

M:
There is no sense in it, if you don't care.

Jane Elliott:
The purpose of this is to find out whether you are going to be in worse shape physically after this is over as a result of sitting on the floor. I don't want you to be. I care, because I don't want you suing me, so there I care.

M:

That's what I wanted to know.

Jane Elliott:

Now, I care. Do you or do you not?

M:

No, I'm fine, thank you.

Jane Elliott:

Oooh, friend, I don't care about you, you need to understand that I don't care about you, I care about me.

M:

Then you need to realize maybe I lied to you.

Jane Elliott:

I care about me. If you lie to me, we have it on tape that you said 'no'. So now, if you try to sue us - forget it! I care about the repercussions for my sake, not for yours. Understand that.

M:

But I care about me.

Jane Elliott:

Good, good. Then don't make me spend my precious time messing with you any more.

O.k.

Jane Elliott:

Once again - do we care?

M/F:

No.

Jane Elliott:

Do some people like being treated like babies? - Yes.

Do we have to take care of them?

Yes.

Jane Elliott:

Yes. Do we have to see to it that they are sitting in the right place?

M/F:

Yes.

Jane Elliott:

Do we have to see to it that they are facing the right direction?

Yes.

Jane Elliott:

Yes. Why do we have to do that?

M:

Because most of them are stupid.

Jane Elliott:

Because most of them are stupid. And where do they spend most of their time, in what ego state?

M:

In the child ego state.

Jane Elliott:

In their child ego state.

M:

Excuse me Mam. I have a question.

Jane Elliott:

I was just talking and you interrupted me and started to talk? You are a real poor case, aren't you?

M:

Sorry, but I have a question.

Jane Elliott:

What's your question?

M:

I was going to say: If I could have my paper and pencil back, so that I could take it and get to my adult state.

Jane Elliott:

Now I'm going to give you a piece of advice. Everytime when I look at you sitting there with that sick smirk on your face if you can't look up without smiling.

The next time I see that smile, I'm going to come down on you real real hard. O.k., you are going to feel like a cowpad on a hot rock. So if I were you, if you can't hide your smile, drop your heads where I don't have to see it. Just look down when I'm going towards you, so I don't have to see that smile. Does that makes sense to you?

M:

Yes, it does.

Jane Elliott:

If you have a nervous twitch, you can't help smiling, put your face down so that I can't see you doing it, because I'll take exception to it and that's not good for you. You understand that?

M:

Yes. I do .

Jane Elliott:

Yes. If you are going to get through this workshop, you are going to live down to my expectations of you. As if you don't live down to my expectations of you, we are going to call you an upperdy bluey and we are going to ride your tail until you do live down to our ex-pectations of you. How do I know how to do this?

M:

By your observation

Jane Elliott:

Of what?

M:

Of what happens in society.

Jane Elliott:

That's right. We in the power position in society know how to keep people in their place by lowering our expectations for them, by forcing them to live down to our expectations of them.

Jane Elliott:

Now, did I teach him something?

F:

Yes, you did.

Jane Elliott:

Yes. Was it a valuable lesson?

F:

Yes, very much.

Jane Elliott:

No, it wasn't! No, that is not a valuable lesson to teach people to submit to tyranny. Get real, that is not a valuable lesson. That is a dastardly lesson and you need to realize it.

You need to realize that what I just did to him today, Newt Gingrich is doing to you all the time by saying people who think like him are normal and other people are not. And you are going along with that.

You are submitting to tyranny in order to be called normal, for god's sake. You'd be better off to be called subnormal. I didn't just teach him a valuable lesson, I taught him to go along to get along, I taught him to submit to oppression.

Now I am going to teach you the listening skills. Since you have already indicated that you have difficulty in remembering things I am going to ask you to write these things down. Take out a piece of paper and a pencil and write exactly as I say it. Number one: Good listeners keep their eyes - what are you doing? - Good listeners keep their eyes on the person who is speaking. Write it quickly before you forget it. Good listeners keep their eyes on the person who is speaking. Good listeners keep their eyes on the person who is speaking. What are you doing? You haven't written?

F:
No.

Jane Elliott:
Why not?

F:
Because my hands are still quiet from the first skill.

Jane Elliott:
Didn't I say, write it down?

F:
Yes.

Jane Elliott:
Write it down!

F:
And violate the first skill?

Jane Elliott:
Write it down! I said, write it down. Do it! Do it now!
What are you waiting for?
Now I'm going to warn you about something: In case you don't recognize it, I'm messing with your mind. Now, I told him to conform and then I said it was stupid to conform, so then you decided that you wouldn't conform.
So now you're in trouble! Now, what did you better do?

F:

You never know what to do.

Jane Elliott:

That's right, that's right. Just the minute you think you've caught onto the rule, what did I do?

F:

You changed the rules.

Jane Elliott:

I changed the rules. People, am I good? Am I good, do I know how to do this? - I'm a white female. I learned how to do this at my mother's knees. I know exactly how to do this. I can turn you every which way but loose and there is no way you can win. And we can do this outside this room and our society does this on a daily basis.

Jane Elliott:

Change places with him.

Now, I want you to talk to him -, oh, I think you're in the wrong place. You change places with him. Now, the reason I put you back here is - when you're beside her, her behaviors rub off on you. And your behaviors rub off on her. And you support and reinforce one another. And I don't want that to happen. So, in order to keep that from happening and keep you from getting into trouble, I put you back here where that won't happen to. Did I do this to be mean to you?

M:

Probably in your mind not. You were helping me.

Jane Elliott:

No, no, I am helping you, and how should you feel about that?

M:

I, in fact I think I should be grateful.

Jane Elliott:

And are you?

M:

No.

Jane Elliott:

Why not? Because you are ingrate, because you are getting this support? You are willing to take the support even if it means getting you in trouble.

M:

Yes.

Jane Elliott:
This man likes to suffer?

M:
He doesn't know any better.

Jane Elliott:
You like to suffer.

M:
He is a martyr.

Jane Elliott:
Does martyrdom appeal to you?

M:
No.

Jane Elliott:
No. is there any way you can win here?

M:
Not under the present rules, no.

Jane Elliott:
Have you won yet?

M:
Not yet.

Jane Elliott:
Am I going to let you win?

M:
You don't want me to win.

Jane Elliott:
Am I going to let you win? -
Where is the only place you can win in this situation?

M:
I can't.

Jane Elliott:
Can you win in your mind?

M:
Yes.

Jane Elliott:
Yes. Yes.

M:
So, within me I can

Jane Elliott:
Within you, you can win. But will I know that you have won within you.

M:
Yes.

Jane Elliott:
No. I won't. And neither will they, because we will use everything you do against you. I won't know that you have reinforced yourself inside yourself. But will you know that?

M:
Yes.

Jane Elliott:
Yes. Is that valuable to you?

M:
Absolutely.

Jane Elliott:
Absolutely. Is that going to be hard for you to keep on doing that while I keep on badgering you?

M:
Yes.

Jane Elliott:
Yes. Are you going to have to keep working and working and working to make that happen?

M:
Every day.

Jane Elliott:
Is that fair? Shit, no, that isn't fair? Did you think this was going to be a fair day?

M:

No.

Jane Elliott:

No. Do you think what goes on outside here is fair?

M:

Absolutely not.

Jane Elliott:

Absolutely not. Do you spend a whole lot of time outside here, holding it in and winning inside yourself even though society doesn't want you to?

M:

Yes.

Jane Elliott:

Yes. And do you?

F:

Yes.

Jane Elliott:

Who, do you think, spent more time in that endeavour? You or that man right there?

F:

Probably that man.

Jane Elliott:

Probably that man right there.

M:

Probably?

Jane Elliott:

What I'm doing to that man and to you happens to his children, unless I'm mistaking in the school on a daily basis. Am I mistaking?

M:

- all the time.

Jane Elliott:

All the time. And when you watch that happen to your children and know you'd better maintain a low profile if you want them to get through the schoolyear. What does that do to you?

M:

It tears me up.

Jane Elliott:

Tears you up. What does it make your sons think of you?

M:

It's a difficult situation.

Jane Elliott:

A difficult situation. And who makes that situation difficult?

M:

You know who makes it difficult.

Jane Elliott:

I know who makes it difficult, you are damn right, I know who makes it difficult.

I make it difficult and people who look like me make it difficult. And do we spend a whole lot of time feeling badly about it?

M:

And we talk a lot about it.

Mapletrees

Interview in the car

Jane Elliott:

This town calls itself the city of beautiful maples and these are hard maple trees lining both sides of most of the streets in town. In two weeks they will all be in gorgeous yellow and orange and red and gold colors. And people will come from miles around to see the color in our trees. And this city is just so proud of that wonderful wonderful color in these trees, but they do not want people of color to come and reside in this community. We love color in our trees, we do not want it in our skin. And it breaks my heart, because it is so. This is a beautiful little community and they are very proud of their feelings for one another, the size of their churches, their churches are full every saturday, every sunday and every sunday night, it's wonderful, it's a wonderful place to raise children - as long as you don't want to raise children of color here - it's heartbreaking.

The first time I did this exercise in 1968, my parents sold 42 lunches in their little hotel lunch room in Riceville. The day after it was shown they sold 2. They never sold more than that again. I was the end of their business. Their business was killed by what I do. Somebody has said "Good deeds won't go long unpunished" and I found out how very true that is. I learned a lot about racism in a short time. And I wouldn't have -, it wouldn't have bothered me as much, if I had been the only one they exposed to that kind of behavior, but nobody confronted me in all those years. To this day, noone other than my peers one time, have confronted me, but they got at me through my children and my parents, and I find that very very difficult to forgive.

The Jews have a saying, they said "You have the right to forgive others for what they do to you, you do not have the right to forgive them for what they do to others". I can't forgive them for what they did to my children. My children have to do that.

INTERVIEW ON THE TERRACE

Jane Elliott:

See, in retrospect I know that I could have made life easier for my parents, could have made life easier for my father, could have made life easier for my husband and for my children. It took me a long time to get over the feeling that I had done something wrong. I wish it hadn't been that way for my parents, but I could not change people in Riceville and their attitudes towards them. I wish it hadn't been that way for my offspring, but I couldn't change what people did. I could have stopped doing what I did, but there would have been a whole lot of learning that didn't take place and there would have been some good things that didn't happen to my offspring, and if I had stopped, it would have been saying to my kids "When things get unpleasant just stop what you are doing, just go along to get along". That wasn't the message I wanted to send to them.

Jane Elliott:

What's bigtime stress to you - if you don't mind telling us?

F:

Every morning when I get up and go in my bathroom and look in my mirror, that's where my stress begins. Because I go to a school where I am one of two black teachers.

Jane Elliott:

Out of how many teachers?

F:

Sixty.

Jane Elliott:

Two black teachers in a school with sixty teachers and you're one of the two.

F:

One of the two. That's stress.

Jane Elliott:

And are you treated differently on the basis of how you look in the mirror when you get up in the morning?

F:

Sure I am.

Jane Elliott:
And you know it is happening.
F:
Sure I do.

Jane Elliott:
And you recognize it.

F:
Yes, I do.

Jane Elliott:
And you can identify it.

F:
Sure I can.

Jane Elliott:
And if you describe it to your white peers, what do they say?

F:
"Oh, Linda, please, that's not happening. It couldn't be happening."

Jane Elliott:
What about you, is this bigtime stress for you as far as you're concerned?

F:
No.

Jane Elliott:
Do you get stress like this?

F:
Oh, yes.

Jane Elliott:
Do you have to perform in spite of it?

F:
Yes, I do.

Jane Elliott:
You have to do your job whether the stress is there or not.

M/F:
Right.

Jane Elliott:
If you give into the stress, what do you have to give up?

M:
My job.

Jane Elliott:
Your job.
This looks a lot of stress to you?

M:
Very much.

Jane Elliott:
It does?

M:
Yes.

Jane Elliott:
Do you think these people are stressed a lot?

M:
Well, they're stressed, but not what we go through..

Jane Elliott:
Now in your heart of hearts all you people know that I'm lying to you about blue eyes. There is nothing wrong with having eyes of a color other than brown. And you know I'm wrong. Does that give you any satisfaction whatsoever - to know that I'm wrong? Is that making it all easier for you to go through this? No. You can transcend your eye color. Can you transcend my behaviors on the basis of your eye color? - No. Can you transcend my eyeism? - No. Can you change what is happening in here to you, because you know that I'm wrong? - No. All you can do is sit there and take it. Tell me what stress is.

M:
Stress is -

Jane Elliott:
Now, wait a minute. He volunteered to tell me what stress is. I do not ask people of color to bleed all over the floor for white folks. I don't do that. You want to tell us? Go ahead and tell us.

M:
Stress is knowing that when you send your son or daughter to school, that they have to start learning how to be the best and no matter what they say or what they do it's never

good enough, 'cause "I'm always going to find something wrong with you and to the point where I'm going to make you so frustrated that you get into a situation where you become unstable and you can't be taught. So now you have to go over here, now we have to test you, we are going to tell you what is wrong with your child. We are going to make him into a statistic, we are going to keep him in the back row continuously". And you have to, day in and day out, talking to him, it is nothing wrong with you, you can do it, you can do it, you can do it. And he continues to come home, hurt, sometimes in fights, and you have to continue to keep doing it over and over and over. And the sad thing about that is that we waste so much time in trying to keep the self-esteem up that we lose the time when we could be learning. And they know that. Now, that's what stress is.

INTERVIEW WITH JANE ELLIOT

Jane Elliott:

You are going to interview some students tomorrow, some former students of mine, who were in my classroom the third year that I did this exercise, they were in the film called the "Eye of the Storm" and we took still photographs of those children each day of that exercise - one when they were on the top and one when they were on the bottom - and I have some of those here. The interesting part about these pictures is, you can take a child who is a perfectly happy normal human being on one day and by putting a collar on him and telling him he is inferior, you can turn him into a frightened, vulnerable, intimidated, suspicious child who can not succeed on the day he is in the wrong place. This is Sandy on the day she was on the bottom. And this is Sandy on the day she was on the top. Sandy is the one who said, when we did our reunion five years after they graduated from high school - I asked Sandy whether, having had this exercise when she was in third grade, had changed her life at all. She is the one who said "Yeah, now when I hear one of those bigoted remarks, I wish I had one of those collars in my pocket and I could take it out and I could put it around that person's neck and I could say: Now, you wear that for two weeks and see how you'd like to live that way for a lifetime."

Rex is the one who said "I have that collar in my pocket for the rest of my life, I can't get that collar out of my pocket".

This is just one day in these children's life - and look at the difference. Why does she have to live this way for -, if she expected to live this way for a lifetime. You would soon begin to doubt her intelligence and so would she.

I don't think I had a picture of Milton in there, did I, but this is Miltons - every day of the exercise, each day of the exercise, the children had to draw themselves as they felt that day. But this was all in yellow and there is an angel on his head on the day he is on the top. On the day he is on the bottom, this is all in black and there are flames, red flames up in here, and there is a little red devil on top of his head. But if you feel like this when you go to school in the morning every day or if you feel like this every morning when you go to school are you going to do a better job than when you feel like this. And how dare society make force people to live this way.

"Eye of the Storm"

Jane Elliott:

It might be interesting to judge people today by the color of their eyes.

You want to try this? Sounds like fun. Since I'm the teacher and I have blue eyes, I think maybe the blue eyed people should be on top the first day. I mean the blue eyed people are the better people in this room.

Child:

Oh, no.

Jane Elliott:

Oh yes, they are, and blue eyed people are smarter than brown eyed people. - They are cleaner than brown eyed people. And if you don't believe it - look at Brian. You brown eyed people do not get to use the drinking fountain you have to use the paper cups. You brown eyed people are not to play with the blue eyed people on the play ground, 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.

Children:

When we were down on the bottom it seemed like everything bad was happening to us. Mrs. Elliott was taking our best friends away from us.

Jane Elliott:

What happend at recess. Were two of you boys fighting?

Boy:

Russell called me names and I hit him- hit him in the guts.

Jane Elliott:

What names did he call you?

Boy:

Brown eyes.

Jane Elliott:

What's wrong being called browneyed?

Boy:

It means that we are stupid and that we are not that.

Boy:

Oh that sure is -, it's like other people call black people niggers.

Jane Elliott:

That's the reason? You hit him, John. Did it help? Did it stop him?

INTERVIEW WITH JANE ELLIOT

Jane Elliott:

The first reaction I get from teachers, who see this film or from hearing, - hear me discuss what I do say to me "How can you do that to these little children? How can put those little children through that exercise for a day?" And they seem unable to relate the sympathy that they're feeling for these little white children for a day to what happens to children of color in this society for a lifetime or to the fact that they are doing this to children based on skin color every day. And I'm only doing this as an exercise that every child knows is an exercise and every child knows is going to end at the end of the day.

"Eye of the Storm"

Jane Elliott:

Let's take these collars off - what would you like to do with them?

Children:

Throw them away.

Jane Elliott:

Go ahead, go ahead.

Interview Jane Elliott

Jane Elliott:

This older woman in the middle of this group stood up and said "Mrs. Elliott, I came here to tell you how much I hate you". I said "O.k., go ahead, you know, this isn't a new experience." She said "I am jewish, I was born and raised in Germany", she said ""We went to a jewish school. Every morning when our headmaster came in we would bow and say 'Good morning, Herr Headmaster'." She said "One morning he came in with two SS-troupers. and one of the SS-troupers said to us "In the future you decadent Jews will no longer bow and say 'Good morning, Herr Headmaster', you will salute and say 'Heil Hitler'."

She said "I watched those of us who valued their life more than their faith, salute and say 'Heil Hitler'." She said "Those who valued their faith more than life itself continued to bow and say 'Good morning, Herr Headmaster'." She said "They disappeared and we never saw them again, but we know what happened to them".

She said "Your students are very fortunate. They will never allow to happen in their society what we allowed to happen in ours. They'll see it coming and put a stop to it." Then she said something that frightens me to this day. She said "The atmosphere that you created for your students in your classroom with your blue eyed brown eyed exercise reminded me of the atmosphere and the environment that the nazis created for the Jews in Germany."

Now, people of color, particularly blacks, who see the film "The Eye of the Storm" which was made in my classroom the third year I did the exercise, say to me when it's over "That's the way I live every day of my life." And that in what we call "the land of the free and the home of the brave". We have created an environment in this country for 11 to 12% of our population in which they feel the way the Jews felt in nazi Germany.

White people say to me "I don't see it that way" - of course they don't see it that way, they don't live it that way. We do not live the same reality in this country. White people do not live as people of color do.

In the workshop

Jane Elliott:

Now I need to know - how did you feel about what you went through this morning. The words that you've written came out of your feelings, right? Nobody else's. O.k., read your three words.

F:

Confused, sad and some humour.

Jane Elliott:

Sad - any of you people sad this morning? You look sad, what were you sad about?

F:

I was sad, because I had to stay on the carpet, I didn't get any coffee, I didn't get any donuts.

Jane Elliott:

Valley girl? - like "wow, man". And I'll tell you something else.

F:

Yes.

Jane Elliott:

I'm going to give you a really valuable piece of advice. Get over cute!

F:

Aha, o.k.

Jane Elliott:

Now, I'm absolutely serious about this. Get over cute, because you'll be cute until you are about 45. And then at 45, you won't be cute any more, you'll just be an old braud. There'll be whole bunch of 18 to 40 year olds there who are cuter than you are. And at that point, you'll say "I want that promotion". And somebody will say to you "Well, let's see, I don't think of you as qualified, I just think of you as cute".

And then you're going to howl "sexism". Females, get over cute! Get competent! Get trained! Get capable! Get over cute! And those of you who are called Patty and Debby and Susy - get over that, because we use those names to infantilize females. We keep females in their little girl state by the names we use for them. Get over it! If you want to be taken seriously, get serious! Get over it!

Why didn't you defend her?

M:

It's like if you are picking on her, you are not picking on me. That's all by the rules I kind of saw it's like I'm just going to sit back and lay low.

Jane Elliott:

And let her do it to them. It's what makes racism work, people! It's what makes homophobia work, people. It's what makes sexism work, it's what makes agism work. To sit back and do nothing is to cooperate with the oppressor. As long as you folks did nothing, I was free to do whatever I chose to.

M:

I think the thing that made me most scared was when we talked about the -, just doing this for a day and how it really is a lifetime thing for so many folks.

Jane Elliott:

Why did that scare you?

M:

It scared me -, I really got in touch with the incredible injustice, that I'm a part of. It really scared me.

I guess part of the biggest thing is that it's really hard for me to believe that one person can make a difference.

Jane Elliott:

Have I made a difference in you?

- Yes.

Jane Elliott:

How many people do you think I am?

At the end of the second world war when they cleaned out the concentration camps in Germany, a lutheran minister said "When they came for the Jews, I wasn't jewish, so I did nothing. When they came for the homosexuals, I wasn't homosexual, so I did nothing.

When they came for the gypsies, I wasn't a gypsy, so I did nothing. When they came for me, there was noone left to do anything." -

Now, think about it. Think about that!