



## LESSON PLAN

<b>Level:</b>	Grades 7 to 12
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<b>Duration:</b>	15 minutes

# Unpacking Privilege

## Overview

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Students are introduced to the idea of “privilege” in relation to diversity and how it applies to media. They then look at a checklist of media related privileges to help them understand the concept.

Note: While it may be taught on its own, this lesson is intended as an optional mini-lesson to accompany the [Diversity in Media Toolbox](#).

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will:

- understand the concept of “privilege” and how it applies to media
- reflect on their own experiences with privilege

## Preparation and Materials

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Photocopy the handout *Unpacking Privilege*

Review the teacher backgrounder [Complicated Conversations in the Classroom](#).

## Procedure

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Distribute the handout *Unpacking Privilege* and go through the “What is Privilege?” section with the class.

Then have students go through the “Privilege in Media” section on their own and reflect on how they may be privileged or disadvantaged in different ways.

Finally, go through the “Taking Action” section with the class and brainstorm ways that they can become more aware of privilege or reduce its impact in media.



## Unpacking Privilege

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### What is “Privilege”?

“Privilege” means the advantages that come from being part of a dominant or majority group (White, male, heterosexual, non-disabled, etc. ).

When we think about racism and discrimination, we often think about deliberate acts towards a **disadvantaged** group – hurtful words, tasteless jokes, exclusion from work or school, and so on – but it can just as easily take the form of **privileges** given to members of a more **advantaged** group. Unlike those other forms of discrimination, these advantages may go **unnoticed** by members of the advantaged group for a variety of reasons:

1. The benefits of privilege are, for those who enjoy them, the ordinary conditions of daily life and are likely to be seen as “**normal**” rather than the result of an imbalance of power.
2. Thinking about privilege means looking at our own lives. To accept that we benefit from privilege is to accept that our successes are not 100 percent the product of our hard work, but are also because of **advantages** we received that were **denied** to others.
3. Because privilege is taken for granted, people can feel like they are being **personally criticized** when confronted with discussions of privilege. In order to spare feelings or save face, people often deny that privilege exists.
4. Privilege is built into how our society works. A big part of privilege is **opportunities** that are not available to members of non-privileged groups. As a result, the benefits of privilege may seem small, but missing out on them can cause serious setbacks and can significantly narrow one’s horizons.

It’s important to understand that being a member of a privileged group doesn’t mean that everything is **easy** for you, just that you **don’t** face challenges that members of disadvantaged groups do. It’s also possible (and common) to be a member of a privileged group in one respect (race, sex, etc.) and a member of a disadvantaged group in another.

### What about “reverse racism”?

There is an important difference between individual *bias* and systemic *prejudice*: while any single person can be *biased* against any other person or group, this is not the same as the kinds of **historic** and **systemic** prejudices like racism, sexism, and ableism that have led to certain groups having **privilege**.

### Privilege in Media

Privilege exists in media too. As an exercise, think about the different groups that you belong to (you don’t have to write this down or share it with anyone). For each of those groups, ask yourself if the following statements are true or false:

1. I can look at the media and see people from my group widely represented as heroes, role models, leaders, news anchors, television hosts and experts.
2. When members of my group appear in media, it is not always as villains, victims, clowns or freaks.
3. I can expect to see people from my group in books, textbooks and other school material.
4. I can expect to see my group widely represented in all levels of media production (writing, producing, acting, directing, etc.).



5. I can turn on the TV and have a good chance of seeing members of my group on any channel.
6. A character may be a member of my group and have it never be remarked upon or be a part of his/her storyline.
7. Characters in media that are members of my group aren't expected to represent the entire group.
8. The revelation that a character is a member of my group is never a cause for shock or used as the butt of a joke.
9. When a character in media is a member of my group, they are usually played by an actor who is a member of my group.
10. I can easily buy posters, movies, television shows, videogames and other merchandise featuring people from my group.
11. It is easy to find video games where I can play a character who is a member of my group.
12. Ads that are not aimed at any particular audience feature members of my group.

### Taking Action

We can't get rid of our privileges on our own, but we can become more aware of them and work to change the systems that privilege some groups and disadvantage others. Here are some ways that we can reduce the impact of privilege in media:

1. Increase your awareness of privilege. See if you can identify it while watching television, listening to the news, playing video games, etc. What groups are **under-represented**? What groups are **misrepresented**? What groups appear in media but don't **make** media?
2. Don't be silent about privilege. Write a letter, post a comment, get into a discussion or create dialogue and criticism in some way to comment on instances of privilege in the media.
3. If you benefit from privilege of any kind, you will someday be addressed about it. Don't deny your privilege when it is pointed out to you and take that opportunity to learn something new about privilege.
4. Privilege will never go away until the systems in our society that cause discrimination go away. In your own daily life, work to make those systems visible and call them into question when you can.

