

# Learning about Prejudice and Discrimination

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Lesson about prejudice and discrimination, critical issues in U.S. Prejudice and discrimination are important issues in the U.S. that ESL/EFL students should learn about during university education.

## Introduction

Gaining an education at university is a brief excursion, and it is not just effort towards better economic prospects. An education should help prepare people for a more informed – a more critical – participation in the larger world. There are critical issues in American culture which ESL/EFL students should learn during university education, but among the most important are prejudice and discrimination. Human rights issues are of growing importance around the world, and students should know about these global human issues, in the U.S., and also in their own countries. This lesson is for intermediate-advanced to advanced level students. It can be adapted to concentrate on one of the four skill areas, but it incorporates all of them.

## Learning about Prejudice

Learning about prejudice within our country, and within ourselves, is important in order to move toward a more humane world. Prejudice and discrimination are current and critical issues in the United States, and they recur again and again in this society due to its troubled history of civil rights. These issues will always be current, and thus, they need to be taught and discussed explicitly with all students, including international students. Many people around the world have heard about U.S. race relations, but some information may be inaccurate. International students learn many things about U.S. culture when studying in the U.S. It is important that they have accurate information about our turbulent race history, as well as about the courage of people who have worked hard to secure human and civil rights in this country. Teaching always involves imparting values, consciously or subconsciously; it is not a neutral process. To be a truly effective teacher, however, it is important that we show students that we care deeply about critical issues in society. A deep concern about prejudice and discrimination underlies the following lesson.

## The Lesson

The assignment revolves around an excellent article by Gordon Allport called, "Prejudice and the Individual," which is a 7-page chapter in *The Black American Reference Book* (1976, p. 515-521). Allport was a renowned educator of psychology who also wrote extensively on personality and on prejudice and discrimination (see, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 1954; he is also the subject of many Internet WEB sites). Most libraries should have *The Black American Reference Book*.

## Watching a Video

For this assignment, students discuss and investigate the causes or effects of prejudice and discrimination, they watch a video on the U.S. Civil Rights movement, discuss their own ideas and feelings about these issues, do research on prejudice/discrimination in their own countries, and they write an essay (cause effect). First, they learn about America's history of civil rights by viewing movies that should be available in university library video collections. More specifically, my preview work is to watch the film, *A Time for Justice* (1992). This gives a preview of U.S. Civil Rights at extremely momentous times in U.S. history. It gives some background about the movement, and a context for information to be discussed.

For more information, there are numerous other films which deal with U.S. Civil Rights history which students may find helpful for this assignment, or for their education about American society. These films are:

- Walk Through the 20th Century with Bill Moyers
- The Second American Revolution, Parts I and II (vols. 7 and 8)
- Eyes on the Prize I (vols. 1-6, 1954-1964)
- Eyes on the Prize II (vols. 1-8, 1965-1980);

This topic is relevant and meaningful to international students because it is a deeply important serious moral issue which affects all societies. All countries have varying amounts of prejudice and discrimination, and students will become broader world citizens with this knowledge. Many children in the U.S. are introduced to these historical U.S. issues in school, but international students may have little knowledge of this part of American culture. Students of today, especially international students are growing up as global citizens. They will carry on and change society as they get older. Further, many young people are idealistic and passionate in their beliefs and sense of justice. They are curious about this topic, and need accurate information. For each of these reasons, it is relevant.

For my own education, this assignment has generated excellent explanations about the Chinese in Malaysia and Indonesia, the Malays in Singapore, the Vietnamese in Hong Kong, the Sudra in Nepal and the Tibetans in China, Skinheads in Sweden, and Kaoshan in Taiwan, and the Ainu and burakumin in Japan. The problems of prejudice and discrimination are historic and similar the world over. Yet, many students are unaware of history.

## **The Steps of the Lesson**

1. Watch the film, A Time for Justice.
2. In groups, discuss the video and the questions and vocabulary in Appendix A.
3. Study the vocabulary and appropriate usage in Appendix A.
4. Read the article (handout from teacher) "Prejudice and the Individual" by Gordon Allport.
5. In groups, discuss the article. See Appendix B.
6. Choose an ethnic group in your country that is being discriminated against (you may have to find an article first).
7. Find, copy and read an article about the group in your country that is being discriminated against; bring to class.
8. In groups, discuss the articles that you have researched about the group in your country.
9. Write an informational, and / or cause-effect paper (refer to your article and to the Allport article in your essay).

## **Appendix A**

### **Prejudice / Discrimination Discussion Groups and Vocabulary**

Directions: You will be in several different groups to get as much information from each other as possible in discussion. First groups will discuss the Allport article. Second groups may be formed according to country, to enable you to share information about your country. This is important background work. Please start thinking about these issues.

In group discussion, talk about the following questions. As you discuss, talk also of specific examples to make your ideas more clear. Then, answer these questions as thoroughly as you are able. You may have to use a good dictionary or an encyclopedia. Prepare answers as a group; choose a spokesperson to speak for the group. Turn in a draft of group answers to these questions. Put each member's name on the paper.

1. What is prejudice? Give an example that you know about. (Note: Prejudice is a feeling.)
2. What is discrimination? Give an example. (Note: discrimination is action.)
3. What causes people to be prejudiced? (Why do some people dislike or hate others?)

4. What causes people to discriminate against other people?
5. What effects does discrimination have on a group which is discriminated against.
6. What does discriminating do to people? (That is, if you discriminate against another person or group, how does that affect you?)

**USAGE:** Note how the following words and phrases are used: Please use them this way in your writing.

Prejudice, discrimination = nouns

Prejudicial, prejudiced, discriminatory = adjectives

Example: prejudicial attitudes; discriminatory behavior

To be prejudiced against\*, to have prejudice against\* to discriminate against = verb forms

\*Discriminate against - discriminate is always used with against

Dominant, minority - these words are often used when distinguishing among groups in societies. A minority group is a smaller group than the dominant group. Today, in the U.S. minority has the connotation of a group which suffers from discrimination. The dominant group usually makes the rules/laws and customs which the minority group must follow, even if these are discriminatory laws. Other related words are stereotype, stereotypical, bigotry, bigot, racism and racist

## Appendix B

### Cause / Effect, Compound and Complex Sentences (Prejudice / discrimination)

Source for the following quotations: Allport, Gordon (1976). Prejudice and the Individual. The Black American Reference Book. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 515-521.

1. "American culture is enormously competitive, and so we find ourselves keenly fearful of our rivals" (Allport, p. 518).
2. A "rejective, neglectful, harsh, or inconsistent style of preschool training...[may be] the major factor in predisposing a child toward a lifetime of prejudice"; therefore, preschool training is very important (517).
3. "...a child who is sometimes rejected, sometimes loved, who is punished harshly or capriciously...grows up....with a suspicious, fearful attitude toward people in general..."; thus he is a good candidate for prejudice (517).
4. "...Young children will play contentedly together whatever their race or national origin"; thus, "...prejudice is not inborn but acquired..." (517).
5. As children become adolescents, they become more independent, and yet they have "precarious identities"; consequently they seek new identities and personal security from peer groups (517).
6. A child may be punished "for his friendliness to minority groups..."; for this reason, he may "acquire...aversion to members of the out-group" (517).
7. "All mortals require simplified rubrics to live by....our thinking seems to be guided by a law of least effort....Prejudice is thus an economical mode of thought, and is widely embraced for this very reason" (518).
8. "...militant protests call attention to needed reforms; [as a result they often] win the sympathy of potentially democratic citizens" (520).

9. In general, stereotyped thinking is reduced as a result of more education. or: Stereotyped thinking is often reduced as a result of more education (520).

10. "The lesson is difficult to learn because as adolescence approaches, the child seeks personal security and a new identity in his peer groups, which usually are of his own color, class, and neighborhood" (517).

11. "However prejudice is learned, it takes root in a personality because it meets certain basic needs or cravings" (518).

12. A child "may develop an avoidance for dark-skinned people" since he has been "repeatedly warned to keep clean" (517).