

OUTSIDER STORIES ACTIVITY

Adapted from activity presented by Executive Diversity Services at a 2006 NOLS “Train-the-Trainer” workshop

Say: “Sometimes the only way to truly understand what a word like ‘inclusion’ means is to figure out what it doesn’t mean.”

Ask: “What is the opposite of inclusion? (Exclusion!) “So now we’re going to explore what it feels like to be excluded.”

Break into small groups of 3-4.

Say: “Share the story of a time you felt like an outsider. Talk about (1) what it looked/sounded like (from the perspective of a fly on the wall observing the situation) (2) what it felt like (both emotionally and physically, e.g., if you felt a knot in your stomach), and (3) how you responded to it.” (Write the three categories on a board so they remember)

Have each group report to you after about 10 minutes and list all the words that crop up under three categories. Your list will look something like this.

Looks/sounds:

- *a circle of people with me outside it*
- *people speaking a different language*
- *people whispering and looking at me funny*

Feelings

- *knot in my stomach*
- *frustrated*
- *lonely*
- *confused*
- *sad*
- *angry*

Response

- *ran away*
- *became more friendly*
- *assimilated*
- *lashed out*

Debrief:

- **Ask:** “What can you say about the looks and sounds of these outsider stories?” (discuss) **Conclude:** “The looks and sounds of exclusion are typically subtle and people usually don’t intend to make you feel like an outsider. These behaviors are what we call microaggressions—things we do that unintentionally exclude others. Example of microaggressions are:
 - “But you sound so White?” [to a black person]
 - “Your English is so good!” [to a person of color]
 - “That’s so gay”
 - “Man up!” or “Sack up!” or “Grow a pair!”
 - Caricaturizing cultural groups (e.g., a “Kung Fu” accent to teach a bow strokes class)
 - Sarcasm (this is a norm for American communication styles—but point out that the origin of the word is *sarkasmos*, which is the Greek word for “tearing or rending of the flesh.”)
- **Ask:** “What can you say about the feelings of being an outsider?” (discuss) **Conclude:** “The feelings are quite profound and deep. Distinguish intent versus impact here—the intent might be innocent, but the impact is negative.”
- **Ask:** “What can you say about your responses to the outsider situation?” **Conclude:** “Reactions/responses usually are varied—some people run away and some become very friendly. This means you can never tell by a person’s behavior whether they are feeling like an outsider, so the only thing we can do is ask!”
- **Ask:** “Why did we just do this activity?” **Conclude:** “By getting you all to reflect on what it felt like to be an outsider, you can build some empathy for others in this group that might be feeling that way too, for completely different reasons.”

