

UNIT on CLASSISM

Unit Outline

Session #

1. Introduction

Introduces the overall unit, developing a working definition of class, reviewing two scenes of conflict arising from perceived socioeconomic differences

2. A Piece of the Pie

Students consider the marks of material success in American life. They begin examination of how people are separated into 4 broad economic groupings in the United States—class differences according to degree of wealth—and how members of different groups may feel about each other and themselves.

3. Classism

Using a formal model of class separation (the “pyramid”), students explore how other “isms” fit with classism to elevate some groups and lower others. Looking at how oppression and internalized oppression operate in socioeconomic class, students turn to look at the role of institutions in preserving—and interrupting—class separation.

4. Getting Together

Students consider four ways people cope with or live within a class system, and some beginning ways to resist by “getting together.”

Session 1. Introduction

Aims

- To introduce the unit on classism
- To identify and discuss two conflicts involving classism

Skills

Students will:

- Identify target and nontarget group members in two conflicts involving classism
- Suggest “resistance and alliance” responses to conflicts

Preparation

Write the scenario descriptions on cards. Pick out appropriate photographs and prepare discussion questions. If you assign the handout, you will need copies for all students.

Session Description

Introduces the overall unit, developing a working definition of class, reviewing two scenes of conflict arising from perceived socioeconomic

Session Outline

1. To Begin	10 minutes
2. A working definition of class	20 minutes
3. Photographs	15 minutes
4. Closure	10 minutes

Agenda

1. To Begin

10 minutes

Explain that in this unit students will explore socioeconomic *class*: how students can be separated from each other by economic background or degree of wealth, the different messages and treatment they receive about themselves and each other, and the cost of this to everyone: classism.

Take a few moments for students to discuss how it feels to talk about “class differences.” What does “class” mean? Is it easy to talk about class differences among people in the room? Why or why not? Acknowledge that looking at actual differences can bring up embarrassment, feelings of separation or other difficult emotions. Remind students of agreements, and invite them to make commitments to alliance with one another across any differences.

2. A working definition of class

20 minutes

Have 6 student volunteers read from cards each of the following scenarios:¹

a. I was in a private school before my folks broke up. They had money when they were together. He left us and now my mom has a job and gets some help from my grandparents to help raise my family.

¹ Adapted from Amen and Creighton, *Power 'N' Me*, 1998.

b. My mom and dad both work, and dad has two jobs. We've wanted to move to a bigger house out of our neighborhood for a long time, but can't afford to right now.

c. When we were in grade school, my little sister and I qualified for free lunches; but a lot of times I took a pass because of some of the jokes people made.

d. My parents inherited some money and I have a trust fund for college. We don't take big vacations or have a lot of cars or anything, but we're doing okay.

e. I've got a job, and I'm helping out with money at home. I'd like to buy clothes and shoes with what I earn, but the fashions cost more. I always have an argument with my folks about what I can buy.

f. I was living on the street; I made a lot of money selling drugs before I got picked up. I'm in a group home now, but I know what I'm going to do to make it when I get out of here. I don't talk about it at school.

Reminding students of the "reality-TV" island, have each student list on a sheet of paper the 5 student scenarios in order from most wealth ("inner") to least wealth ("outer"). Then have the class as a group negotiate how to line up from left to right the students who read each scenario from "inner" to "outer" on the island in terms of economic wealth, justifying their choices. Make sure that any student(s) whose original list doesn't agree with the class arrangement can share their choices if they wish to do so. Close with questions:

- What reasons did you use to classify the students?
- Do people get classified according to how much they have?
- What does it mean to say some people are "upper class"? "Middle class"? "Working class"?
- What might be hard or confusing about assigning positions to youth in this exercise?
(Ans. *Don't know enough facts; each situation is really complex; sometimes people can conceal*)

Conduct the following brainstorm for a working definition of "class." Make sure students include bulleted items.

What kinds of things do we mean when we say people are in one economic class or another?

- how much wealth people have
- people's wealth includes not just income, but how much property and inheritance they own
- how people are treated based upon whether they are rich or poor
- some people are on top and some are on the bottom based upon how much they have
- people have more or less prestige
- where you fit will determine how much power you will have to control your life economically

3. Photographs

15 minutes

Distribute the photographs in turn, conducting the following discussion:

Incident #15: Food Stamps

[no caption]

- What is happening in this situation?
- There are four characters in the photo. What different expressions does each of them have? What might each of them be thinking?

[caption: Clerk: We don't take food stamps *here!*]

- What is happening in this situation?
- What does the clerk mean by her statement?
- What does it mean that her word "here" is in italics?
- How might the woman holding the food stamp ID feel?
- What can you tell about the supermarket that makes it look like food stamps aren't accepted?
- Why do you think the market has a policy of refusing food stamps?
- Why might someone in her situation feel the way she does?
- How might the boy feel?
- How might the man behind them in line feel?
- How is the woman being made to feel about herself?
- Who is/are the target group person(s) and who is/are the nontarget?
- What is another way the woman could feel and/or respond, to resist this treatment by the clerk?
- What could the boy do as an ally to her? What could the man do to be an ally to her?

Incident #16: Low-class sneakers

- What might be happening in this scene?
- There are three characters in this photo. What different expressions does each of them have? What might each of them be thinking?
- What differences do you notice between the student on the left and the two students to his right? What might that have to do with what is happening in the scene?
- What is the male student in the center looking at? Why might he be smiling?
- Why might the female student be smiling?
- What is the male student on the left doing with his left hand? Why might he be doing this?
- How is the student on the left feeling, and why?
- Who is being targeted in this scene, and why? Who is doing the targeting?
- Without naming names, give some other real-life examples of this scene that you have witnessed at school, happening now or in the past.
- How could the student who is being targeted resist?
- If you were a best friend of the student being targeted, what ways could you use to intervene?

3. Closure

10 minutes

Close with students' final thoughts. As an option, you may assign the handout, an anonymous writing exercise, for students to complete in advance of the session to help them think about class. (Otherwise, conduct the handout exercise as noted in the beginning of the next session.) If

so, take a few moments to review the assignment with them. Explain that it is an anonymous writing, and that you will not be collecting it.

Handout

My economic background²

For questions 1-8, circle as many responses as apply: For questions 9-13, answer in your own words/phrases/sentences; you may use extra paper if necessary for your responses.

1. Work

What do your parents or the people who are raising you do for a living, paid or unpaid?

- Work outside the home
- Work inside the home
 - home office or business
 - taking care of family
- Skilled work (work requiring special, extended training)
- Unskilled work (work not requiring special, extended training)
- Manual/physical labor
- Mental labor (work that for the most part does not involve physical labor but thinking, working with concepts and interacting with people, such as writing, speaking, planning, accounting, &c.)
- Supervise others
- Don't supervise
- Not sure

2. Education

How far did your parents or the people who raised you go in school?

- Middle school
- High school
- Some college education
- Graduated from college
- Advanced degree

3. Income

Where does the income that supports your family come from?

- salary
- hourly wages
- income from family business or farm
- stocks and bonds
- inheritance
- renters or roommates
- public assistance/welfare
- social security/veteran's benefits
- other
- not sure

² Adapted from Kivel and Creighton. *Making the Peace*, pp. 98-9.

4. In your house

How many people live in your home now?

5. Housing

Where do you live now?

- house your family owns
- apartment your family owns
- “gated” community
- rented house
- rented apartment
- “poor neighborhood”
- public housing
- trailer housing
- residential program
- transient lodging, such as motel
- shelter
- homeless
- other

6. Space

How much private, personal space do you have where you live?

- your own bedroom
- a shared bedroom
- room with other family uses during the day
- group sleeping quarters
- other (specify)

7. Clothing

Where do you get most of your clothes and footwear?

- made at home
- hand-me-downs
- used clothing/thrift store
- discount/grocery/drug store
- department store
- on sale
- high-fashion or specialized clothing/shoe store

8. Food

Where does your family usually get food?

- fast food restaurant
- convenience store
- warehouse discount store
- supermarket
- grow or produce your own food
- specialty/gourmet market

- sit-down restaurant

9. Do you earn money or otherwise bring income into your home? Is this income necessary to support others in your home? Is it necessary, or partly necessary, to support you?

10. When you think about all of the above, what do you consider your economic background to be now? Note any way you think your economic or social standing might be different from that of your parent or parents and grandparents, or might have changed in the last few years in any direction, and why.

11. Is this difficult or uncomfortable for you to write about? Write about your feelings answering these questions and why you might feel this way.

12. If you didn't have enough information to answer some of the above questions, why might you lack that information? What might be difficult or uncomfortable about getting the information?

13. Think of an incident at school in which you were made to think about your economic background—something somebody said or did that made you think about your family and money or social standing, whether positive or negative. Describe the incident, and write about how you felt.

Session 2: A piece of the pie ³

Aims

- To identify a definition of material success in the United States
- To explore roots of classism in differences in material wealth in the United States
- To determine how differences in wealth affect students' perceptions of themselves and others from different socioeconomic backgrounds

Skills

Students will:

- Articulate a standing ideal of material success in the United States
- Identify four broad economic groupings of people in the United States based upon relative percentages of material wealth
- Identify perspectives each group may have about other groups
- Determine which groups are targeted for discrimination and mistreatment

Preparation: You will need 10 moveable chairs.

Session Description

Students consider the marks of material success in American life. They begin examination of how people are separated into 4 broad economic groupings in the United States—class differences according to degree of wealth—and how members of different groups may feel about each other and themselves.

Session Outline

1. To Begin	10 minutes
2. The American Pie	10 minutes
3. 10 Chairs	25 minutes
4. Closure	10 minutes

Agenda

1. To Begin 10 minutes

Remind students of agreements. If you have not assigned it as homework, have students take 8-10 minutes to complete the handout from session 1.

Have students report, for a few moments, how it felt to complete the exercise (question 11 on the handout): what they noticed, what they thought about, what uncomfortable feelings, questions or uncertainties they may have had.

Continue by reflecting on photographs from last session (and on the handout), having students respond to the following questions:

- How can you tell that people are separated by economic backgrounds in the United States? Examples?

(Ans.: see poor people on TV/in the street; TV shows/news about rich people's lives; different kinds of cars people drive or clothes they wear; who gets locked up

³ Adapted from Vasquez, Myhand, Creighton, *Making Allies, Making Friends*

for crimes and who doesn't; some people have a lot of money and others don't; some people live in big houses with lots of space and protection and some live in poor neighborhoods, &c.)

- Can you think of examples in which people cover up class differences or pretend they don't exist?

(Ans.: getting clothes you can't afford to fit in or be part of the crowd; some people borrow money to buy expensive cars to "look good"; people with more money pretending they're "just the same as" people with less money; statements like "this is the land of equal opportunity," "anyone can get ahead," "anyone can be President," &c.)

2. The American Pie

10 minutes

Cite the phrase "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness" from the Declaration of Independence—the three "rights" that everyone in America is supposed to have. Draw attention to the third "right," the pursuit of happiness; ask for suggestions for what "happiness" meant for the writers of the Declaration.

Draw a huge circle on the board, labeled the "American Pie": the stereotype, or ideal, for the material success everyone should work for and try to achieve: the best car, best house, best job, and so forth. For each of the areas listed, ask students what goes into the American Pie, writing responses into the circle.

housing	education	neighborhood	job	healthcare	recreation	travel
clothing	transportation	possessions	property/land	food	money	

Close by asking students:

- where do we get messages, and what kind of messages we get, that tell us that this is the American Pie—the "happiness"—everyone should "get a piece of"?
- who do you think actually gets the largest pieces of pie? The smallest?

3. 10 Chairs⁴

20 minutes

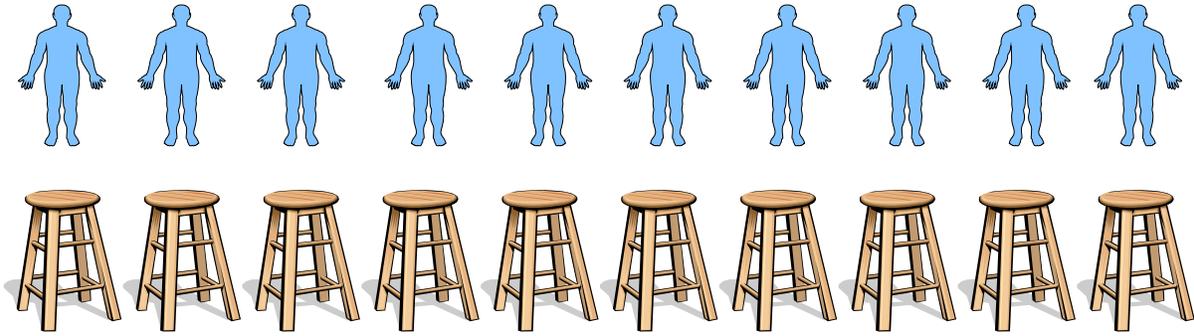
Introduce the following exercise about how people are separated in the United States depending on how much of the "American Pie" they have.

Have 10 volunteers line their chairs up in the center of the room, facing one way, and sit in the chairs. Explain that each volunteer represents 10% of all the people in the United States—all of them together equal 100% of people in the U.S. Each chair represents 10% of the wealth—income, property, inheritance, land, and so forth—in the U.S., and all of them together equal the total U.S. wealth.

Equal distribution of wealth

(each figure = 10% of U.S. population 1 chair = 10% of U.S. wealth)

⁴ adapted from Vasquez, Myhand and Creighton, *Making Allies, Making Friends*, Hunter House, Alameda, 2002. From Paul Kivel version of 10-chairs exercise in Collins, Chuck, Yeskel, Felice and United for a Fair Economy, *Economic Apartheid in America*, New Press, New York, 2000.



Ask: What does it mean when there is one person in each chair? (Ans: *everyone in the U.S. has an amount of wealth, the same amount of the “Pie.”*)

Move students into new positions as follows:

a. Make 9 students stand up and “evict” them, having them move over to the left-side half of the line of chairs, occupying 5 chairs, while 1 remains seated and spreads out to occupy the 5 chairs of the right-side half of the line, any way she/he wants to do it (sitting across them, lying down on them, gathering them all around her/him, &c.). Explain that this person has become the “rich” part of America: 1% of the people (really 1/10 of one person!) owning 47% of the wealth (about 5 chairs).

1% of the population owns 47% of the wealth



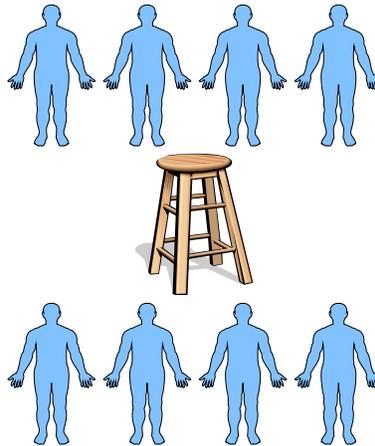
b. Make 8 of the remaining students stand, evicting them, and move them to the last single chair on their side, leaving 4 chairs for the remaining student, having the latter occupy these seats anyway s/he wants to do it, while the 8 students occupy the one seat any way they can (sitting on laps, standing all around it, some standing/some sitting, &c). Acknowledge that there isn’t really room, of course, for all of them to sit comfortably on the chair, and allow them to make their own decisions, respecting personal space, about whether to sit, stand, and so forth. Invite them in that process to notice any discomfort that arises and think about what that could mean “in real life”: what does it mean that some people have a number of “chairs,” and some are pushed into having to sit on or share one chair?

Explain that this student represents 19% of America, sometimes called “upper middle class,” higher-paid professionals like lawyers, doctors, bankers, managers, or heads of corporations who own 44% of the wealth (about 4 chairs).

19% of the population owns 44% of the wealth



80% of population “share” 10% of the wealth

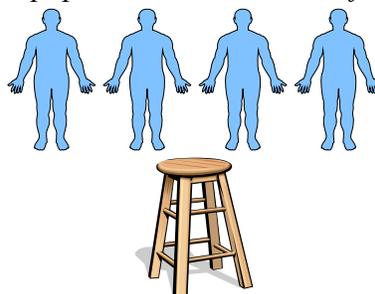


c. Make (“evict”) 4 of the students from the remaining chair stand and sit on the floor to one side. Explain that the students on the chair represent 40% of the U.S. population, who own about 6-8% of the wealth (actually less than 1 chair), sometimes called the “lower middle” class: teachers, police, social work professionals, skilled trades workers and so forth.

Explain that this group is a “buffer group” between the people above them (the holders of the 9 chairs and the people below them (the people on the floor). They work with or handle people in the lower groups, but are employed by and to some extent “protect” people in higher groups by “managing,” “serving,” or policing the people in the lower groups.

Invite students who are occupying the single chair to pretend they are acting as a buffer group between the 2 students in chairs on one side and the students on the floor on the other.

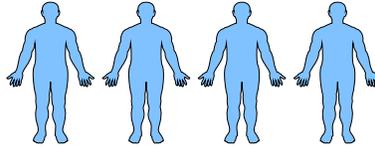
40% of the population owns 6-8 % of the wealth



d. Finally, explain that the students on the floor are 40% of the U.S., sometimes called the “working class” or “poor,” who live with little or no wealth or owe money: unskilled workers, day workers, people employed in “sweat shops,” minimum-wage workers, people on public

assistance, single mothers and their children, people who are elderly and on retirement or pension, and those who are unemployed, homeless, in the prison system, and the rest.

40% of the population own no wealth at all, and are poor or in debt



Continue the exercise with the following process. Beginning with the “rich” student, have each of the 4 groups take turns answering the following questions, pretending to be a member of the class they represent.

- How does it feel to be sitting where you’re sitting?
- What might you feel or be made to feel, about people in the other groups?
- What stereotypes might you have been taught about them?
- How might you be made to feel about other people in your “group,” or about yourself as a member of the group?

Close the exercise, while volunteers remain in place, by opening the discussion to the full class.

Questions:

- What do you notice about what each group said about itself? About the other groups?
- What do you notice about how each group felt about itself?
- Who is/are the target groups here? How are they targeted?
- Who is/are the nontarget groups here? How do you think they were trained or socialized to think about the target groups?
- Who is/are the groups which are nontargets toward some groups and targets from others?

4. Closure/Conclusion

10 minutes

Appreciate volunteers and restore the classroom. Close by having students reflect on their experiences of 10 chairs at this school, considering these questions in turn:

- One way you see or experience people separated by class at this school and/or in your community
- One way you see or experience people at this school reaching across class differences at this school and/or in your community

Session 3. Classism

Aims

- To present a formal model of class separation in the United States
- To identify interconnections of class differences with other “isms”
- To explore the role of institutions in class separation

Skills

Students will:

- Identify four socioeconomic “classes” in the United States
- Understand the role of other isms in identifying who is likely to be elevated and who is likely to be lowered in a class system
- Apply the concept of institutional oppression to analysis of class difference

Preparation

For the “pyramids project” you will need markers and paper for each 4-member group. Select the institutions that you will focus on based on the number of 4-member groups you will have and the particular relevance of institutions to your community. Review examples and add your own to assist groups as needed in completing their pyramids.

Session Description

Using a formal model of class separation (the “pyramid”), students explore how other “isms” fit with classism to elevate some groups and lower others. Looking at how oppression and internalized oppression operate in class, students turn to look at the role of institutions in preserving—and interrupting—class separation.

Session Outline

1. To Begin	5 minutes
2. The Pyramid	20 minutes
3. The Pyramids Project	20 minutes
4. Closure	10 minutes

Agenda

1. To Begin 5 minutes

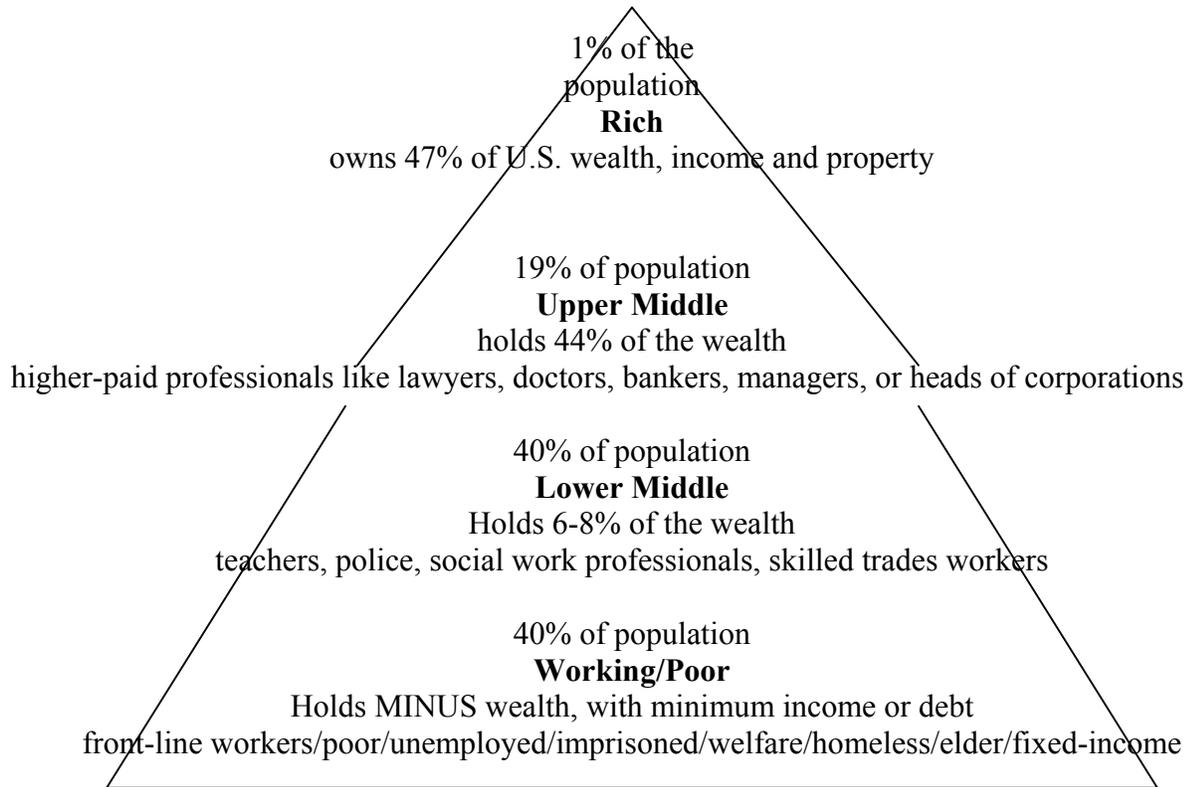
So far students have been looking at how people in the United States are separated by economic background. Explain that today they will be examining how classism works within the other “isms” from the Power Chart.

2. The Pyramid⁵ 20 minutes

a. Reviewing the 10-chair exercise, draw a “pyramid” on the board with 4 sections, matching the 4 different groups in the 10-chairs exercise, explaining the different levels.

⁵Most recent figures, adapted by Paul Kivel, from Wolff, Edmund N, *Recent Trends in Wealth Ownership, 1993-1998*, Jerome Levy Economics Institute, Working paper #300, April 2000, available at www.levy.org/doc/workpap/papers/300.html. Pyramid exercise adapted from Creighton and Kivel, *Young Men’s Work sessions 11-26*, Hazelden, Center City, MN, 1998.

THE ECONOMIC PYRAMID



Questions:

- According to the pyramid, who is most likely to have most of the American “pie”? Least?

b. The Pyramid and the Power Chart

Remind students of the “power shuffle” exercise and the power chart, showing how people are separated from each other, with some groups (nontargets) elevated and others (targets) lowered. Next to the pyramid draw a horizontal line.



Explain that you are turning the power chart on its side, with nontarget groups above the line, target groups below the line. List several sample nontarget groups above the line, with target groups below.

Nontarget		Target	
“Normal”	Labeled “fat,” “skinny”	English as 1st language	English as 2 nd language
Able	Physical/ mental disability	Christian	Jew
Rich	Poor	Hetero- sexual	Lesbian/ gay/bi/tr ans
Men	Women	White	People of color
Adult	Elder	Adult	Youth

Remind students of the “heart” exercise: all of us come here as “hearts”: when we’re born, we all begin at the same place, as if we were all together, on this line—a “level playing field.”

- What does the “American Pie” tell us about where we should try to go on the pyramid?
- Suppose we all start at the same place (as if on the horizontal line). When we begin to get separated by age, gender, race, how does that affect our places on the pyramid?
- Who is most likely to be pushed up the pyramid?
- Who is most likely to be pushed down the pyramid?
- If you are part of more than one nontarget group, where are you more likely to move? If part of more than one target group, where are you more likely to move?
- Who is more likely to be pushed to the very bottom of the pyramid? To the very top?
- Is this a “level playing field” or not? If yes, why? If not, why not?

c. Oppression

Return attention to the pyramid for the following questions:

- What is the message to everyone in the pyramid about what they should do to get a piece of the pie? (*Ans.: push other people down*)
- What is message for each of the “classes” about its worth or value in the pyramid?
- Who benefits from class difference—who are more likely to be members of the “nontarget group”?
- Who loses from class difference—who are more likely to be members of the “target group”?
- When you look at the kinds of work each “level” of the pyramid performs, who is that work *for*—who is it most likely to benefit?
(*Ans.: the next level up*)

Explain that students have just begun to define “classism” as an oppression:

- the mistreatment and discrimination against lower-income people: *impoverishment*; and
- the use of their work to benefit people further “up”: *exploitation*.

d. Internalized oppression

Continue questions:

- How easy is it to move up the pyramid? Down?
- What do you lose if you move down?
- How does the threat of moving down affect people in all the classes?
(*Ans.: it makes us afraid or anxious; it keeps us focused on working to stay in place or move up, &c.*)
- What is the message about who is responsible for people being in their particular place in the pyramid? For example, if a person is lower in the pyramid, whose “responsibility” is it? If a person is higher in the pyramid, whose responsibility is it?
(*Ans.: People can pull themselves up by their bootstraps; anybody can get ahead if they try; people who have a lot earned it; people who don’t have a lot haven’t tried enough; the “myth of the meritocracy”—that people succeed economically based on their abilities/merits alone*)
- What examples can you think of that give us these messages?

Point out that students have begun to define internalized oppression in classism: each person is made to feel:

- a) sole, personal responsibility for where s/he fits, and
- b) fear or hopelessness that keeps her/him in place in the pyramid, waiting for a piece of the American pie.

Summarize:

- The pyramid works to place responsibility on each of us for where we “fit.” One phrase for this is the “myth of the meritocracy”: the story that anyone can get ahead by her/his merits or efforts alone. But the power chart shows that, while there are always exceptions, people in large part get placed and kept, from generation to generation, in upper and lower parts of the pyramid, regardless of what actions they take.
- Classism works through and backs up all the other “isms.” That is, in each of the isms people are separated from each other into people who are targeted, and people who are nontargeted. People who are “targeted,” on the downside of power, are pushed down on the pyramid: they have few resources, and so they have fewer ways to move up on the pyramid or enable their children to move up. Classism works to keep them lower on the pyramid. People who are nontargeted are pushed up, so they receive more resources to help them, and help their children, stay up and keep up on the pyramid. Classism works to keep them higher.
- As “hearts” we are born into a system that already separates us, and tends to keep us separated. And, of course, all of us come from people who have struggled to change and resist this separation.

Have students write for 3-5 minutes about how they feel about the “myth of the meritocracy.”

3. The Pyramids Project

20 minutes

Have students look at the pyramid as a geometric figure for a moment. Is it easy to move or change the shape of a pyramid? Turn it over?

(*Ans: it’s sturdy, solid, most of the weight is on the bottom, hard to move or turn over*)

If class in the United States really is like a pyramid, is it easy to move or change its shape? Turn it over?

(Ans: it looks pretty set up, it seems solid, most of the people are on the bottom, and it's hard to move or change it)

Explain that, like the other oppressions, this structure of classism is kept in place by institutions. Remind students of the definition of “institution” in the foundation sessions: an “institution” is something that is made/built by people, that stays or persists beyond the everyday, that shapes how people live, grow, and learn, and shapes and keeps a community going. An institution works to help “hearts” interrelate in a community. But it can work to keep people separated from each other as well.

Have students form groups of 4 to work on the following “pyramids” project. Each group will receive butcher paper and markers and a copy of the questions/instructions for this project. When groups are formed and materials distributed, have each group draw a large pyramid on its paper. For the project, assign one of the following institutions to each group, who in turn will write the institution name as a title on their page.

- School/education system
- Real estate/housing/land ownership
- Business/jobs/corporations
- Criminal justice/prison system
- Organized Sports
- Banks/financial institutions
- History books
- Government
- Media/entertainment industry (TV/cable, internet, music, books, video games, newspapers, magazines, etc.)

Each group is to brainstorm and write answers into and around their pyramids for the following questions. (For examples, see attached “Examples for “Pyramids” exercise.”) Students are to write down all answers they can think of.

Conduct the activity as a fast-moving brainstorm. As you present each question, write it on the board, give students the allotted time to chart their answers, bring the time period to an end and present the next question. Circulate among groups to assist where necessary.

Brainstorm questions:

- 1) Who is at the top in this pyramid? This can include those people or organizations who have the most wealth within the institution (e.g. highest paid people who work in the institution), as well as whom the institution most supports, protects and keeps wealthy (e.g. who the institution benefits or works for most). Write names at the apex of the pyramid. **(2 minutes)**
- 2) Who is at the bottom of this pyramid? This can include both who is poorest (lowest paid or non-paid people who work in the institution), as well as whom the institution most

excludes or keeps poor or makes invisible. Write names across the bottom of the pyramid. **(2 minutes)**

- 3) How are the people who are lower in the pyramid “exploited” by—made to work for or serve or provide profit for—those who are higher? Write answers across the middle of the pyramid. **(2 minutes)**
- 4) What ways does the institution work to hide or cover up class differences, or “distract” people from seeing class differences—that we’re not all on a “level playing field”? Write answers along right and left sides of the pyramid. **(2 minutes)**

For the last two questions, have groups turn papers over. On the other side, draw a circle. Fill the circle with answers to the following questions:

- 5) What are possible ways this institution could (and sometimes does) work *against* classism, to promote equality? **(3 minutes)**
- 6) Write in any examples of people or movements you can think of who have resisted class separation in this institution: people from history or people you know. **(3 minutes)**

4. Closure/conclusion

10 minutes

Close by posting all “pyramids” for reference in the next session. Have students report one insight or new thought from the session.

Examples for “Pyramids” exercise

School/education system

1) **Top:**

(Ans.: alumni from and students at elite or private schools; wealthy families; school district superintendents and boards; university chancellors and trustees)

2) **Bottom:**

(Ans: low-income students, students of low-income parents, low-paid school personnel (security, clerical, custodial services, food services, &c.))

3) **Exploited:**

(Ans: front-line workers paid less for necessary work; low-income students trained/educated and tracked into low-income jobs)

4) **Hide or cover up class differences:**

(Ans: pretend all students are equal and have equal opportunities and no one is treated differently; no discussion of economic differences in curriculum)

5) **School/education system working against classism:**

(Ans: public education system set up to teach all students regardless of income; education scholarships, loans and income-based affirmative action; education has been one of the main tools for people from low-income backgrounds to secure more opportunities and resources than their parents had)

6) **Resistance:**

(Ans: teachers and students use educational process to learn to fight for education reform, social equality for all people)

Real estate/housing/land ownership

1) **Top:**

(Ans: large organizational landowners: corporations, agribusinesses, mining/timber industries; large individual property owners: landlords, homeowners in “gated” communities, wealthy people)

2) **Bottom:**

(Ans: homeless people, renters and tenants, poor people)

3) **Exploited:**

(Ans: tenants provide rents to landlords; absentee landlords provide few services to tenants; mining/timber industries exploit “publicly-owned land” for timber and mineral harvest; corporations receive tax breaks from taxpayers via government; industries discharge toxic pollutants into “publicly-owned” water and landfill)

4) **Hide or cover up class differences:**

(Ans: “anybody can own their own home if they just work hard enough”; “public lands belong to everyone”)

5) Real estate/housing/land ownership working against classism:

(Ans: people can acquire property and secure some independence and future for their families)

6) Resistance:

(Ans.: communities set up for collective land ownership; government buying up private land for public ownership; small-farms movement; popular resistance to toxic pollution and land exploitation)

Business/jobs/corporations

1) Top:

(Ans: Chief executive officers of corporations (CEOs), upper management, wealthy stockholders and boards of trustees, “Fortune 500” and multinational companies, corporation chains)

2) Bottom:

(Ans: front-line, sweatshop, unskilled, “temp,” “illegal” (undocumented immigrant) and day workers; small businesses; employees whose retirement and pension funds are invested in the company; “mom and pop” stores; communities dependent on one large employer)

3) Exploited:

(Ans: differential pay between top and bottom; sweatshop pay; 10-14-hour working day and 60-80-hour workweek; tax breaks for large employers; “glass ceiling” (invisible discrimination) that keeps certain kinds of workers (e.g. women, people of color, non-college-educated, &c.) performing more work in lower positions; use of workers’ retirement and pension pay funds for company’s financial expansion)

4) Hide or cover up class differences:

(Ans: management urges workers to “work for the company team”; management urges public sector workers to ignore job conditions and “serve the public”; “anybody can get ahead if they work hard enough”; hidden (“glass”) ceilings that cover up employment discrimination)

5) Business/jobs/corporations working against classism:

(Ans: workers share a common workplace and can more easily organize for worker rights, better pay and retirement; small-business movements for collective ownership by workers, small business initiatives for better treatment of the environment, business adapting affirmative action practices to promote people of color and women, corporations investing in communities through foundations)

6) Resistance:

(Ans: unions; public organizing to make corporations more responsible to their local communities; informal and formal work slowdowns, stoppages and strikes to secure better working conditions; worker organizing at shareholder meetings; public campaigns against corporate chain domination)

Criminal justice/prison system

1) Top:

(Ans: highly-paid public officials, judiciary, law enforcement; people whose rights and property are protected by these systems)

2) Bottom:

(Ans: people, including young people, from poor or low-income communities, disproportionately arrested and imprisoned; “blue-collar” (low-income) criminals)

3) Exploited:

(Ans: prisoners employed in prison system industries; younger offenders released into military service; “white collar” (wealthy) offenders given lighter sentences; corrections industry secures increased government funding compared to schools)

4) Hide or cover up class differences:

(Ans: “everyone is equal before the law”; justice is “impartial” or “blind”; “do the crime and serve the time”)

5) Criminal justice/prison system working against classism:

(Ans: judges and jury systems using laws that find in favor of low-income people and against wealthy interests, or find lower-privileged defendants innocent; police and government investigations and arrest of corporate wrongdoers; police protecting all community members; “honest cops,” officers that work against corruption within criminal justice system)

6) Resistance:

(Ans: citizens and prisoners organizing for prisoner rights; public initiatives to prevent incarceration for juvenile, first-time and non-violent offenses (e.g. drug possession); advocacy groups for low-income people; public initiatives against the death penalty)

Organized Sports

Top:

(Ans: sports company franchise owners, stockholders and officers, (a few) professional athletes or “stars”, often from elite institutions with extended training opportunities; directors and owners from related industries (e.g. media, sports equipment, alcohol, advertising, arena construction, &c.)

1) Bottom:

(Ans: low income high school/college athletes; unskilled workers; consumers)

2) Exploited:

(Ans: tax breaks, incentives and stadium construction for franchises by local communities funded by local taxpayers; injuries to athletes; fatalities; high profits for owners from teams' performance)

3) Hide or cover up class differences:

(Ans: "anyone can play if they're good enough"; media focus on "stars" from low-income backgrounds)

4) Organized Sports working against classism:

(Ans: Reward and fame for players' abilities or skills regardless of backgrounds; organized sports can provide material success for some players from low-income backgrounds; most organized sports highlight teamwork and equality among teammates; franchise investment in local communities; professional athletes performing community services)

5) Resistance:

(Ans: players' unions; local organizing against sports franchise monopolies; movements for coed and cooperative sports; athletic programs promoting equal opportunity)

Banks/financial systems

1) Top:

(Ans: chief financial officers, bank owners, stockholders and investors; international financial organizations (e.g. IMF (International Monetary Fund), World Bank)

2) Bottom:

(Ans: front-line workers, low-income customers, small property holders, small businesses, poorer communities (within the U.S.), and poorer "developing" nations (across the world))

3) Exploited:

(Ans: low pay for front-line workers (tellers, cashiers, &c.); redlining practices (refusing to loan money for home purchase or mortgages to people from low-income communities, circled on a map by a "red line"); higher charges and interest rates for lower-income people or "smaller investors" who borrow money or use credit cards; international financial organizations charging high interest for loans to developing countries and in turn securing their natural resources (minerals, oil, &c.) for wealthy nations)

4) Hide or cover up class differences:

(Ans: advertising that all customers get equal treatment; "it's just good business practice"; financial decisions made on behalf of promoting "free trade" and the "free market" that actually deepen class inequality)

5) Banks/financial systems working against classism:

(Ans: financial institutions can be used to save money, invest, and build community wealth)

6) Resistance:

(Ans: unions for workers; legislation to halt unfair or exploitive lending practices; local citizen organizing to stop redlining practices; community-based cooperative financial systems; “anti-globalization” movements to prevent continued exploitation of poorer communities and countries)

History books

1) Top:

(Ans: kings, rulers, military leaders, statesmen, “founding fathers”)

2) Bottom:

(Ans: poor, workers, soldiers or combatants, conquered, enslaved, immigrants, women, “the people”)

3) Exploited:

(Ans: labor and accomplishments of masses of people ignored or made invisible)

4) Hide or cover up class differences:

(Ans: “heroes” version of history; description of development of U.S. as “class-free” and “melting-pot” society)

5) History books working against classism:

(Ans: the purpose of studying history is to find out the truth: history is continually revised and rewritten to find out “what really happened”)

6) Resistance:

(Ans: “people’s” history emphasizing popular resistance, movements for women, immigrants, people of color, workers; oral histories (interviewing people who have direct experience) to uncover viewpoints and voices of people otherwise made invisible)

Government

1) Top:

(Ans: chief executives and legislators (congress people, senators, representatives; wealthy financial contributors to political campaigns; industry lobbies (e.g. pharmaceutical, airline, agribusiness and tobacco industries))

2) Bottom:

(Ans: poor, low-income people without access to legislators; non-citizens such as new immigrants, temporary workers, undocumented workers); disenfranchised people (people not allowed to vote, e.g. young people, people with criminal records, non-citizens, &c.)

3) Exploited:

(Ans: unequal taxation (lower taxes or tax breaks for wealthy); government funds from taxpayers diverted from social service and education toward defense, law enforcement and protection of property and business)

4) Hide or cover up class differences:

(Ans: voting system gives the appearance of full choice and equal participation of all citizens in government; the 3-part government system (executive, legislative, judicial) is supposed to guarantee “checks and balances” that prevent any one group of people from controlling the government for their own interests)

5) Government working against classism:

(Ans: voter registration; citizen advocacy groups; the government as an employer prescribing equal access and employment for women, people of color and others; Bill of Rights for all citizens; “New Deal” legislation during the U.S. “Great Depression” to create jobs and promote greater equality and less differential between the rich and the poor; legal constraints against invasion of privacy; government regulation of industries to prevent unfair labor practices, environmental destruction, &c.)

6) Resistance:

(Ans.: alternative, community-based or “town hall” local forms of government; “people’s” movements on behalf of all groups targeted for oppression; ongoing citizen moments to reform and improve government; “civil disobedience”: actions, usually nonviolent, that citizens take to violate or protest laws they consider to be unjust)

Media/entertainment industry

(TV/cable, Internet, music, books, video games, newspapers, magazines, etc.)

1) Top:

(Ans: media CEOs, stockholders and owners)

2) Bottom:

(Ans: front-line workers; actors, artists and performers; consumers)

3) Exploited:

(Ans: low-paid workers, actors, artists and performers; consumers as customers)

4) Hide or cover up class differences:

(Ans: TV daytime and primetime shows and commercials depicting “normal” people and families as middle-income; TV daytime or primetime shows stereotyping lower-income or working people as criminal or less intelligent (and so “not like us”); music industry glorification and/or stereotyping of thug or gangsta life that show that low-income people can “make it” too; commercials for expensive cars, jewelry and other luxury items as available and affordable for “normal” people)

5) Media/entertainment industry working against classism:

(Ans: popular culture; investigative journalism; Internet access)

6) Resistance:

(Ans: youth culture music; hip-hop movement; media watchdog groups; independent media; independent journalism)

Session 4: Getting Together

Aims:

- To outline 5 ways people cope with current class divisions in the United States
- To explore a different, inclusion-based model for sustaining a local community

Skills

Students will:

- Identify 5 ways people cope with current class divisions in the United States
- Develop inclusion-based strategies for designing a model community.

Preparation

You will need pyramid art from the last session, and materials for the “Getting Together” groups project, including a copy of the instructions for each group with a different topic highlighted on each copy (if you prefer, cut and paste one topic for each group onto an index card).

Session Description

Students consider four ways people cope with or live within a class system and some beginning ways to resist by “getting together.”

Session Outline

1. To Begin	10 minutes
2. Living on the Pyramid	10 minutes
3. Upsetting the set-up: Getting Together	25 minutes
4. Closing	10 minutes

Agenda

1. To Begin 10 minutes

Have students re-post pyramids from the last session. Have a few students volunteer to summarize discussions so far. Return to the question from the conclusion of the “10 chairs” exercise in session 2:

- What “class differences” or pressures to fit in with a certain class can you *now* see at this school?
- How might people sometimes try to cover up differences, or pretend they don’t exist?

2. Living on the Pyramid⁶ 10 minutes

Explain that people can decide in various ways how to live in the pyramid—getting ahead, getting by, getting back at, or getting out. Divide students into 4 brainstorm groups, one for each of the “getting” categories below, to consider some of the ways people can choose to live.

- Getting Ahead*—trying to get up the pyramid
- Getting By*—trying to get by and make do in the pyramid
- Getting Back At*—retaliating against others in the pyramid
- Getting Out*—getting out, dropping out, or giving up

⁶ Adapted from Paul Kivel, quoted in Vasquez, Myhand and Creighton, *Making Allies, Making Friends*.

Assign each group one of the preceding categories to brainstorm answers to the following questions:

- If people decide to “get” in this particular way, what do they do?
- How might they relate to other people “above” them in the pyramid? “Below” them? Side by side, like family members and friends?
- Given the structure of the pyramid, what is likely to happen to them?

3. Upsetting the set-up: Getting Together

25 minutes

Reconvene class, having groups summarize their brainstorms. Have the entire class brainstorm the final kind of “getting”:

Getting Together

- If people decide to get together, what could they do? What would they do to get more and more people together?
- How could people *resist* classism? How could they be *allies* against classism?
- Why might they want to get together?

Divide the students into 10 groups. Distribute art materials and highlighted topics, randomly assigning a different topic to each group. The task of the group is to write, brainstorm, or draw, showing how our society could be if people got together, and lived not as a pyramid but as a society where everyone was included.

Groups⁷:

HOUSING: How should housing be organized so that everyone can live with some privacy and safety while not excluding some people? Think about cities, suburbs, rural areas, as well as group and single-family living, people being able to live together and apart, or differently at different ages.

FOOD: How would the community produce and obtain its food? How would it make sure everyone was fed, and that all kinds of different foods could be produced so that people could have variety and balance in what they ate?

SAFETY: How would the community organize to keep its children safe but not afraid? So that adults would not hurt each other? If someone did hurt someone else, how would it be handled fairly?

WORK: What kinds of work are needed to make a community happen? Who would do what work? How would people share community tasks like garbage, housekeeping, cleaning, and so forth?

CLOTHING: How would the community work to make sure everyone could have clothes, and that clothes could be produced creatively, with fashions and differences among which people could choose?

⁷ Adapted from Vasquez, Myhand and Creighton, *Making Allies, Making Friends*.

SCHOOL: How would the community provide for children and adults being educated? Who would teach? What would be taught? How would different kinds of intelligences among youth and among adults get the kinds of education to help them grow?

PLAY: What do community members need to be able to do in order to play, to relax, or to do creative activities? How would the community enable all of its members time to play, to create, to relax? Where would this happen?

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT: What does the community need to do to take care of the land, the plants and animals, air and water in the environment? How could everyone in the community be educated about the environment and given tasks for helping to care for it?

CHILDREN and ELDERS: How would the community operate to make sure that its children and elders are cared for?

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE: What should the community government look like, to enable everyone to participate in decisions affecting the entire community?

4. Closing

10 minutes

Have students post their murals across the pyramids, covering them up, and take a few moments to examine them. Close with reflections on what they observe.

Follow up Sessions/Activities

Assessment/Evaluation