

The Anti-Racist Classroom

Teaching "The Invisible Knapsack"

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Introducing "White Privilege"

Your students have probably heard and even used the term "White Privilege," but do they know its origin?

- In 1989, Peggy McIntosh published "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack."
- Famously, the essay includes a list of 26 ways McIntosh notices her white privilege enacted.
 - For example, McIntosh says she can go shopping without fear of harassment because of her race or "do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to [her] race."
- Through her personal and specific examples, McIntosh provides an engaging and thought-provoking introduction to the ways in which our race and other identifiers influence our daily lives and the way we view the world.

Writing Prompts for Response

Before and/or after class discussion, ask students to respond to McIntosh's essay in writing. Below are suggested journal prompts you might use:

- Following McIntosh's example, create your own autobiographical list of ways you benefit from certain privileges. While you may certainly include race as part of your thinking, also consider other aspects of your identity that may grant you certain privileges. For example: Class, Education, Home Environment, Sexuality, Religion, and Language. Can you think of other forms of privilege?
- Reflect on the experience of reading and/or discussing McIntosh's essay. How does it feel to think and talk about people, including yourself, benefiting from unearned advantages? If such discussion makes you uncomfortable, why do you think that might be? If such discussion is comfortable and familiar to you, what might that signify? When and how did you first become aware of white and other types of privilege?

"The Invisible Knapsack" in the Classroom

On the National SEED Project's website, McIntosh includes a set of notes for teachers and others who may use her essay to facilitate group discussion.

Some of her most useful suggestions for the college classroom include:

- Encourage and remind students to **discuss personal experiences, not opinions**. Using first-person language, as McIntosh does in her essay, helps students to focus on and listen to individual experiences instead of making generalized assumptions or accusations.
- **Avoid exercises that ask students to self-identify** in front of the class based on a certain question or checklist. Instead, you may ask students to talk in pairs or small groups, responding to an open-ended prompt, such as, "What unearned advantages or disadvantages have you experienced?"
- Ask students to consider why people often have trouble seeing the privilege they possess. **What systems, ideals, and unspoken rules keep the knapsack "invisible"?**