

Experiencing Discrimination

Pre-reading exercises

Before you read the article, look at the box below. In the box, Readers A and B wrote reflections telling how they felt about the article. Read their reflections. Then do Exercise 1 under the box.

Two readers' reflections (feelings) about this article.

Reader A: *After reading this, I now would like to learn what effect this had on the children a year later or even 10 years later.*

Reader B: *I found it interesting that the teacher gave a scientific reason, melani, for why certain people were superior in order to "fool" the students. ...*

Exercise 1 Pre-reading: Read the reflections of Readers A and B and answer questions below.

1. What reflection type did Reader A use?
 - a) She explained what was interesting in the article.
 - b) She told what surprised her.
 - c) She told about what she'd like to know more about the study.
2. What reflection type did Reader B use?
 - a) She explained what was interesting in the article.
 - b) She told what surprised her.
 - c) She told about research that she'd like to do about this topic.

Exercise 2 Pre-reading: While you are reading the article, think about your reactions to (feelings about) the information. At the end of this study guide, you will write a reflection. In your reaction, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*

Exercise 3: Quick reading. Read ONLY

- (1) the first paragraph,
- (2) the first sentence of each paragraph
- (3) the last paragraph

Experiencing Discrimination

¹ “How do you think it would feel to be a Negro boy or girl?” Jane Elliott asked her Riceville, Iowa, third-grade students on the day after Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968. All of the children were white. “It would be hard to know, wouldn’t it, unless we actually experienced discrimination ourselves. Would you like to find out?” The students shouted out their enthusiastic approval. Thus started a unique lesson in discrimination, which became the subject of several documentaries.

² Elliot started by dividing the students into two groups: one group was blue-eyed and the children in the second group had brown and green eyes. She gave the brown-eyed students collars to wear so that everyone would know what their eye color was from a distance.

³ Then she announced to the class that blue-eyed students were better than the others. As a result, they would get to have five minutes more of recess, but the brown-eyed students would have to come back to the classroom.

⁴ She gave them the rules for the day: blue-eyed children could drink from the water fountain, but if those with brown eyes wanted some water, they needed to use paper cups. A girl asked her why, and immediately a blue-eyed boy responded that they could catch something that might make them sick from the brown-eyes. The students looked at Elliot to see her reaction to this, and she nodded.

⁵ Brown-eyed people could not play with the blue-eyed ones on the playground because they were not as good as the blue-eyeds. Elliott continued, “Brown-eyed people sit around and do nothing. You give them something nice and they just wreck it.”

⁶ As the morning progressed, the children started to behave differently. Elliot noticed that several of the blue-eyed children who had previously been among the slower and more passive ones in the class suddenly became more confident and outgoing. They were smiling more too.

⁷ The blue-eyed ones began to abuse their brown-eyed classmates with insults. After one brown-eyed classmate made an arithmetic

mistake, a child with blue eyes quipped, “Well, what do you expect from him, Mrs. Elliott? He’s a brownny!”

⁸ A brown-eyed girl who had been among the smartest in the class started making mistakes. She looked dejected. At recess, three blue-eyed girls approached her and said, “You better apologize to us for getting in our way because we’re better than you are.” The brown-eyed girl said she was sorry.

⁹ During recess, two boys got into a fight, so Elliot asked the class what happened. “Russell called me names and I hit him,” explained John.

¹⁰ “What did he call you?” She asked.

¹¹ “Brown eyes.”

¹² Elliot asked, “What’s wrong with being called brown eyes?”

¹³ A brown-eyed boy named Roy spoke up, “It means that we’re stupider.”

¹⁴ Jane Elliott then asked Russeli, “Why did you call him brown eyes? Were you doing it for fun—to be funny or doing it to be mean? Did it make you feel better to call him brown eyes? Why do you suppose you called him brown eyes?”

¹⁵ One of the children said, “They tease him.”

¹⁶ During the lunchbreak that day in the Teachers’ Room, Elliot told her colleagues that in just 15 minutes, children who had been wonderful, cooperative and respectful children became nasty, cruel and discriminating little third-graders.

The rules change

¹⁷ Elliot started the class the next day saying, “Yesterday, I told you that brown-eyed people aren’t as good as blue-eyed people. That wasn’t true. I lied to you yesterday. The truth is that brown-eyed people are better than blue-eyed people. They are cleaner and they are smarter.”

¹⁸ To make this idea more believable, she made up a scientific reason. She told them that eye color, hair color and skin color are caused by a

chemical called melanin, which makes people more intelligent. “The more melanin, the darker the person’s eyes—and the smarter the person. Brown-eyed people have more of that chemical in their eyes, so brown-eyed people are better than those with blue eyes,”

¹⁹ She then told the brown-eyed children to take off their collars and put them on a blue-eyed classmate. She continued to praise the brown-eyed children and disapprove of the blue-eyed ones. For example, after a brown-eyed child wrote something on the board, she told everyone that he had beautiful handwriting. Later, she pointed out a blue-eyed student who wasn’t sitting up straight in her chair.

²⁰ During classes, Elliot frequently had students study phonics in groups. The previous day when brown-eyed children were “down,” those students took more than five minutes to complete the assignment. On the second day however, when they were the “superior” people, it took them only about two minutes. She asked them why they couldn’t do it as fast the first day.

²¹ A brown-eyed girl named Donna answered, “We had those collars on.”

²² Elliot said, “I hate today. Because I’m blue-eyed. It’s not fun. This is a filthy, nasty word called discrimination. We’re treating people a certain way because they are different from the rest of us. Is that fair?” Then she asked the blue-eyed children what they learned that second day.

²³ “I know what [the brown-eyes] felt like yesterday,” a girl answered.

²⁴ Jane Elliott asked them, “Should the color of some other person’s eyes have anything to do with how you treat them?” They all responded, “No.” And she asked, “All right, then should the

color of their skin?” And again, they all responded, “No.”

²⁵ When Elliot was reflecting back on this second day of the experience, she made an interesting observation: the brown-eyed students, who were now considered to be the better people, were much less rude and harsh than the blue-eyed ones had been the day before. She surmised that this was perhaps because the browns had experienced how it felt to be ostracized and didn’t want to treat others that way.

²⁶ The following day, the exercises ended. She told them to take off their collars. Elliot reminded them that the reason for doing it was to understand more about King’s assassination and have them experience prejudice. Then she had them write what they had learned. One child wrote, “I felt like quitting school. . . . I felt mad. That’s what it feels like when you’re discriminated against.”

²⁷ Other brown-eyed children reported, “It seemed like when we were down on the bottom, everything bad was happening to us.” And another said, “The way they treated you, you felt like you didn’t even want to try to do anything.”

²⁸ In the end, she believes these children learned that judging people because of their skin color is as ridiculous as judging them based on their eye color. And now they understand the importance of empathy.

²⁹ Thinking back on this exercise, Elliot said that it proves that prejudice is a learned behavior. It’s not something that we are born with. These children believed what their authority figures (their teacher in this case) told them about their superiority or inferiority. She said parents can have the same effect. She is hopeful though. She believes that if it is learned, it can be unlearned.

The third time Jane Elliott taught this lesson, it was recorded. You can see the video at this site.
<https://www.pbs.org/video/frontline-class-divided/>

Or read the transcript at this site:

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/etc/script.html>

Exercise 4: Answer these questions after doing a quick reading.

1. Answer True (T) or False (F).

- ___ 1) The children said wanted to experience discrimination.
- ___ 2) The students were divided into two groups according to their race.
- ___ 3) She told them that some students were better than others.
- ___ 4) During the experiments, some students behavior changed.
- ___ 5) Elliot believes that people naturally discriminate against others because we are born with feelings of prejudice.

Part 1

Exercise 5: Read ¶ 1-16 of the article.

Exercise 6: Answer the study guide questions below.

1. Why did Elliot give some students collars to wear?

- a) Because she wanted the students to look more formal.
- b) Because people tend to discriminate against others who wear collars.
- c) Because it would be easier than trying to look at their eyes to know what group they were in.

2. Which group was experiencing how discrimination felt?

- a) The blue-eyed students.
- b) The brown-eyed students.
- c) The minority students.

3. Why did the students think that the brown-eyed students had to have a shorter recess?

- a) Because they needed to study more in order to improve their grades.
- b) Because they were better than the blue-eyed students.
- c) Because Elliot told them that they were not as good as the blue-eyed students.

4. **Challenging Question.** You don't have to answer it if it's too difficult for you.

- In ¶ 4, why did a blue-eyed boy say, "...they could catch something that might make them sick"?

5. What was Elliot's reaction to what that blue-eyed boy said about catching something?

- a) She agreed with him.
- b) She didn't react.
- c) She disagreed with him.

6. In ¶ 5-8, the author discusses what happened in the class. In the paraphrase, you see underline words. Circle the correct ones.

Elliot told the students that ¹ blue-eyed / brown-eyed students people ruined nice things because she ² really believed this / wanted the students to believe it. The blue-eyed students ³ who hadn't been / had been active started to become ⁴ more positive / more negative probably because Elliot said that they were ⁵ better / worse than the brown-eyed students. Some blue-eyed students seemed to ⁶ believe / not believe that they were superior. At the same time, some brown-eyed students seemed to ⁷ believe / not believe that they were inferior.

7. Answer True (T) or False (F) about ¶ 9-16.

- ___ 1) Russell probably had blue eyes
- ___ 2) Russell probably hit John because John did something bad.

8. **Challenging Question.** You don't have to answer it if it's too difficult for you.

• In ¶ 14, Elliot asked Russell some questions. What do you think were her reasons for asking these?

9. According to ¶ 16, what did Elliot tell the other teachers?

- a) Her students have been discriminating against others for a long time.
- b) Her students very quickly learned how to discriminate against others.
- c) Her students wouldn't discriminate against others because they were too young.

10. Write a short reflection about the information in ¶ 1-16. You can write just one or two sentences. In your reaction, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*

Part 1 of the article ¶1-16

Exercise 7. Academic Vocabulary Definition Exercise Look in the article and find the words that have these meanings.

Word	¶	Find the word that means . . .
1.	look at paragraph 1	special; different from others
2.	6	before now; before a specific time
3.	6	likes to meet and talk to new people; not shy
4.	8	unhappy, disappointed, sad
5.	16	people you work with, especially as a professional

Exercise 8. Vocabulary Fill-in Exercise: Choose the words in Exercise 5 to fill in the blanks below.

1. A good salesman is usually _____.
2. About 30 years ago, a person with a tattoo was _____, but today they are common.
3. If my doctor is on vacation, I can talk to one of her _____ if I have a problem.
4. Dion just transferred to a university. _____, he attended a community college.
5. After her flight was cancelled, Rumi felt _____ because it meant that she'd be late for her sister's birthday party.

PART 2**Exercise 8: Read ¶ 17-29**

Exercise 9: Answer the study guide questions below.

1. Answer True (T) or False (F)

- ___ 1) Elliot told the children to pretend that today brown-eyed people are better than blue-eyed ones.
- ___ 2) She told them a true scientific reason about melanin.
- ___ 3) The children who wore the collar were the inferior ones.
- ___ 4) She said positive things about the brown-eyed children so everyone would believe they were better than the blue-eyed ones.
- ___ 5) An example of a weak blue-eyed child was how he was sitting in his chair.

2. Paraphrase ¶ 20-25 by filling in the blanks with the words in the box.

brown-eyes	blue-eyes	color eyes or skin
abilities	much better	poorly
phonics	inferiority	superiority

Students in Elliot's class usually study _____ with other students. She noticed that the students who were wearing the collars the previous day had done _____ in the assignment. However, today, when they didn't have on the collars, they did _____. Their feelings of _____ probably caused them to not do well. A blue-eyed girl who experienced discrimination the second day said that because of that she now understood that the _____ felt terrible when they had to wear the collars. The children all agreed that people should not be treated differently just because they have different _____.

The next questions are about ¶ 26-29

3. How did the children feel when they had to wear the collars?

- a) They wanted to give up trying to do their assignments.
- b) They wanted to show the others that they were just as good as they were.
- c) They wanted to fight the other students.

4. What is an important point that Elliot discovered from this?

- a) Children learn feelings of prejudice when they observe others who are inferior to them.
- b) Children need to improve their behavior if they want others to respect them.
- c) Children learn to feel prejudice from people whom they are supposed to respect.

5. **Challenging Question.** You don't have to answer it if it's too difficult for you.

- In ¶ 28, it says, "And now they understand the importance of empathy." What does this mean?

Exercise10. Write a reflection about the article. Try to write a paragraph with several sentences. In your reaction, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*

Part 2 of the article ¶17-29

Exercise 11. Academic Vocabulary Definition Exercise Look in the article and find the words that have these meanings.

Word	¶	Find the word that means . . .
1.		look at paragraph 16 very unkind and unpleasant
2.		25 guessed that something was true, using the information that already you know
3.		25 refused to accept someone as a member of a group
4.		28 very silly or unreasonable
5.	(two words)	29 people who have power and whom we should respect and obey

Exercise 12. Vocabulary Fill-in Exercise: Choose the words in Exercise 5 to fill in the blanks below.

1. After Laurent was fired from his job, he posted a _____ message on social media about his boss.
2. Katya wanted to order a \$50 bottle of wine for dinner, but I told her that it was _____ to pay that much.
3. Milos often gets into trouble with his father, his teachers and the police because he doesn't respect _____.
4. On Monday, Simone told me that she was starting to feel sick. She missed work on Tuesday and Wednesday, so I _____ that she still wasn't feeling well.
5. When Mari started high school, she was _____ by some rich students because she came from a poor family.

Answer Key *Experiencing Discrimination*

Exercise 1 Pre-reading: Read the reflections of Readers A and B and answer questions below.

1. ☐ c) She told about what she'd like to know more about the study.
2. ☐ a) She explained what was interesting in the article.

Exercise 4: Answer these questions after doing a quick reading.

1.
 - ☐ T_ 1) Near the start of the class, the children said wanted to experience discrimination.
 - ☐ F_ 2)
 - ☐ T_ 3)
 - ☐ T_ 4)
 - ☐ F_ 5)

Part 1

Exercise 6: Answer the study guide questions below.

1. ☐ c) Because it would be easier than trying to look at their eyes to know what group they were in.
2. ☐ b) The brown-eyed students.
3. ☐ c) Because Elliot told them that they were not as good as the blue-eyed students.
4. **Challenging Question.** • In ¶ 4, why did a blue-eyed boy say, "...they could catch something

Because he believed that brown-eyed children were inferior and probably were not as healthy as the blue-eyes, so the blue-eyes could catch an illness from them if they drank from the same water fountain.

5. ☐ a) She agreed with him.

6.

¹ blue-eyed / brown-eyed students

² really believed this / wanted the students to believe it.

³ hadn't been / had been

⁴ more positive / more negative

⁵ better / worse

⁶ not believe / believe

⁷ not believe / believe

7.

☐ T_ 1) Russell probably had blue eyes

☐ F_ 2)

8. **Challenging Question.** • In ¶ 14, Elliot asked Russell some questions.

She wanted them to try to understand that people who discriminate do it for no good reason.

9. ☐ b) Her students learned how to discriminate against others very quickly.

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Exercise 7 1. unique 2. previously 3. outgoing 4. dejected 5. colleagues	Exercise 8 1. outgoing 2. unique 3. colleagues 4. Previously 5. dejected
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PART 2 Answer Key Experiencing Discrimination

Exercise 8:

1. _F_ 1) Elliot told the children to pretend that today brown-eyed people are better than blue-

F 2

T 3)

T 4)

T 5)

2.

Students in Elliot's class usually study phonics with other students. She noticed that the students who were wearing the collars the previous day had done poorly in the assignment. However, today, when they didn't have on the collars, they did much better. Their feelings of inferiority probably caused them to not do well. A blue-eyed girl who experienced discrimination the second day said because of that she now understood that the brown-eyes felt terrible when they had to wear the collars. The children all agreed that people should not be treated differently just because they have different color eyes or skin.

3. a) They wanted to give up trying to do their assignments.

4. c) Children learn to feel prejudice from people whom they are supposed to respect.

5. **Challenging Question.** • In ¶ 28, it says, "And now they understand the importance of *They now know how bad it feels to be the victim of discrimination.*

Exercise 11. Academic Vocabulary Definition Exercise

	Ex. 11	Ex. 12
1.	nasty	<u>nasty</u>
2.	surmised	<u>ridiculous</u>
3.	ostracized	<u>authority figures</u>
4.	ridiculous	<u>surmised</u>
5.	authority figures (two words)	ostracized