

## **What is Privilege?**

### *Introducing privilege to your students*

*Privilege* is someone's unearned advantages and access to opportunities, choices, and things (including clean water, healthy food, housing, medical care, money, and education). You can get privilege by belonging to certain social identity groups (such as your race, ethnicity, age, gender, physical abilities, where you were born, what languages you speak, and how much money you have), even though these identities are things over which you have no control.

While certain social identity groups are given privilege, other groups face barriers and unfair disadvantages in accessing those same resources due to discrimination. This discrimination is not only by individuals, but also by communities and governments whose policies can discriminate against entire social identity groups.

When you have privilege you have power, and that includes the power to be heard. Those with privilege are often used to people listening to what they say. This helps them to get what they want, thus they are encouraged to speak up more. Those without privilege have less power, and are less likely to be listened to by those with privilege.

Your privilege can shift when you are in different spaces and over time, depending on your identities. Sometimes one aspect of your identity gives you privilege, while another aspect doesn't. For example, you might have privilege because of your gender, but be disadvantaged because of your skin color. Your age and physical abilities change over the course of your life, and the privileges that come with them (and the disadvantages that come from ageism and ableism) will change too.

Privilege is often invisible to you when you have it, until you listen to and empathize with someone else who doesn't have that specific privilege. For example, think about how the world is set up for right-handed people and not for left-handed people. If you are right-handed, you may not be aware of this unless you talk to a left-handed person about how difficult it is to use scissors, write with pen and paper, sit at a school desk, or play most guitars. If you are left-handed, you already know this from your own experience and it might be frustrating to have to explain it to others who have never thought about it before!

When you are aware of your privilege, you can use it to help make a better world for everyone.