Thinking About Bias Using *Twelve Angry Men*

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Grades 8-12
1-2 Class Periods

**Introduction:**
The Ford’s Theatre production of *Twelve Angry Men* focuses on how twelve jurors’ conscious and implicit biases prevent them from being open and objective in a court case. Because the jurors determine the fate of the defendant, a sixteen-year-old boy, the play reveals how prejudice can dramatically affect a single person’s life. This lesson plan asks students to consider how they see themselves and how they see one another. The lesson plan will help students understand what implicit biases they have and what can be done with those biases.

**Learning Objectives:**
Students will be able to:
- Identify biases presented in the play and in the broader world
- Understand the implications of implicit bias
- Recognize and communicate ideas about their own identity

**Guiding Questions:**
- How do implicit biases affect everyday events?
- How do implicit biases contribute to larger institutional policies?
- What can be done to change implicit biases?

**Common Core Standards:**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1:** Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3:** Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1:** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1:** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
Materials:
- Handout: Starburst Identity Chart, two for each student
- Article: What It’s Like to Be Black In The Criminal Justice System
- Online Resource: Harvard Implicit Bias Test
- Twelve Angry Men excerpt (included)
- Video: How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them - TED.com

Procedures:
- **Lesson Activity One: How Do I See Myself?**
  - Students will start to reconcile how they see themselves and how others see them.
- **Lesson Activity Two: Dissecting the Text**
  - Students will read aloud from the text and analyze it for bias.
- **Lesson Activity Three: Bias in The Criminal Justice System**
  - Using infographics, students will analyze data about the criminal justice system and make connections to the Twelve Angry Men text.
- **Lesson Activity Four: Moving Forward**
  - Students will learn about their own implicit biases and will learn about ways to move forward challenging those prejudices.

Lesson Activity One: How do I see myself?
Student will start to reconcile how they see themselves and how others see them.
- Lead a student brainstorm about the roles they play in their homes, school and community. What roles do they occupy now? What roles do they hope to inhabit?
- Distribute copies of the Starburst Identity Chart.
- Have each student complete one side. Give students free rein to describe themselves.
- Next, have student flip over their worksheet to find the second Starburst Identity Chart printed on the back.
- Have students complete a chart for another student (paired as you decide is appropriate).
- When they are done, have students compare the charts they completed for themselves with those completed for them by a classmate.
- Lead a discussion as a larger class. Ask, “Is it important to consider how others see me? Should I care if others see me differently than I see myself? Who holds power over me? What can happen in a society if one is viewed under different terms than he or she sees themselves?”

Lesson Activity Two: Dissecting the Text
Student will read aloud from the text and analyze it for bias.
- Ask for nine volunteers. Assign the following parts:
  - Foreman
  - Juror Three
  - Juror Four
  - Juror Five
  - Juror Six
  - Juror Seven
  - Juror Eight
  - Juror Ten
• Have the students read the included excerpt of *Twelve Angry Men* aloud.
• Ask the following questions to the class as a group:
  o In the text, do the characters ever say specifically what race the boy is?
  o Is there language (coded or plain) that suggests what race the boy might be? Where do you see that?
  o Even though we never see the boy, he is talked about a lot, and the fate of his life is in the jurors’ hands. If the boy had done a Starburst Chart just like you just did, what do you think he would have included? Do you think he is an athlete, musician, artist or writer? What do you think his dreams and aspirations are?
  o Do you think the jurors see the boy as human? Why or why not? Where do you see evidence of that?
  o What biases are evident in the text?
  o The last line of the excerpt reads, “There is something personal!” What does that mean to you? Why is it personal?
• Next, have the students work in pairs to answer the discuss the following question:
  o When someone sees you differently than you see yourself, who holds the power?

**Lesson Activity Three: Bias in the Criminal Justice System**
Using infographics, students will analyze data about the criminal justice system and make connections to the *Twelve Angry Men* text.

• Give students copies of the Slate Article, *What It’s Like to Be Black In The Criminal Justice System*.
• Put students in eight small groups and assign each group one of the eight sections of the article.
• Give students ten minutes to read the article, analyze the chart and answer the question, “How does this relate to the section we read in *Twelve Angry Men*?”
• Return to a large group and have each group report out on what they read and how it relates to the play excerpt.
• Brainstorm what can be done to change this system.
  o Does it begin at birth in the hospital? School? This classroom?
  o Where can changes be made?
• After you’ve listed several possibilities for change, ask students if they have ever considered their own implicit bias.
• For homework, have students take the *Harvard Implicit Bias Test*. They should not report their results to anyone. Tell students you will discuss the results as a group.

**Lesson Activity Four: Moving Forward**
Students will learn about their own implicit biases and will learn about ways to move forward challenging those prejudices.

• Give students 10-15 minutes to discuss how the implicit bias test went for them.
  o Were they surprised at the results?
  o Why might it be difficult for some people to accept they hold biases?
• Play the video *How to Overcome Our Biases? Walk Boldly Toward Them*.
• If students are interested in learning more about the criminal justice system, including juvenile justice, tell them they can learn more at www.thesentencingproject.org.
Assessment:
- After watching the video, have students write down their responses to the following prompts:
  - I experienced biased behavior when...
  - I saw bias in the text of *Twelve Angry Men* when...
  - Implicit bias affects people in the criminal justice system when...
  - (Optional) I’m going to confront bias by...

Reflection:
- Have students volunteer to share one of their responses to the prompts.
- Lead a discussion on how students experienced this lesson plan.
Mass incarceration has not touched all communities equally

The racial impact of mass incarceration
Sentencing policies, implicit racial bias, and socioeconomic inequity contribute to racial disparities at every level of the criminal justice system. Today, people of color make up 37% of the U.S. population but 67% of the prison population. Overall, African Americans are more likely than white Americans to be arrested; once arrested, they are more likely to be convicted; and once convicted, they are more likely to face stiff sentences. Black men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as white men and Hispanic men are more than twice as likely to be incarcerated as non-Hispanic white men.

**Lifetime Likelihood of Imprisonment for U.S. Residents Born in 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Male Likelihood</th>
<th>Female Likelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Men</td>
<td>1 in 9</td>
<td>1 in 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>1 in 17</td>
<td>1 in 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Men</td>
<td>1 in 3</td>
<td>1 in 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>1 in 6</td>
<td>1 in 45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This estimate is based on data from 2001. Data source: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
ACT 1

6TH JUROR: Well, it doesn't exactly prove anything. It's just part of the picture. I didn't say it proved anything.

8TH JUROR: You said it revealed a motive for the killing. The prosecuting attorney said the same thing. Well, I don't think it's a very strong motive. This boy has been hit so many times in his life that violence is practically a normal state of affairs for him. I can't see two slaps in the face provoking him into committing murder.

4TH JUROR [quietly]: It may have been two slaps too many. Everyone has a breaking point.

FOREMAN [to the 6TH JUROR.]: Anything else?

6TH JUROR: No.

FOREMAN: OK. [To the 7TH JUROR.] How about the next gentleman?

7TH JUROR: Me? [He pauses, looks around, shrugs.] I don't know, it's practically all said already. We can talk about it forever. I mean, this kid is oh for five. Look at his record. He was in Children's Court when he was ten for throwing a rock at his teacher. At fourteen he was in Reform School. He stole a car. He's been arrested for mugging. He was picked up twice for trying to slash another teenager with a knife. He's real quick with switch knives, they said. This is a very fine boy.

8TH JUROR: Ever since he was five years old his father beat him up regularly. He used his fists.

7TH JUROR: So would I. A kid like that.

4TH JUROR: Wouldn't you call those beatings a motive for him to kill his father?

8TH JUROR [after a pause]: I don't know. It's a motive for him to be an angry kid. I'll say that.

3RD JUROR: It's the kids, the way they are nowadays. Angry! Hostile! You can't do a damn thing with them. Just the way they talk to you. Listen, when I was his age I used to call my father "Sir." That's right, "Sir!" You ever hear a boy call his father that anymore?

8TH JUROR: Fathers don't seem to think it's important anymore.

3RD JUROR: No? Have you got any kids?

8TH JUROR: Two.

3RD JUROR: Yeah, well I've got one. He's twenty. We did
everything for that boy, and what happened? When he was nine he ran away from a fight. I saw him. I was so ashamed I almost threw up. So I told him right out. "I'm gonna make a man outa you or I'm gonna bust you in half try-
ing." Well, I made a man outa him all right. When he was sixteen we had a battle. He hit me in the face. He's big, y'know. I haven't seen him in two years. Rotten kid. You work your heart out... *[He breaks off. He has said more than he intended. He is embarrassed.]* All right. Let's get on with it.

**4TH JUROR** [**rising**]: I think we're missing the point here. This boy, let's say he's a product of a filthy neighborhood and a broken home. We can't help that. We're here to decide whether he's guilty or innocent of murder, not to go into rea-
sons why he grew up this way. He was born in a slum. Slums are breeding grounds for criminals. I know it. So do you. It's no secret. Children from slum backgrounds are potential menaces to society. Now I think—

**10TH JUROR** [**interrupting**]: Brother, you can say that again. The kids who crawl outa those places are real trash. I don't want any part of them, I'm telling you.

**5TH JUROR** [**rising**]: I've lived in a slum all my life. I nurse that trash in Harlem Hospital six nights a week.

**10TH JUROR**: Oh, now wait a second... **5TH JUROR**: I used to play in a backyard that was filled with garbage. Maybe it still smells on me.

**10TH JUROR** [**his anger rising**]: Now listen, buddy. **FOREMAN** [**to the 5TH JUROR**]: Now, let's be reasonable. There's nothing personal...

**5TH JUROR** [**loudly**]: There is something personal!

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**FOREMAN**: All right, let's stop all this arguing. We're wast-
ing time here. *[He points to the 8TH JUROR.]* It's your turn. Let's go.