



RACIAL JUSTICE *and a* LESSON *on* PRIVILEGE

APPETIZER: RACIAL JUSTICE JOURNEY

FRAMING

Begin by reflecting on the following two questions:

When and how did you first become aware of race? Think about your family, where you lived growing up, who your friends were, your viewing of media, or different models of leadership.

Where are you coming from in your racial justice journey? Please share one or two brief experiences.

Once you've had a moment to reflect, share your thoughts around the table with the other guests.

ENTREE: A LESSON *on* PRIVILEGE (VIA BUZZFEED AND QUARTZ.COM)

FRAMING

In November 2014, [Buzzfeed's](#) Nathan Pyle shared a lesson about privilege using a recycling bin and some scrap paper that went viral, with over 4.8 million views. Many people, including Jeff Yang at [Quartz](#), felt the lesson Nathan Pyle shared was a bit too simple and suggested ways to better represent privilege as a concept. Comics can be interesting lenses into current issues and can spark interesting reflections. We hope that by examining the two comics that tackle different ways of understanding privilege, you will be able to approach the conversation about education and racial justice from different perspectives.

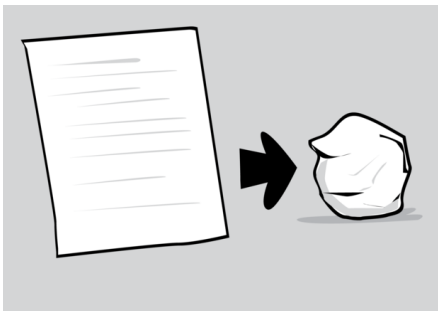
INSTRUCTIONS

After reading the comics, find a chevruta (a partner) and discuss the guiding questions. Share any takeaways with the larger group.

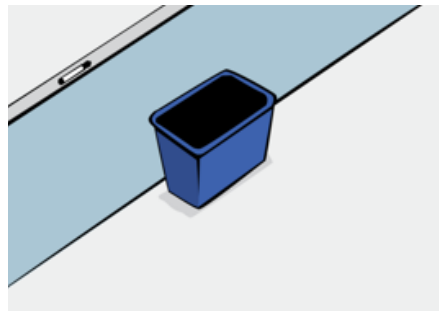
A NOTE ABOUT CHEVRUTA LEARNING

Chevruta literally means "friendship" or "companionship." It is the traditional rabbinic approach to Talmudic study in which a pair of students analyze, discuss, and debate a shared text. Unlike a teacher-student relationship, partnered learning puts each student in the position of analyzing the text, organizing their thoughts into logical arguments, explaining their reasoning to their partner, hearing out their partner's reasoning, and sharpening each other's ideas, often arriving at new insights into the meaning of the text. Spend some time wondering out loud together before referring to the guiding questions. Allow space for each partner to have the opportunity to share a response.

THIS TEACHER TAUGHT HIS CLASS A POWERFUL LESSON ABOUT PRIVILEGE¹



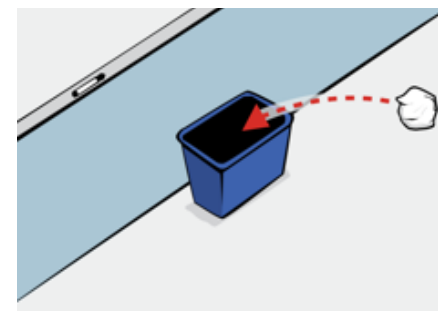
I once saw a high school teacher lead a simple, powerful exercise to teach his class about privilege and social mobility. He started by giving each student a scrap piece of paper and asked them to crumple it up.



Then he moved the recycling bin to the front of the room.



He said, "The game is simple — you all represent the country's population. And everyone in the country has a chance to become wealthy and move into the upper class."



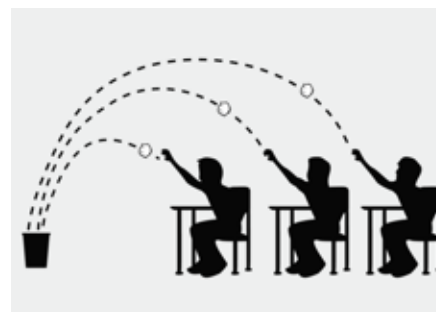
"To move into the upper class, all you must do is throw your wadded-up paper into the bin while sitting in your seat."



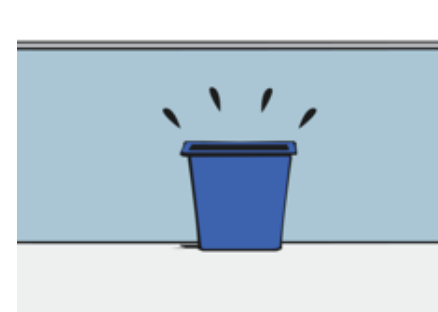
The students in the back of the room immediately piped up, "This is unfair!" They could see the rows of students in front of them had a much better chance.



Everyone took their shots, and — as expected — most of the students in the front made it (but not all) and only a few students in the back of the room made it.



He concluded by saying, "The closer you were to the recycling bin, the better your odds. This is what privilege looks like. Did you notice how the only ones who complained about fairness were in the back of the room?"



"By contrast, people in the front of the room were less likely to be aware of the privilege they were born into. All they can see is 10 feet between them and their goal."

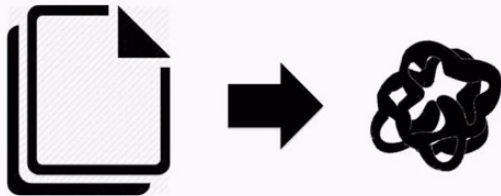
"Your job — as students who are receiving an education — is to be aware of your privilege.

And use this particular privilege called "education" to do your best to achieve great things, all the while advocating for those in the rows behind you."

HOW TO REALLY UNDERSTAND WHITE PRIVILEGE²

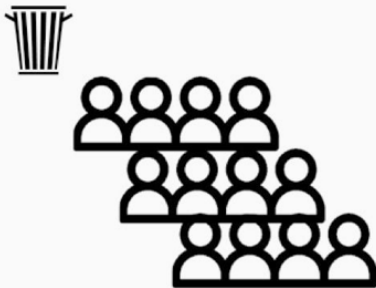
It was a “[simple, powerful exercise about privilege.](#)” On Nov. 21, 2014, BuzzFeed’s Nathan Pyle posted a lesson he recalled from high school, taught using a ream of paper and a trash bin. It instantly went viral, with over 4.1 million views. Here’s our real-world take on Pyle’s post and the concept of privilege, which turns out to not be so simple after all.

The way it goes is, at the beginning of the teacher’s class, every student received a sheet of paper.



They were told to crumple it up into a ball.

Except that the kids were seated in rows. And of course, the kids in the front row were closer to the waste basket than the ones in the middle and back rows.

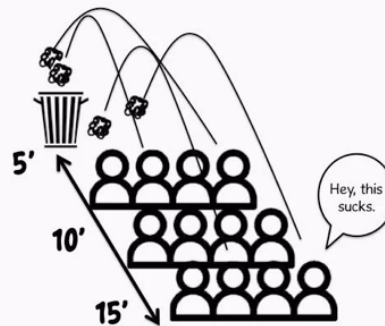


And where you were seated was basically random.

The teacher then put a waste basket at the front of the room.

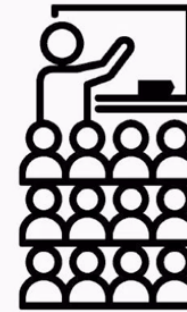


But of course, it meant that the kids in the front row were five or ten feet closer to the basket.



Hey, this sucks.

So you’ve probably seen the story go around about the teacher who had a simple way of teaching his class about privilege.

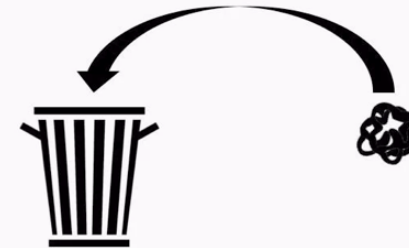


SO INSIGHTFUL.

PERSONALLY, I FIND IT POWERFUL.

I mean, how could you possibly miss it? Everybody’s been sharing it and calling it “insightful” and “powerful!”

“We’re going to play a game,” he said. “All of you take your balls of paper and try to throw them into the waste basket. Whomever gets it into the basket wins.”



Simple, right?

Obviously, if you’re closer to the basket, you have a better chance of scoring a hit with your ball of crumpled-up paper. The kids in the back of the room immediately said “Hey, this isn’t fair — the students in the front of the room have a much better chance than we do!” And of course, they were right. The front-row kids got a lot more “wins” than the middle or back row kids.

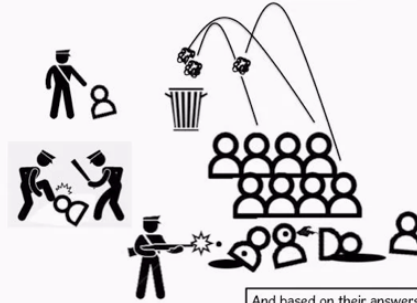


So it’s all about what row you start in. That’s the meaning of “privilege.” Lesson learned, right?

HOW TO REALLY UNDERSTAND WHITE PRIVILEGE

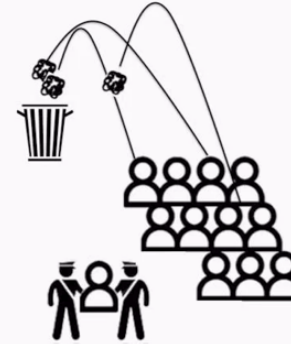
WELL...
NOT QUITE.

You see, if you wanted to *really* be accurate, you'd make it so that when the kids in the back row made a sudden move, people in uniform would come in and start asking them questions.



And based on their answers, sometimes they'd get beaten. Or shot.

Every so often, a back-row student would be taken out of the classroom.



They'd spend the rest of the period in the broom closet.



Because you didn't want them making trouble for the front-row kids.

The front and middle-row kids would be able to go to throwing lessons, assuming they wanted to. The back row kids would have to stay out in the hall. Because if they weren't *already* doing well at throwing, it's obvious that they didn't have the "aptitude" or "discipline" for throwing.



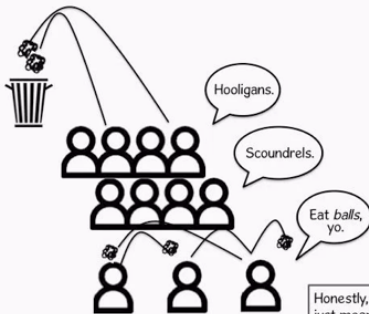
Throwing is hard.

If the kids in the front and middle rows *ran out* of paper balls, they'd just take balls from the back-row kids.



Because *gentrification*.

At some point, the back-row kids would get sick of the whole game and just start throwing the balls at *each other*. The front-row kids would use that as evidence that the back row was where they *belonged*.



Honestly, some people were just meant to be back-row.

Hmm...maybe "privilege" isn't so *simple* after all?



HAPPY
THANKSGIVING.


Just sayin.'

- 1 | Pyle, Nathan W. "[This Teacher Taught His Class A Powerful Lesson About Privilege.](#)" BuzzFeed. 21 Nov 2014. Web.
- 2 | Yang, Jeff. "[How to Really Understand White Privilege.](#)" Quartz. 27 Nov 2014. Web.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Which pieces of these exercises resonate with you and which pieces do not? What might be too simple?
- In what ways does this exercise reflect your experience of the education system and of privilege more generally? What specific experiences do you have that reflect or contradict this exercise?
- What can each of us do to create dynamics in our education system and more generally in our society that give everyone more equal access to opportunity and resources?

DESSERT: NO ONE *is* GETTING LEFT BEHIND

FRAMING

Pursuing racial justice is a process. How we approach it will evolve as we explore our identities and histories and as we change through our experiences. But Jewish tradition, the sources we have read tonight, or a combination of the two, push us to take the initiative in beginning that process.

INSTRUCTIONS

Take a look at the [Next Steps](#) document and choose one or more actions that you will follow through on. Then, choose one person at the dinner to be your accountability partner and exchange contact information. Set a time in the next month to follow up with each other.

Take time to reflect on this experience and process the information presented in your discussion. Go around the table, having everyone read one line of the following prayer by Miriam Grossman, organizer and rabbinical student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.³

*Our G-d and G-d of our ancestors,
give us a vision that history is long.*

*It is not every loss of every people
all at once.*

*Give us hands to join with on
either side.*

*This time we remember every other
time; this time we have each other.*

*Give us something different than
hope-give us fire: warm, bright, life-
giving, light-giving, angry. Give us
memory.*

*An intersecting, intersectional web.
And no one is getting left behind.*

*This moment in history is this moment
in history- it is not my Grandmother's
house burning down.*

*My G-d...and G-d of our ancestors,
no one is getting left behind.*

With Miriam's prayer ringing in the air, take a moment to think about what it means to leave no one behind in the fight for racial justice.

³ | Posted to Facebook on November 9, 2016.