Lesson Plan: Understanding Privilege
Objectives

- Students will be able to define privilege and provide examples of how it shapes individuals' experiences and opportunities.
- Students will analyze the impact of privilege on different aspects of life, such as education, employment, and social interactions.
- Students will reflect on their own privileges and discuss ways to use privilege to promote equity and justice.

Materials

- Whiteboard and markers
- Projector and computer
- Handouts with definitions and examples of privilege
- Chart paper and markers
- Reflection journals
- Access to online articles or videos related to privilege
- Art supplies (paper, colored pencils, markers)

Procedures

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Begin by asking students what they think the word "privilege" means. Write their responses on the board.
- Show a short video or read a brief article that explains the concept of privilege in simple terms.
- Discuss the examples presented in the video or article and relate them to students' own experiences.

2. Group Activity: Mapping Privilege (15 minutes)

- Divide students into small groups and provide each group with chart paper and markers.
- Ask each group to create a "Privilege Map" by listing different types of privileges (e.g., economic, racial, gender, ability) and examples of how these privileges manifest in everyday life.
- Groups will present their maps to the class, and a brief discussion will follow each presentation.

3. Reflection: Recognizing Personal Privilege (10 minutes)

- Have students individually reflect on their own privileges by writing in their reflection journals. Prompt them to think about aspects of their lives where they may experience privilege and how it has affected their experiences.
- Encourage students to think about how they can use their privileges to help others and promote fairness.

4. Class Discussion: Using Privilege for Good (10 minutes)
- Facilitate a class discussion on how students can use their privileges to make positive changes in their communities. Encourage students to share ideas on actions they can take to support others who may not have the same privileges.

5. Conclusion and Exit Ticket (5 minutes)
- Summarize the key points of the lesson and emphasize the importance of understanding and acknowledging privilege.
- Ask students to complete an exit ticket with one thing they learned and one way they plan to use their privilege to help others.

Assessment
- Participation in group discussions and activities.
- Reflection journal entries will be assessed for understanding and depth of thought.
- Exit tickets will be used to gauge students' grasp of the concept and their willingness to apply what they learned.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Art

- Objective: Students will create an art piece that visually represents the concept of privilege.
- Procedure:
  1. Discuss how art can convey complex ideas like privilege.
  2. Provide students with art supplies and have them create a drawing or collage that symbolizes privilege.
  3. Display the artworks in the classroom and allow students to explain their pieces.

Language Arts

- Objective: Students will write a reflective essay on how privilege affects their own lives or the lives of others.
- Procedure:
  1. Discuss the role of writing in exploring personal and social issues.
  2. Have students draft an essay outline focusing on a personal experience or observation related to privilege.
  3. Students will write and revise their essays, sharing them in small groups for peer feedback.

Foreign Languages

- Objective: Students will explore how language can be a privilege and create a multilingual poster that includes key terms related to privilege in different languages.
- Procedure:
  1. Discuss how knowing multiple languages can be a form of privilege.
  2. Provide students with key terms related to privilege in several languages.
  3. Students will design a poster that includes these terms, ensuring the poster is visually engaging and educational.

Math

- Objective: Students will analyze statistical data related to privilege and inequality.
- Procedure:
  1. Introduce basic statistical concepts and how they can be used to understand social issues.
  2. Provide students with datasets on income inequality, education, or employment rates.
  3. Students will create graphs or charts to represent the data and discuss their findings with the class.

Music

- Objective: Students will create a song or musical piece that reflects themes of privilege and social justice.
- Procedure:
  1. Discuss how music can be used to raise awareness and promote social change.
  2. Students will work in groups to write lyrics and compose a melody that addresses privilege.
  3. Perform the pieces for the class or record them using digital music software.

Physical Education

- Objective: Students will participate in a game or activity designed to simulate the experience of privilege and lack of privilege.
- Procedure:
  1. Set up a physical activity where students are divided into groups with different levels of "advantage" (e.g., some groups start closer to the goal or have fewer obstacles).
  2. After the activity, discuss how the setup represented privilege and how it affected the outcome.
  3. Encourage students to reflect on how this relates to real-world experiences.

Science

- Objective: Students will explore the concept of environmental privilege and how it affects access to clean air, water, and safe living conditions.
- Procedure:
  1. Introduce the concept of environmental justice and discuss examples of how privilege affects access to natural resources.
  2. Conduct a simple experiment or case study analysis on pollution levels in different neighborhoods.
  3. Students will write a report on their findings and discuss potential solutions.

Technology

- Objective: Students will create a digital presentation or video that explains privilege and its impact on society.
- Procedure:
  1. Teach students how to use digital tools like presentation software or video editing apps.
  2. Students will work in pairs or small groups to create a presentation or video that educates others about privilege.
  3. Share the projects with the class or post them online for a wider audience.

Family and Community Involvement

- Encourage students to discuss the concept of privilege with their families and bring back stories or examples of how privilege has impacted their family's experiences.

- Organize a community forum or panel discussion on privilege, inviting local leaders, activists, and parents to participate.
- Share students' work (e.g., art projects, essays, or videos) with the broader school community through an exhibition or online platform.

Additional Resources

- Articles or videos on privilege from reputable sources like Teaching Tolerance or the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).
- Books like "So You Want to Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo or "White Fragility" by Robin DiAngelo (adapted excerpts for middle school students).
- Online tools and websites for creating digital presentations and videos.

Definitions of privilege

Privilege refers to the unearned advantages, rights, or benefits that individuals or groups receive based on certain characteristics or identities, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, or ability. These advantages are not necessarily earned or deserved but are granted by societal structures, norms, and institutions that favor certain groups over others.

Key aspects of privilege include:

1. Unacknowledged Advantages: Privilege often goes unnoticed by those who possess it because it is seen as the "norm." For example, individuals with privilege may not recognize that they are receiving benefits that others do not have.

2. Systemic Nature: Privilege is embedded in social, economic, and political systems, which means it affects many areas of life, such as access to education, healthcare, job opportunities, and representation in media.

3. Relative Advantage: Privilege exists in relation to others; it means having advantages that others, often those from marginalized or oppressed groups, do not have. For example, gender privilege might mean that men are often treated as more competent than women, even when qualifications are similar.

4. Intersectionality: Privilege can intersect with multiple aspects of identity. For instance, a person might experience privilege due to their race but may face disadvantages due to their gender or sexual orientation.

5. Impact on Perception and Treatment: Individuals with privilege often receive more positive treatment, are granted more opportunities, and face fewer barriers compared to those who do not have the same privileges.

Examples of Privilege

The New School Year

Jamal was excited about starting seventh grade at a new school. He had always been a good student, and he was looking forward to making new friends and learning new things. On the first day of school, Jamal walked into his classroom with a big smile. He noticed that most of the other students were white, but he didn't think much of it.

During the first week, the teacher, Mrs. Collins, asked the students to introduce themselves and share something they were proud of. When it was Jamal's turn, he talked about how he loved math and had won a prize for a science project at his old school. Some of the other students seemed impressed, but Jamal noticed a few kids whispering and laughing. He wasn't sure why, but it made him feel uncomfortable.

As the days went by, Jamal started to notice some differences in how he was treated. When he answered questions in class, Mrs. Collins sometimes seemed surprised that he knew the right answers. When he and a white classmate, Ethan, both did well on a test, Mrs. Collins praised Ethan and told him how smart he was, but she only smiled at Jamal without saying much.

One day, during recess, a group of kids were playing basketball. Jamal was good at basketball and asked if he could join. The kids let him play, but one of them, Kyle, said, "I bet you're really good because, you know, you're Black." Jamal wasn't sure if Kyle meant it as a compliment, but it didn't feel right.

Jamal started to realize that, even though he was just as smart and capable as his classmates, some people treated him differently because of his skin color. This was something called racial privilege, where people are treated better or worse just because of their race. Jamal knew he was a great student and a good friend, but he also learned that not everyone saw him the same way, simply because he was African American.

The Science Project

Mia and Jake were best friends and both loved science. When their teacher announced a big science project, they decided to team up. They were excited to work together and had lots of ideas. After discussing for hours, they finally settled on building a model of a volcano that would actually erupt. Mia and Jake split the work evenly—Mia would handle the research and the design, while Jake would gather the materials and help with the construction.

As they worked on the project, Mia noticed something strange. Whenever they were in class working on the project, their classmates would ask Jake questions about it, even though Mia had done most of the research. One day, their teacher, Mr. Stevens, walked over to their table. “This looks great, Jake!” Mr. Stevens said, patting Jake on the back. “You must have worked really hard on this.”

Jake smiled, but Mia felt a little hurt. She had put in just as much effort, if not more, but no one seemed to notice. Even when she tried to explain part of the project to their classmates, they would often turn to Jake for confirmation, as if his answers were more reliable.

The day of the presentation arrived. Mia and Jake were ready to show off their hard work. They took turns explaining how the volcano worked and why it erupted the way it did. But when it was time for questions, almost all of them were directed at Jake.

After the presentation, Mia talked to Jake about how she felt. “It’s like no one believes I did any of the work just because I’m a girl,” she said quietly. Jake hadn’t noticed it before, but he realized Mia was right. He felt bad that she wasn’t getting the credit she deserved.

Mia learned that sometimes people assume boys are better at certain things, like science, just because they’re boys. This is called gender privilege. Even though she was just as smart and capable as Jake, Mia saw that she had to work even harder to be recognized. But she didn’t let that stop her—Mia knew she could achieve anything, no matter what anyone else thought.

The Class Trip

Lena and Sarah were both in the seventh grade and had been friends since kindergarten. They did almost everything together, and they were both excited when their teacher, Mrs. Green, announced a class trip to the city's big science museum. The trip would include a special tour of the planetarium, a visit to the dinosaur exhibit, and lunch at a nice restaurant nearby.

That afternoon, the students were given permission slips to take home. The trip cost $40 to cover the bus ride, museum tickets, and lunch. Lena quickly shoved the slip into her backpack, thinking about how much fun it would be. Sarah, on the other hand, stared at the paper, her excitement fading. She knew $40 was a lot of money for her family. Her dad worked two jobs, and her mom stayed home to take care of her younger siblings. They barely had enough to cover the bills each month.

At home, Lena's parents were happy to pay for the trip. They handed her the money that evening without a second thought. Sarah, however, approached her mom hesitantly. "Mom, there's a school trip to the science museum, but it costs $40," she said quietly. Her mom sighed, looking worried. "I'm sorry, Sarah. We just can't afford that right now. Maybe you can go next time."

The next day at school, Lena and the other students were buzzing with excitement, but Sarah was quiet. Mrs. Green noticed and asked if everything was okay. Sarah explained that she couldn't go because of the cost. Mrs. Green was sympathetic but knew there wasn't much she could do.

When the day of the trip arrived, Sarah stayed behind while the rest of the class boarded the bus. Lena tried to enjoy the trip, but she couldn't help but think of Sarah sitting alone in the classroom. She realized that not everyone had the same opportunities just because their families had more money. Lena understood that socioeconomic privilege meant having access to things that others couldn't afford, and it wasn't fair.

The School Play

Every year, Hillside Middle School put on a big play, and this year was no different. The school was buzzing with excitement as students auditioned for roles, helped design sets, and prepared for the show. Liam, who loved acting, was thrilled when he got the lead role. He couldn't wait to perform on stage in front of the whole school.

Liam's friend, Emily, was also excited about the play. Emily was in a wheelchair because of a condition that made it difficult for her to walk. She loved theater just as much as Liam, but she wasn't sure how she could participate in the play. "Maybe I can help with the costumes or props," Emily thought to herself.

During the first rehearsal, the director, Mr. Roberts, explained the scene where the lead character, played by Liam, had to run across the stage and climb up a set of stairs. Liam nodded, ready to start practicing. Emily watched from the side, feeling a bit left out. She wanted to be part of the action too, but the stage wasn't built for someone in a wheelchair.

After rehearsal, Emily talked to Mr. Roberts about wanting to be involved. He smiled kindly and said, "You can help backstage, Emily. Maybe with lighting or sound." Emily agreed, but deep down, she wished she could be on stage with her friends.

As the rehearsals went on, Liam noticed how easy it was for him to move around the stage and how hard it was for Emily to even get close. The stage had steps, narrow entrances, and small spaces that made it difficult for her to navigate. Liam started to realize that his ability to move freely was something he had always taken for granted.

On opening night, the play was a success. But as Liam took his final bow, he couldn't stop thinking about how Emily wasn't able to participate in the same way. He understood that being able-bodied gave him privileges that Emily didn't have, and it made him want to help make things more accessible for everyone.

The Group Project

At Riverwood Middle School, the seventh graders were assigned a big group project in history class. The topic was Ancient Civilizations, and each group had to research and present their findings to the class. Mia, a hardworking and creative student, was excited to be in a group with her friends. They had great ideas and were eager to get started.

Mia's group also included Kevin, who was a year older than the rest of the students because he had repeated a grade. Kevin was taller, more confident, and had a deep voice that made him seem more mature. As soon as they started discussing their project, Kevin took charge. "I'll do the research and lead the presentation," he announced. "You guys can handle the rest."

Mia wanted to share her ideas too. She had found some interesting information about the pyramids and thought it would make their presentation stand out. But whenever she tried to speak up, Kevin interrupted her or brushed off her suggestions. "Don't worry, Mia," he said. "I've got this. You can just work on the poster."

As the days went by, Mia grew more frustrated. She felt like her contributions didn't matter because Kevin, being older, was automatically seen as the leader. Even when Mia did get a chance to speak, the other group members seemed to listen more to Kevin just because he was older.

When it was time to present, Kevin took the lead, speaking confidently while the others, including Mia, played supporting roles. The teacher praised their work, especially Kevin's presentation, but Mia felt disappointed. She knew she had good ideas, but they hadn't been heard.

Afterward, Mia talked to her mom about how she felt. "It's like no one thinks my ideas are as important just because I'm younger," she said. Her mom nodded. "That's called age privilege, Mia. Sometimes, people give more importance to someone's ideas just because they're older, even if it's not fair."

Mia realized that being older gave Kevin certain advantages that she didn't have. But she also knew that her voice mattered, and next time, she would make sure it was heard.