



Special Olympics

get into it

education and engagement tools  
for teachers and students



## Activity 1: 9-12 Lessons SO...What's the Challenge?

### Activity Overview:

This lesson begins with an immersive experience where students are randomly given different rights within the classroom, prompting reflection on the personal and societal impact of treating people differently based on something not in their control. They examine their personal experiences with intolerance, as a victim or a perpetrator, and consider the consequences of standing by as others are targeted. They watch an authentic story about a group of teenagers who mock a young girl because of her intellectual disability and examine examples from history when intolerance and prejudice had a significant negative effect. They identify the roots of intolerance and prejudice, and brainstorm strategies and solutions for overcoming them. They then brainstorm about how intolerance and prejudice could be reversed, particularly with kids their age. Finally, they create a product to influence their peers to show tolerance toward those with intellectual disabilities. This lesson would work well in a unit that explores civic responsibility, societal influence, human experience, or peer pressure.

## Activity 1: SO...What's the Challenge?

PHOTO BY: Ryan Eades



Special Olympics  
is humanity's  
greatest  
classroom,  
where lessons  
of ability,  
acceptance,  
and inclusion  
are taught on  
the fields of  
competition by  
our greatest  
teachers - the  
athletes.

### Cross-Curricular Connections:

In addition to language arts, this lesson extends into social studies — particularly civic responsibility — as well as service-learning and technology. Students examine the rights of those with intellectual disabilities and the responsibilities of all citizens to help protect those rights. Students reflect and examine the problems and issues related to tolerance/inclusion within their school and community, which helps them assess the community and begin to address community needs, both parts of a traditional service-learning curriculum. Finally, the lesson's conclusion challenges students to create a technology-related product that helps empower their generation.

### Academic Skills Addressed:

- Posing reasoned questions and responses drawn from previous learning and from personal experiences;
- Developing ideas using creative thinking, problem posing, and problem solving strategies;
- Using technologies to explore and communicate;
- Identifying and summarizing similarities and differences among ideas, experiences, opinions, and viewpoints;
- Developing persuasive and reflective texts to change perceptions and behavior; and
- Selecting and using techniques to create impact on an audience.

### Desired Outcomes:

*Students will:*

- Draw conclusions about the personal and societal impact of basing someone's rights on something they can't control.
- Reflect upon the difficulties of standing up for what is right, especially to one's own friends.
- Identify and examine current and historical non-inclusive, intolerant behaviors in their school, their community, and society as a whole.
- Identify the roots and consequences of non-inclusive, intolerant behavior.
- Recognize ways to overcome intolerant behavior.
- Influence others to help reverse the trends of intolerant, non-inclusive behavior toward those with intellectual disabilities.

### Time Required:

Two to three 45-minute class periods

## Activity 1: SO...What's the Challenge?



"Sports play a critical role in the health and development of all children, including those with disabilities."

Hon. Ann Veneman,  
Executive Director,  
UNICEF

### Materials Needed:

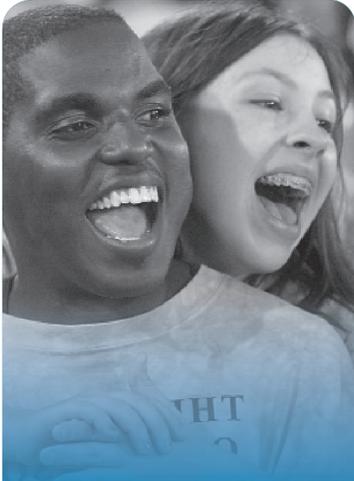
- Index cards and different colored markers or stickers
- Pillows, candy, sodas (optional) for introductory activity
- Computer with access to the Internet
- Copies of Reproducible 1.1, *Do You Have the Right?*; Reproducible 1.2, *R U Ready to Reflect?*; and Reproducible 1.3, *Be the Solution*
- Student journals (for Extension activity)

### Background:

- Before beginning the lesson, you may want to watch the speech by Special Olympics Youth Leader and Notre Dame honor student Soeren Palumbo, which students will watch and reflect on during the lesson. Soeren tells the story of an incident that happened to his younger sister Olivia, who has intellectual disabilities, when she was mocked at a store by a group of teens. The speech is close to nine minutes long and can be found at <http://www.specialolympics.org/video.aspx?id=6066&terms=soeren+palumbo>
- Familiarize yourself with the initiatives that are part of the Special Olympics Fan Community at <http://www.specialolympics.org/community>
- Put different colored dots on enough index cards to distribute one to each student. Decide which color dots will represent all or some of the categories below. (The categories are designed to randomly give some students rights that others do not get.)
  - Students will be placed in an area where they have difficulty seeing or hearing you.
  - Students will not be allowed to sit on chairs.
  - Students will be blindfolded.
  - Students will get candy and/or a drink of their choice.
  - Students will get a pillow behind their back.
  - Students will get a free homework pass.
- For more information on service-learning and how to implement service-learning experiences in your classroom, review the *Service-Learning Instructional Planning Guide* available for download at: [www.specialolympics.org](http://www.specialolympics.org)
- Refer to the *Teacher Background: Service-Learning Approach* in this guide (Pages 45-46).

### Important Terms:

equal rights, intellectual disabilities, inclusion, intolerance, prejudice, stereotypes, tolerance



“Give to every human being every right that you claim to yourself.”

Robert Ingersoll

## Activity 1: SO...What's the Challenge?

### Activity Steps and Suggestions:

1. As students enter the room, randomly hand them an index card. If possible, distribute an equal number of each type of card. Explain what each card represents, recognizing that students who are deprived of certain rights likely will protest. **(Educate, Motivate)**
2. Distribute Reproducible 1.1, *Do You Have the Right?*, which asks students to reflect on a famous quote and make connections with their own lives. Give students time to complete the reproducible and discuss answers, while still treating them differently based on their colored dots. If time allows, expand the discussion to explore why it's so difficult for kids their age to stand up to their own friends and how they have felt when they have or have not done so. **(Educate)**
3. At the conclusion of this part of the lesson, restore equal rights for all students! Discuss the exercise using the following questions as a guide:
  - a. *How did you feel during the exercise?*
  - b. *What did it feel like to have more or fewer rights based on a random drawing of a card?*
  - c. *For those who had more rights, did you try to fight for those with fewer rights? Why or why not?*
  - d. *How would you relate the exercise to the quote about which you wrote?*
  - e. *How would you relate the exercise to rights or treatment of those around the world based on skin color, religion, gender, or ability?*
  - f. *What is the impact to individuals, the community, and society as a whole when people are denied rights or treated differently based on things they cannot control?* **(Motivate)**
4. Tell students that they are going to watch a speech that illustrates the consequences of treating someone differently based on something they cannot control. Have students watch the Soeren Palumbo speech. You may want to show students the speech in its entirety or break it up using the guide below:
  - a. Stop the speech at 1:28 when Soeren describes the teens teasing an African-American child and using a racial slur. Ask students if they could ever see themselves or their friends doing something similar. They likely will say no, making the story's reveal more powerful.
  - b. Stop the speech at 4:25 after Soeren polls his audience to see if they discriminate based on age, gender, or race. He then asks how many have used or stayed silent when other used the terms or stayed silent when others used the terms, “retard” or “retarded.” Poll your students using the same question.
  - c. Finally, show the final part of Soeren's speech in which he reveals that his younger sister Olivia was the real target of the teenagers at the store. **(Educate, Motivate)**

## PART ONE

PHOTO BY: Ryan Eades



How would your life be different if you were judged by just one element of your life, especially if it was one you could not control?

### Activity 1: SO...What's the Challenge?

## Activity Steps and Suggestions:

5. Hold a class or small group discussion using the following questions as a guide:
  - *Did you predict that the target of the teens' discrimination was Soeren's sister? If not, what was your reaction?*
  - *How do you think the teasing made Soeren feel?*
  - *How would you describe the teens who were teasing Olivia? (Students may use words like "mean," but you may also want to introduce words like "intolerant" and "prejudiced.")*
  - *Why does the use of the R-word demonstrate intolerance?*
  - *Is it just as bad to remain quiet when someone is calling someone the R-word as it is to use the term yourself?*
  - *How does the story relate to the introductory exercise? Why is it so difficult to be an innocent bystander?*
  - *How would your life be different if you were judged by just one element of your life, especially if it was one you could not control?*
  - *How might Soeren's story be different if (1) Olivia had been seen by the teens as more than a "retard" or if (2) One of the teens had stood up to the others?*
  - *What are the important lessons we can learn from Soeren's story?*  
**(Educate, Motivate)**





What conclusions can students draw about the use of the R-word in their school? In their community?

Activity 1: SO...What's the Challenge?

Activity Steps and Suggestions:

1. Have students think about their own experiences with the R-word. Distribute Reproducible 1.2, *R U Ready to Reflect?*, which asks students to reflect upon their own use, active or passive, of the R-word. Give students time to complete the reproducible and then discuss answers as a class. What conclusions can students draw about the use of the R-word in their school? In their community? What about society in general? **(Educate, Motivate)**
2. Break students into groups and have them share examples of when they have been the victim, witness, or perpetrator of intolerance or discrimination of any sort. Based on the examples, would students say that prejudice and intolerance exist at your school? In the community? What about prejudice and intolerance specifically toward those with intellectual disabilities? Do they exist at the school or in the community? **(Educate, Motivate)**
3. Challenge student groups to identify examples from history when intolerance and prejudice had a history-changing negative effect. Examples include the Holocaust, the genocide in Darfur, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Rodney King beating, the murder of Matthew Shepard, and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Ask:
  - *What happened through this event to change history?*
  - *How were people discriminated against or treated differently because of something they could not control?*
  - *How did the event change history?*
  - *What positive impact, if any, came from this event?*
  - *How might the world be different if this event had never happened?***(Educate)**
4. Refer students back to Soeren's story (or another of the intolerance examples shared during the lesson). Ask questions such as: *Why do you think that the teens were mocking Olivia, considering they did not know her? What possible reasons might cause someone their age to be intolerant of others?* Reasons might include: influence from family, friends, or society; insecurity; fear; unfamiliarity; ignorance; competitiveness; need to conform; need for power; or lack of education. **(Educate, Motivate)**



PHOTO BY: Ryan Eades

## PART TWO



PHOTO BY: Richard Corman

"A rewarding life is filled with challenge, so do not pity me. Give me a chance!"

Thomas Gat, Special Olympics Athlete

### Activity 1: SO...What's the Challenge?

## Activity Steps and Suggestions:

5. Have students select one of the reasons from their list and come up with 1-3 ways to overcome it. Create a list of student-generated solutions. **(Motivate)**
6. Assuming students believe that intolerance or prejudice toward those with intellectual disabilities is a problem at their school, in their community, or in society as a whole, *whose responsibility is it to find solutions? The principal? Staff members? Parents? Kids themselves? Do students think that their generation can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem? How?* **(Motivate, Activate)**
7. Distribute Reproducible 1.3, *Be the Solution*, which challenges student groups to create a product or project to influence their generation to reverse intolerant, non-inclusive behavior toward those with intellectual disabilities. They can act upon one of the ideas from the list of solutions above or come up with a new one. Their project should be targeted to their peers and should focus on (1) the power of inclusion related to those with intellectual disabilities; (2) the negative impact of prejudice or intolerance toward those with intellectual disabilities; (3) or both. **(Motivate, Activate)**



## Activity 1: SO...What's the Challenge?

PHOTO BY: Ryan Eades



"A right is not what someone gives you, it's what no one can take from you."

Ramsey Clark

### Reflection:

Using the ideas generated in Step 7, ask students to reflect on the potential reaction of their peers to the project they've designed. *Do they think their friends will be influenced to be more inclusive? What obstacles do they anticipate? How can they overcome these potential obstacles?* Have students pairs write one of two letters from people who are hearing about their project for the first time: the first letter will be from a peer who has the opportunity to be more inclusive and the second is from a person with an intellectual disability who could benefit from the inclusivity resulting from their project.<sup>1</sup>

### Suggested Assessment:

Challenge students to write a blog entry that answers the question from this activity's title, *SO...What's the Challenge?* Their answer should include examples from the activity and from their own personal experience.

### Cross-Curricular Extensions:

#### Social Studies

- Have students research the historical events they identified in the lesson that demonstrate intolerance and prejudice. *What, if anything, could have prevented the event? What must happen to ensure that history will not repeat itself?*

### Service-Learning

- Review the *Service-Learning Instructional Planning Guide* for ideas on introducing students to service-learning. The *Investigation* section on pages 22-29 will help guide students through the process of determining authentic community needs.
- Refer to the *Teacher Background: Service-Learning Approach* in this guide (Pages 45-46).



PHOTO BY: Ryan Eades

<sup>1</sup>Adapted with permission from *Connecting Thinking and Action: Ideas for Service-Learning Reflection*. Denver: RMC Research, 2003.

## Activity 1:

# SO...What's the Challenge?



Consider introducing students to the concept of Special Olympics' Unified Sports Teams. These teams partner students with and without intellectual disabilities.

### Inclusive Classroom Modifications:

- For inclusive classrooms, remember that all students can learn from each other, and those who have intellectual disabilities can give unique insight and perspective into the discussion about rights.
- Use peer buddies, read-aloud, and scribes. Pictures and social stories (i.e., simplifying the issues of tolerance and rights) may help explain social situations.
- You may wish to rephrase some of the questions to be more guided. Examples include:
  - For the reflection, prompt students to share their experiences if their feelings have been hurt or they have been excluded.
  - For the Soeren story, ask: *What were the good things that happened? The bad? What would you say to Olivia? The teens?*
  - Consider introducing students to the concept of Special Olympics' Unified Sports Teams. These teams partner students with and without intellectual disabilities.

### General Extensions and Modifications:

- Encourage students to take and persuade their friends to take the R-word pledge on the Special Olympics Web site at: <http://www.r-word.org>
- Encourage students to upload their final projects to the Special Olympics Fan Community at: <http://www.specialolympics.org/community>
- Hold a school-or community-wide tolerance day featuring students' persuasive projects.
- Encourage students to research Terry Fox (<http://www.terryfox.org>) and write a magazine or newspaper article describing how this powerful young man was a model of activism and engagement and how he influenced change.
- Learn more about Special Olympics athlete, Loretta Claiborne from her humble and challenged beginnings while a student in York, Pennsylvania to her rise to world prominence. Athlete Loretta Claiborne's story may be one of the most inspiring, especially for young people. As a young person, she was told that her future would be in an institution. After discovering Special Olympics, Loretta became a long-distance runner...and she hasn't stopped since. Over her career, she competed in 25 marathons - twice finishing in the top 100 women runners in the Boston Marathon. The Women in Sports Hall of Fame inducted her as a member, and Runner's World magazine named her Special Athlete of the Quarter Century. Loretta speaks four languages and holds honorary doctorate degrees - the first person with intellectual disabilities known to receive such honors. Her life was the basis for Disney film, *The Loretta Claiborne Story*. In 1996, she received the coveted Arthur Ashe Award for Courage. <http://www.specialolympics.org/video.aspx?id=6093&terms=Loretta+Claiborne> and <http://www.lorettaclaiborne.com/>

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### Additional Resources:

- Background information on Special Olympics:  
<http://www.specialolympics.org>
- Additional information on intellectual disabilities can be found at:  
<http://www.aamr.org> and <http://www.intellectualdisability.info>

PHOTO BY: Ryan Eades



"The right to play on any playing field? You have earned it. The right to study in any school? You have earned it. The right to hold a job? You have earned it. The right to be anyone's neighbor? You have earned it."

Eunice Kennedy Shriver



## Do You Have the Right?

Throughout history, people have been awarded certain rights or treated differently based on things they cannot control. Their skin color. Nationality. Gender. Abilities. The quotes below express several people's opinions related to equal rights. Select one quote and answer the questions below it.

- *A right is not what someone gives you; it's what no one can take from you.*  
— Ramsey Clark
- *We could learn a lot from crayons: some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different colors...but they all have to learn to live in the same box.* — Author Unknown
- *Give to every human being every right that you claim for yourself.*  
— Robert Ingersoll
- *I am the inferior of any man whose rights I trample underfoot.*  
— Horace Greeley
- *He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it.* — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

1. Put the quote in your own words. What do you think its author was trying to say?

2. Do you agree or disagree with the author, and why?

3. What actions (or inactions) have you witnessed or been a part of at your school or in your community that relate to the quote?

## R U Ready to Reflect?

Think about your own thoughts and actions (or inactions) with regard to intolerance and prejudice toward others. Then rate yourself using the scale below and answer the questions that follow:

- 1 - I never or almost never do this.
- 2 - I sometimes do this.
- 3 - I frequently do this.
- 4 - I always do this.

\_\_\_\_\_ I make fun of people for things like race, religion, gender, body size, or physical or mental ability.

\_\_\_\_\_ I treat people differently if they are or have a different race, religion, gender, body size, physical, or mental ability than I do.

\_\_\_\_\_ I use the R-word (retard, retarded) to refer to people who have intellectual disabilities.

\_\_\_\_\_ I use the R-word (retard, retarded) to refer to people or things that I think are silly or stupid.

\_\_\_\_\_ I laugh when my friends use the R-word.

\_\_\_\_\_ I remain quiet when my friends use the R-word.

\_\_\_\_\_ I discourage my friends from using the R-word.

Chose one of the statements from above for which you rated yourself a 2, 3, or 4, and reflect on why you believe you did the action. Would you do it again? Would there be a value in not doing it? What would that value be?

Unfortunately prejudice and intolerance toward those with intellectual disabilities has been part of our society for many years. Through this lesson, you have explored and reflected upon many examples of this including the teenagers mocking Olivia; the hurtful use of the R-word in school, community, and society; historical examples of intolerance and prejudice; and your own personal experiences. The good news is that your generation has the power to become part of the solution in reversing these long-standing trends. You can do this by making inclusion a part of your life, influencing others to do the same, and explaining the consequences of intolerance and prejudice.

For this activity, you will create a speech, video, song, blog, or advertisement to influence your peers to help reverse the trends of intolerance and prejudice against those with intellectual disabilities. You may wish to explore the Special Olympics Fan Community (<http://www.specialolympics.org/community>) to see products created by other young people, including songs, films, photos, and messages.

Your project should be targeted to high school kids and should focus on:

- The power of inclusion related to those with intellectual disabilities
- The negative impact of prejudice or intolerance toward those with intellectual disabilities
- Or both.

For your project, think about the following:

1. What examples of intolerance and prejudice against those with intellectual disabilities have I experienced or witnessed at our school or in our community?
2. Why might the perpetrators from Soeren's story have acted intolerant or prejudiced? What were their goals?
3. What might help or persuade them to change their behavior?
4. How can I use this information to create a persuasive project?