

Ideas/Suggestions for Classroom Discussion around Fair Housing Month

Introduction: The classroom is a perfect place to promote tolerance, appreciation for diversity and fair treatment. Aside from the daily interactions between students and teachers, these concepts are addressed through curriculum guidelines, classroom activities and informal discussions. Housing Rights, Inc. is offering a wonderful opportunity to expand on these activities and introduce civic responsibility and rights, law, government, as well as the values of tolerance, freedom of expression, diversity and cultural literacy in a manner that “hits close to home”. Below are suggestions and activities that teachers can discuss fair housing with young people

Background: The history of fair housing legislation is part of the history of the civil rights movement in this country. For a historical overview see document entitled “Historical Overview-Equal Opportunity in Housing”. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 broke new ground in prohibiting discrimination by clearly defining the rights of through a wide range of situations. In 1966 congress passed another Civil Rights Act. Title VIII of this act defined in detail what constituted illegal housing discrimination and became known as the “fair housing” law. In 1988 the Fair Housing Amendment Act added new protected classes.

- Race
- Color
- Religion
- Sex
- National origin
- Familial status
- Disability

In addition, California recognizes these additional classes

- Mental status
- Ancestry
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Other personal characteristics (including source of income)

Activities:

Housing Rights, Inc. is offering a poster/art contest to help teachers educate about discrimination and diversity in neighborhoods. We also offer a number of suggestions and activities to go along with this contest and expand on students’ awareness and knowledge. Some of these activities are more appropriate for younger children and others may be more useful for middle and high school students. For more ideas and suggestions go to our website: www.housingrights.org/schooloutreach.htm. If you would like to share some of your ideas with us and others please e-mail them to: hri@housingrights.com.

- Write “discrimination,” “culture,” and “tolerance” on the board. Get the students’ definition for each of the words. Then write these definitions on the board next to the words:
 - ✓ Discrimination-to treat differently, favoring one over another, on the basis of something other than merit
 - ✓ Culture-the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of racial, religious, or social groups
 - ✓ Tolerance-being willing to grant equal freedom of expression or willing to grant or share social, political or professional rights with people of different cultures, views or backgrounds.
 1. ask students to think about each of these words then open it up for a class discussion.
 2. Ask them to think of different cultures we have in the US. What makes these cultures different? How are they the same?
 3. Other than culture, what ways do people discriminate against each other?
 4. Are there certain cultures that you tolerate? Or that you discriminate against? Why?

- Ask students to stand up if they eat Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwiches. State that everyone who is standing has to eat their lunch outside, in the parking lot. State that everyone else can eat anywhere they want. Ask them HOW DO YOU FEEL? Both the people sitting and standing. Explain what just went on is discrimination.
- Ask—How would you feel if someone told you that you could not live in a neighborhood, house/apartment or go to a certain school because of:
 - ✓ The fact that you don't speak the same language
 - ✓ You aren't the same religion
 - ✓ You don't have the same customs, traditions, look or dress the same.
 - ✓ Because of the color of your skin
 - ✓ Because your parents aren't married
 - ✓ Your brother is in a wheelchair and they don't allow wheelchairs in the building
- Teachers may wish to introduce the concepts of fair housing and diverse neighborhoods as part of a historical lesson on the civil rights movement. We celebrate the birthdays of several national heroes, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cesar Chavez. This is a good opportunity for students to reflect on the message of these two civil rights leaders and to think about how the lives of these men have affected their lives, their homes and neighborhoods.
- How affective has this legislation been? Can students think of situations in their neighborhoods where fair housing legislation has worked? Do they see areas where people are still being discriminated against? What are some ways in which landlords discriminate against people? Since we have civil rights legislation, what does this mean? What can someone who believes they are being discriminated against do? Housing Rights, Inc. staff and interns are available to make classroom presentations and provide more information on this topic.
- What is a protected class? What are examples of discriminatory behavior against specific protected classes? For example, is it fair to say, "I'm sorry, we don't allow children on the second floor or in the pool area."? Rarely is discrimination obvious. What are some examples of subtle forms of discrimination? This helps students think about concepts in a broader sense. Housing Rights, Inc. staff and interns are available to make classroom presentations and provide more information on this topic.
- Why is it good to live in a diverse community? What are some challenges people face in diverse communities? What can people do to address these challenges and improve their neighborhoods.
- Imagine you have new next door neighbors. What would you do to make them feel welcome? What would you not do? What if the new neighbors were different in some way. Would you still take the time to say hello?
- If you were a landlord, what kind of people would you want living in your apartment building? Who would you not want living in your apartment? How would you choose who could live there and who couldn't? What would be some legal ways to distinguish between applicants? What would be illegal?