



Understanding Privilege, Power, and Oppression *That's Not Fair! In Practice*

Background:

That's not fair! is a phrase often thrown around by young people and there is a lot underneath that statement. It can be a useful way in to addressing societal and cultural issues that underly your *tzedakah* or *tikkun olam* project. Nancy Gruver, the founder of *New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and their Dreams*, identifies this complaint as the seed of what she calls girls' "natural feminism." Recognizing something as unfair creates a teachable moment, when an educator can help develop that intuitive sense into a principled critical awareness of injustice. Thus the moment of "that's not fair," rather than being just a petulant or entitled whine, is a moment of great opportunity in our work with teens.

Defining privilege: A system of unearned advantages that benefits some individuals and groups at the expense of others.

(N.B.: not all unearned advantages meet this definition of privilege; for instance, being raised by loving and attentive parents is an unearned advantage, but it doesn't come at the expense of another group, and thus is not what we mean when we refer here to privilege.)

Challenges in Addressing Privilege:

It's hard for those who have it to recognize it: privilege functions by clearing obstacles (e.g., having financial resources, being able to "pass" as white or straight). If you don't run up against an obstacle in your own life, how would you recognize that it exists for someone else?

Acknowledging privilege (both in terms of class/economics and race) is often thorny for Jews. Recognizing class privilege can play into anti-Semitic stereotypes about the disproportionate economic influence of wealthy Jews. Owning white privilege can feel as though it undermines or obscures the reality of bias and oppression against Jews. So in our own communities, there is additional resistance to recognizing and talking frankly about privilege.

In the Show:

- The list of "not fair" statements on the scroll in the Briefing Room scene (including: pay disparity between men and women, younger siblings getting favored, access to abortions, the word "gay" used as a slur, high cost of college, sexual double standard for girls/women, adultism: "young people are not valued for their wisdom")
- The metaphor of sleeping and waking up (i.e., becoming/staying conscious of inequality and injustice)
- The rejection of "Different Girl" by Girl #1 (popularity as a form of systemic privilege)
- Material consumption, obsession with handbags (keeps girls from recognizing or addressing inequality, their job is to worship and buy!)
- The Ten Chairs (Raina, representing the wealthiest 10% of the U.S. population; and her long gloved arm, the wealthiest 1%)
- The G.I. Bill is characterized as a great equalizer that expanded the middle class following WWII...but it was not equally applied in practice
- Jews become assimilated into middle class, becoming white folks
- African American veterans face discrimination in college admissions and on campus
- The long arm of capitalism that threatens Esther as she begins to question her obsession with her beloved handbag

Activities:

- Race to the Well-Paying Job (exercise created by Paul Kivel): <http://www.paulkivel.com/resources/classandrace.pdf>
- United for a Fair Economy's 10 chairs activity: www.faireconomy.org/files/GD_10_Chairs_and_Charts.pdf
- "It's Not Fair That..." icebreaker game (adapted from "The Wind Blows For..."). Instructions: one person stands in the middle of a circle of chairs (should be one less chair than participants) and says something that they believe isn't fair... everyone who agrees needs to a) yell "that's not fair!", and b) find a new place in the circle. Capture each statement on board/paper and return to those issues one by one for debrief/discussion after the game.
- Building lens for privilege: using page 68 from *Classified* (see Resources), tell the story and ask for comments/feedback reactions. Ask: Anything to notice or challenge? Anything I might have left out of that story? After you have discussed, hand out page 69 from *Classified*, focusing on class privilege and discuss.
- *Theater of the Oppressed* techniques: using the vocabulary list provided by Ma'yan, introduce the terms privilege, power, and oppression and explore the definitions through the students offering examples, through case studies, and through *Theater of the Oppressed* techniques. (Example: have half the participants create sculpture with their bodies that demonstrate "power over" and the other half create sculpture with their bodies that demonstrate "power with"). (See Augusto Boal books in Resources.)
- Privilege step-in exercise and debrief (inspired in part by the work of Peggy McIntosh, see two versions in Resources): Read a statement and ask participants to step into the circle if that statement is true for them.
- Steppin' It Up curriculum: purchase the curriculum from *Y_Step* in the Bay Area and go through the workshops one by one over an 8-week period.

Questions for Discussion:

- Questions from Zoe's film, *Enough*: What class are you? What is poverty? What would you give up to end poverty?
- How do we make change? What should our role be in "repairing the world?"
- What is power? Who has power? (In synagogue? In school? In the culture? In the world? In our families?) How do you know?
- What are some ways we can share our power with those who have less? What happens when we try to help people without sharing our power with them?

Resources:

Enough - film by Zoe Greenberg: www.classism.org/Enough

PBS "Where Race Lives" online exhibit http://www.pbs.org/race/002_SortingPeople/002_00-home.htm

Animated version of the 10 Chairs Exercise: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTUN7Dn1gEw

That's Not Fair! Glossary, created by Ma'yan

Activities and Curricula:

- Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, Peggy McIntosh <http://www.case.edu/president/aaction/UnpackingTheKnapsack.pdf>
- - A Closer Look at Privilege at School worksheet: <http://www.antiracism.com/pdfs/46.pdf>
- "Fair Game?" activity from *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing* (Moving Traditions)
- United for a Fair Economy's 10 Chairs activity: www.faireconomy.org/files/GD_10_Chairs_and_Charts.pdf
- Steppin' It Up: Racial Justice Trainings for White Youth: www.ystep.org

Books:

- Classified: How To Stop Hiding Your Privilege and Use It For Social Change, by Karen Pittelman & Resource Generation
- Uprooting Racism, by Paul Kivel
- "*That's not fair!*" Nurturing girls' natural feminism, by Nancy Gruver. In R. Dicker and A. Piepmeier (Eds.), Catching a wave: Reclaiming feminism for the 21st century, (2003, pp. 101-115). Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Theatre of the Oppressed (London: Pluto Press, 1979) and Games For Actors and Non-Actors (London: Routledge, 1992; Second Edition 2002), both by Augusto Boal.