

Lesson 2 - Multiple Identities

We all have multiple identities: race, gender, and more. How do these identities impact us?

NGSS connections: **Practices:** Asking and Defining Problems; Developing and Using Models; Engaging in Argument from Evidence; **CCCs:** Patterns; Systems and System Models.

Starting point for instructors

- Do [Unit 0 - Setting the Stage](#) before this, and review norms if needed
- A social identity is a description of a person based on their group membership. Race and gender are two examples of social identities, but there are many more.
- Implementation of the URC tends to focus on one social identity - why there are so few Black scientists, for example, leads to learning about systemic racism and race. This helps to focus the learning, but is also too narrow a view: we are so much more than one identity. In this lesson, students have an opportunity to reflect and learn a bit more about their other identities.

Pre-Lesson Student Exploration / Bell-Ringer

Before coming to class/at the start of class, students need to:

The Social Identity Profile (below) could be completed before class.

In-Class Investigations

Social Identity Profile Activity [20 minutes]

The [Social Identity Profile](#), developed with the help of E-chieh Lin, guides students to consider their multiple identities. The first page can be distributed to students. The second page can also be included on the back, *modifiable to include additional identities and edit the examples in your context*, or left off (depending on whether the examples would be helpful and educational for students to see).

Students read through the worksheet. Give an example, explaining how you would fill out the top row (or any row) from left to right. Students will often have questions about the worksheet - the distinction between race and ethnicity is a common one - so pause to answer any that arise.

Let students know that their work will be anonymous - they don't need to put their names on it, and nobody will see their answers but them - but they will be asked to talk about the experience of filling it out. The last row is blank; if you like, you can discuss as a class as to identify a social identity missing that should be added.

[Write/Pair/Share:](#)

- *Write:* Students complete the worksheet, filling out the second column and checking appropriate boxes



- *Pair*: What did you notice as you filled out the worksheet? Did anything surprise you?
- *Share*: Open discussion of Social Identity Profile experiences and learnings

Instructor Note:

It can be useful to note that some identities (like age) can change, and that whether an identity gives power and privilege depends on context: being Jewish might give someone privilege in one setting but leave them marginalized in others. For these reasons and others, there are experiences common among people who share a social identity but nobody experiences an identity in exactly the same way: a white woman's experience of whiteness, for example, is different than a white man's.



Language is powerful and important to get right, and also ever-evolving. Disability activists in the US, for example, increasingly self-identify as “disabled people” and not as “people with a disability” and the reasons for this are [significant and illustrative](#). This may feel overwhelming as a facilitator, and students may have questions, but it is important to do your homework to be prepared to discuss with students. The fluid nature of identity and language likely means the worksheet needs constant updating!

Write/Pair/Share: Transition to Action [10 minutes]

The Social Identity Profile activity (above) helps students to identify areas where they have privilege and power as a result of their identities. These can be a foundation for starting to think about taking action: while action does not require a privileged identity, privilege can be leveraged to create change.

Relatedly, while it is easy to see the advantage that comes with privilege, a closer look can reveal disadvantages as well. Systems of power and oppression harm everyone, even those who seem to benefit from them, and helping students to recognize that liberation comes from equity and justice - even for those who have privilege as a result of those systems can create long-lasting motivation for students to work for social justice.

- *Write*: Choose one social identity (on the Profile or not) that is a major contributor to your power or privilege in a particular context. What are the costs to you of that privilege? How would it benefit you if that system of privilege was eradicated? (If students need an example, you should give one. A sample: because of racial privilege, white people have to live in uncertainty as to whether the things they have achieved are the result of their internal excellence. In a world of true racial justice, white people wouldn't have to wonder or feel guilty.)
- *Write*: Choose one social identity (on the Profile or not) that is a major contributor to you feeling a lack of power or privilege in a particular context. What are the costs to you of that lack of privilege? How would it benefit you if that system of privilege was eradicated?
- *Pair*: In as much detail as you feel comfortable, share with a partner what you wrote about.
- *Share*: Discuss as a class what new ideas and feelings have arisen.
- *Reflect*: Since conversations about privilege can bring up powerful emotions, it may be useful to use the Emotional Check-In writing prompts (for a refresher on this move, see [Lesson 0](#)) to help students stay aware and open to change.
- *Summarize*: Working for justice benefits us all. In our next lesson, we will begin to apply what we've learned to take action together.



Intersectionality [10 minutes]

'Intersectionality' is a concept, first coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, that helps us understand how our social identities interact to be more than the sum of their parts. In this lesson, we have chosen not to use this term because the Social Identity Profile stops short of looking at how the identities influence one another - how, for example, being a Black woman is different than being Black or being a woman. Intersectionality is, however, a crucial topic for students learning about identity, oppression and culture to learn, and so we encourage you to visit the [Resources](#) page, choose a resource or two that are appropriate for your context, share with students, and learn together.

Post-Lesson Homework

Preparing to Take Action

Since this lesson is likely the last one in most instructors' implementations of Unit 2, we encourage you to assign the homework preceding [Unit 3 - Taking Action](#) to prepare for that final step.

Resources

[Lesson Plan Resources](#)



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