

# Blue eyes vs. brown eyes essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



Through the eyes of a kindergarten class, prejudice dynamics were shown in a simple yet powerful experiment. On April 5 1968 Jane Elliot performed the famous experiment in her classroom separating blue-eyed and brown-eyed students. She had separated them by making one eye group inferior to the other making them have certain benefits and better treatment than the other. Then it was switched the next day. In this they saw how colors and discrimination affected the minority population. After Martin Luther King had died and her students questioned a king's death, she thought of a way to impact her students so they can understand and feel what minorities in the country at that time had felt. She had asked the students if and if they wanted to be treated like a person of color for a day, judging each other by their individual eye color. The students eagerly went along splitting the group into blue eyes vs. brown eyes.

Jane's hypothesis was that the students would understand what it felt like to be discriminated against with separating them with their eye color, saying the brown eyed students were not as smart as the blue eyes and vice versa the next day. This showed the effects of racism and discrimination in the country as a whole and teaching her students to treat human beings as human beings at a young age would influence them more since they are so pliable. Jane Elliot was a white anti-racism activist and a third grade teacher in the 1960's. In this particular experiment she had done on her class, the student would be the independent variable being manipulated by the researcher. The "better" students of the day, which began with blue because that was the eye color of Jane, would get special privileges. Some of the freedoms included drinking from the water fountain while the opposite

eyes had to drink from cups, certain students got a longer recess and snack time, and all around they would be treated better than the students who were beneath them.

“ On the first day, Elliott told her students that those with blue eyes were superior in intelligence and gave them extra classroom privileges. She told the students with brown eyes that they were inferior. Quickly, the students with “ superior” color began to oppress those of “ inferior” color, while those of the “ inferior” color had a negative reaction and experienced self-hatred and fear.”(McCurry1). The dependent variable would be the lesson itself. She kept the same dynamic with each switch displaying the effects of racism. Giving the children an opportunity to feel the effects of discriminatory practices would change them for the better, giving an inside look on what racism feels like. “ I watched bright, blue-eyed kids become stupid and frightened and frustrated and angry and resentful and distrustful. It was absolutely the strangest thing I’d ever experienced”-Jane Elliot. Children who previously had trouble reading before this lesson was even thought of became excellent readers and had a confidence in doing so.

Jane found that her classroom was soon a little civilization that represented the real world issues and consequences of discrimination. An example of change not only in their attitudes, but in their intelligence would be the phonics cards given to them. When the blue eyes had been superior, they had finished the cards in about three minutes. When the tables turned and they were inferior, they finished them in about four minutes and thirty seconds. The brown eyes first took them about five minutes to finish when

they were inferior, but when they became the superior ones in the classroom they did it in only two minutes and thirty seconds. This just goes to show that positive words of encouragement and treatment can not only help one's mental health, such as being self-conscious and angry, but in learning as well. A status that you were born into in society can be the basis on one's performance in everyday life. The students also had helped other students become aware of racism and the school became testing better as a whole.

To some, this experiment wasn't ethical. Jane's co-workers would leave the break room if she had walked in, many residents of her town were not happy with her either. " Two education professors in England, Ivor F. Goodson and Pat Sikes, suggest that Elliott's experiment was unethical because the participants weren't informed of its real purpose beforehand"(Bloom4). She did not ask the students' parents either so that could have posed as an issue. During that time there were a good amount of parents that had racist mindsets, and that might have prevented this experiment from ever happening. It seems like a harmless experiment that was only to better the younger population and start new. Elliot likes to call this an exercise rather than an experiment. As far as an impact on psychological studies and growth as a nation, she had helped students and others after she gained recognition.

Presenting not only to students in a classroom but moved on to speeches and other anti-racial progressive acts, Jane Elliot was an important part to bringing people together; showing what a ridiculous thing like treating someone different by what she demonstrated with, color, can do to anyone.

In the end the students hugged and cried with each other, understanding they would not treat anyone that way because they had learned first-hand what it felt like. Years after the children had grown into adults they had a reunion. They mentioned how it changed their lives and how it helped shape them as people. “ Just when you think that the fertile soil can sprout no more, another season comes round, and you see another year of bountiful crops, tall and straight.

It makes you proud”-Jane Elliot (Bloom5). Although Jane Elliot was not liked by all and not everyone approved of what she was doing, she did not let that stop her. Her methods are used around the world to demonstrate the importance of equality. Based on reunions and interviews, her experiment has had a positive outcome on the students that were a part of it. Even in their later years they still remember the values taught and how important it is to treat people the right way. Social influences, media influences, etc. can shape a person’s brain positively or negatively, treatment of one another is an important aspect. In the field of psychology, Elliot has had a strong impact.

#### Works Cited

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