

# [A class divided](https://assignbuster.com/a-class-divided-essay-samples/)

A CLASS DIVIDED
Thirty years ago Jane Elliott taught the third grade in the white, Christian
community of Riceville, Iowa. The dayMartin Luther King Jr. was killed she
planned an exercise that wouldn't just show her students what racism is -
rather, it would give them first-hand experience of what it felt like to be
oppressed for something out of their control.

Elliott divided her class by the color of their eyes, marked them with
armbands and proceeded to treat one group as if superior in capabilities to the
other. The superior students performed better than they ever had before, while
the inferior students' performance dropped. The next day, the third graders
traded ranks and their performance reversed in accordance to their groups'
status.
What did the children learn? How did the experience affect them later in
life? Clips from her original classes and interviews with former students
confirm that Jane Elliott's workshops make them permanently more
empathetic and sensitive to the problem of racism.

Sandy is the one who said, when we did our reunion five years after they
graduated from high school - I asked Sandy whether, having had this
exercise when she was in third grade, had changed her life at all. She is the
one who said " Yeah, now when I hear one of those bigoted remarks, I wish
I had one of those collars in my pocket and I could take it out and I could
put it around that person's neck and I could say: Now, you wear that for two
weeks and see how you'd like to live that way for a lifetime." Rex is the
one who said " I have that collar in my pocket for the rest of my life, I can't
get that collar out of my pocket". (INTERVIEW WITH JANE ELLIOT)
http://www. newsreel. org/transcri/essenblue. htm
The children learned that discrimination has a tangible affect on their
performance in everyday activities. Elliott has gone on to do the exercise with
numerous adults and almost without exception the participants' abilities, such
as reading and writing, are grossly affected.
Jane Elliott's approach is especially relevant today. It demonstrates that
even without juridical discrimination; hate speech, lowered expectations, and
dismissive behavior can have devastating effects on achievement. Black
members of the blue-eyed group forcefully remind whites that they undergo
similar stresses, not just for a few hours in a controlled experiment, but every
day of their lives. Although these concepts are food for thought they are
merely preludes to the main course. The most important lesson to be learned
here is that just one person can make a difference.

Next we join a group of 40 teachers, police, school administrators and
social workers in Kansas City - blacks, Hispanics, whites, women and men. The
blue-eyed members are subjected to pseudo-scientific explanations of their
inferiority, culturally biased IQ tests and blatant discrimination. When the
inevitable resistance by a blue-eyes surfaces, Elliot cites the outburst as an
example of their inability to work in a group or follow basic directions. The
utter failure of the offender pre-empts any future resistance. In just a few
hours under Elliott's withering regime, we watch grown professionals become
despondent and distracted, stumbling over the simplest commands.
Growing up in northern California shielded me from all but the most
trivial discrimination growing up. At 19 I moved to Hawaii and received a
reality check. The local population, which was predominantly Polynesian,
generally disliked outsiders, especially Caucasians. Situations developed that
were uncomfortable to say the least. Eventually, familiarity with the
environment enabled me to avoid the more dangerous faux pas; unfortunately,
without changing my skin color, I would never be anything but an outsider.
Later I moved to Richmond California and was again the minority. Though I
made some good friends, I could never quite overcome the barrier associated
with my skin color. Perhaps some day, through the efforts of people like Jane
Elliott, discrimination will exist only in the annals of history. In the meantime,
we would do well to follow her example.