

Jane elliot: blue eyes, brown eyes



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Jane Elliot

Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes

Jane Elliot was a well liked third grade teacher from a small rural town in Iowa. In 1968 after the brutal assassination of Martin Luther King, the whole nation was in turmoil. Jane, also feeling the disparity and frustration knew that something needed to be done about racial discrimination. She knew that she could not just talk about discrimination to her students; it needed to be more tangible so that the students could truly understand how prejudice feels. Little did Jane realize what a profound effect this would have on herself and her students. Her approach to this experiment was very creative as she needed to take into account her pupils age and also their ability to understand discrimination. Jane was aware that none of her children had ever seen a black person before in person and that their only comprehension of a black person was through the TV.

Although Jane knew that there would be lots of tears and sorrow, she was very passionate and committed to her cause. On that faithful day in 1968, Jane entered her 3rd Grade classroom, it was National Brotherhood Week. She opened up with a question to her students; " who do we not consider our brothers?" The students responded with, the blacks and Indians. She continued on with more questions such as, " What do you know about Negroes?" Surprisingly the pupils responded back with statements such as; Negroes were not smart, or that they smelled bad. Others stated that Negroes were uncivilized and or dirty. Jane observed that when the children spoke, they were not speaking viscously; it was more of a generalized statement about what they thought or considered black people to be. Jane

continued on with her discussion of black people and inquired to her students, what do you think it would feel like to be a black child? Jane suggested that in order to truly understand discrimination, the students would need to experience it for themselves.

The experiment was to be a division of eye colour starting with blue eyed student having superiority and then the following day, the roles would be reversed.

Jane divided the class into 9 brown eyes and 9 blue eyes. The students who had blue eyes were told that they were better and smarter than their inferior brown-eyed peers. Brown-eyed students were given punishments and told that they could not interact with the blue-eyed students; this led to pupils withdrawing, becoming confused, angry, and sad. The blue-eyed students were delighted in knowing that they were the superior group and took full advantage of it. As a result, Jane Elliot had created segregation and prejudice.

The following day, Jane stated to her pupils that she had made a mistake and that the brown eyed students were the smarter and better people than the blue eyed students. This reversal in discrimination was apparent immediately as the blue eyed students who were on top yesterday started to exhibit feelings low self worth. Considering that they knew what it was like to be picked on and made fun of, they knew what consequences lay ahead of them.

At the end of the day, the experiment was complete. Jane and her pupils spoke about how this division of eye colour made them feel. As she states, “
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"I created a microcosm of society in a day." Jane Elliot demonstrated that true discrimination is not something that can be effectively understood unless it is experienced.

Jane's highly controversial experiment suggests that children who were part of the out-group took on the role of inferiority and children in the in-group became superior; thus resulting in a reinforcement of the stereotype. It can be concluded that children are fundamentally easy to manipulate and will go into doing things that are morally incorrect. Also, social pressure can have a damaging effect on a child's behaviour and moral senses.

Unfortunately, prejudice still lingers on in our society. People who are homeless or disabled, gay, and black are commonly portrayed as part of the out-group and become targets for prejudice and discrimination. The harbouring of prejudice feelings can lead to tyranny. A more recent example is David Copeland, his hatred for gays and people of colour rocked the nation as he became a one man killing machine. Influenced by the right wing extremist, David's hatred was validated. He stated that his main intent for the bombings was to "spread fear, resentment and hatred throughout this country; it was to cause a racial war."

While most of us choose not to be in the out-group; most of us are not willing to walk that mile of someone who is already there. If more people fight back and oppose hatred, prejudice, and discrimination; perhaps the out-group can merge and be a part of the in-group and prejudice will be a thing of the past.