



## Invisible Knapsacks

### Overview

This activity uses independent reflection and small-group discussion to guide students in understanding white privilege as a concept and recognizing the ways their relationship to whiteness benefits or disadvantages them and impacts daily life. Students will also examine characteristics of white supremacy culture, examining the link between white privilege and white supremacy. If you as an instructor need a refresher or introduction to privilege before leading this activity, please review “An Instructor’s Guide to Understanding Privilege.” If you have not yet facilitated the “Examining Privilege Lists” activity, please consider it as an introductory activity before engaging in this activity. All other necessary materials are linked in PDFs below.

Peggy McIntosh defines her white privilege “as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.” Layla F. Saad describes the relationship between white privilege and white supremacy - white privilege is the “reward that white and white-passing people receive in exchange for participating in the system of white supremacy [...] voluntarily or involuntarily.” White persons cannot escape the benefits of white privilege and must be able to name and understand the benefits that such privilege confers to do any meaningful work in dismantling the systems of oppression that benefit whites and disadvantage Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). This Invisible Knapsacks activity is an introductory activity in which white people can begin to do the work of addressing white privilege and its connection to white supremacy.

### Goals

- 1) To help students understand the concept of white privilege and how white privilege in the context of white supremacy benefits white people while harming BIPOC people.
- 2) To prompt students to recognize and reflect on their own relationship to whiteness and by the end of the activity, be able to identify how white privilege influences daily life, offering examples from their own experiences.
- 3) To begin to illuminate the larger impact of privilege on daily life and how it relates to oppression as well as to provide a greater understanding of the need for individuals to engage in allyhood behaviors.

<p><b>Anti-Racist Pedagogy Principles</b></p>	<p>The following anti-racist pedagogy principles are incorporated into this activity guide. For a review of the principles, visit our <a href="#">Practicing Anti-Racist Pedagogy homepage</a>.</p> <p><b>Principle 2: Anti-racist pedagogy centers both structural and personal manifestations of racism</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> This activity has students think about white privilege and white supremacy on an individual and institutional level by discussing their experiences at U-M.</li> </ul> <p><b>Principle 3: Anti-racist pedagogy disrupts racism whenever/wherever it occurs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Discussing and reflecting on white privilege and white supremacy is an important step in engaging in anti-racism. Acknowledging their existence and how they operate in different spaces is a key component to engaging in disruptive practices.</li> </ul> <p><b>Principle 4: Anti-racist pedagogy seeks change within and beyond the classroom</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Although this activity takes place within a classroom setting, the discussions and reflection extend beyond the classroom. This activity provides an opportunity to practice reflexivity and examine positionalities as instructors and students. Students also discuss how white privilege and white supremacy show up on campus.</li> </ul> <p><b>Principle 6: Anti-racist pedagogy focuses on the importance of process over time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> This activity is not intended to be a one-off lesson. As mentioned in the <b>Implementation</b> section, revisiting this activity throughout the semester is encouraged. Revisiting this activity will help students make additional connections to how white privilege and white supremacy show up in and outside of the classroom.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Implementation</b></p>	<p>This activity can be implemented at any point throughout the year but is most effectively implemented after students have engaged in some critical identity work. For example, the “Examining Privilege and Oppression” activity prompts students to begin examining their identities in relation to privilege and oppression. In this activity, students are pushed to think critically and specifically about their identity in relation to whiteness and white supremacy. Returning to this activity throughout the semester promotes regular reflection on white privilege and white supremacy and how they impact our day-to-day lives on and off campus. Revisiting this activity also reinforces the mindset that anti-racism is not an achieved state of being or boiled down into one activity, but rather it consists of intentional everyday actions, behaviors, and thoughts.</p> <p>Importantly, the activity allows students to reflect on their relationship to whiteness independently before debriefing in a small group with others. The rationale is multifold: First, students create a list of white privilege examples independently to promote critical self-reflection. Second, they can share comments or questions with members of their group.</p> <p>However, it is critical to preface this activity by letting students know that the small group discussion portion is not an opportunity to interrogate a group member that does not identify as white. Students of color are not gatekeepers of knowledge nor are they responsible for educating white students on privilege/oppression. When students are in</p>

	<p>small group discussions, questions and comments are posed to the whole group and not directed at any one group member. This messaging is essential, as it guides students to avoid relying on members with marginalized identities to educate them in this instance. For the aforementioned reasons, it is advised that this activity is implemented after students have had the opportunity to form relationships and a sense of community in the classroom space. This activity depends on students being vulnerable, which is made possible by establishing trusting relationships.</p> <p>Inclusive teaching and/or practicing anti-racist pedagogy requires that we put in the work of critically self-reflecting on a topic before introducing it to students. Instructors should complete this activity on their own before bringing it to students. Additionally, instructors should follow through on the prerequisite work of regularly reflecting on their relation to privilege and oppression. If you are new to this topic or are looking for a way to start, our resource guide "<a href="#">Doing One's Own Personal Work on Privilege and Oppression</a>" offers insights, readings, and strategies to begin this critically important self-reflective work.</p> <p>It is also recommended that instructors review the following guides for additional insight and context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Applying Dialogic Techniques</a> (Resource Guide)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Examining Privilege and Oppression</a> (Activity Guide)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Implicit Bias</a> (Resource Guide)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Identifying and Addressing Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture</a> (Resource Guide)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Racial Bias Test</a> (Activity Guide)</li> </ul> <p>It is our goal that our <a href="#">activity guides</a> and <a href="#">resource guides</a> are not used in isolation from one another. Engaging in inclusive and/or practicing anti-racist pedagogy is an ongoing process that requires consistent engagement and reflection. Be sure to review the many resources that are provided on the LSA Inclusive Teaching website.</p> <p>The optimal group size for this activity is 20-30 students, but it can be modified for smaller or larger groups.</p>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) This activity assumes that all students are able to move easily around the room. If you have a classroom space that limits movement or you have students whose movement is limited, you will need to adapt the activity accordingly.</li> <li>2) Discussing privilege often makes students defensive. While this activity is designed to be comfortable (or at least as comfortable as confronting privilege and white supremacy can be), be prepared for some resistance, claims of so-called "reverse" discrimination, and dialogue blockers.</li> </ol>
<b>Materials</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Excerpt of Peggy McIntosh's, "<a href="#">White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack</a>" <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Enough copies for everyone + facilitator(s)</li> <li>b. Uses pgs. 1-4 for excerpt</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>c. Facilitator(s) be sure to read “Some Notes for Facilitators on Presenting” pgs. 5-7</li><li>2) Pre-class article “<a href="#">The freedom to be: Defining white privilege and white supremacy</a>” by John Metta<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. <a href="#">PDF version of reading</a></li></ul></li><li>3) Small group discussion questions<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. <a href="#">Invisible Knapsacks Small Group Discussion Prompts</a></li><li>b. 12 slips, or two per group</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Citations</b>	Developed by: Ashley Wiseman, Global Scholars Program, 2017; Philip Abdo, School of Education, 2021; Frankie Quasarano, School of Social Work, 2021.

## Session Sequence

Lesson Structure	Time <i>(Estimated amount of time for each component)</i>	Activity Content and Instructions
<b>Pre-Class Reading</b>		Prior to class, have students read the article “The freedom to be: Defining white privilege and white supremacy” by John Metta. The article is linked in the Materials section, including a PDF version as well.
<b>Introduction</b>	5-10 mins	<p>The instructor introduces the assignment with an overview of the lesson, introducing the concept of privilege and stating learning goals for the class period.</p> <p>Privilege: Societally granted, unearned advantages accorded to some people and not others. These systemic or structural advantages impact people based on identity factors such as race, gender, sex, religion, nationality, disability, sexuality, class, and body type.</p> <p>According to Layla F. Saad, white privilege “describes the unearned advantages that are granted because of one’s whiteness or ability to ‘pass’ as white.” She notes that “white privilege is not a concept that is part of the natural order of life. In the absence of white supremacy, white privilege is meaningless” explicitly linking white privilege and white supremacy. <b><i>See “overview” for additional ideas to share.</i></b></p> <p>Today we will be discussing white privilege and its connection to white supremacy.</p>
<b>Article Debrief</b>	10 mins	<p><b>Gather feedback from students regarding the assigned reading:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What stood out to you from the assigned reading?</li> <li>2) How did the Metta connect white privilege and white supremacy?</li> <li>3) How would you define white privilege?</li> </ol>
<b>First Reading</b>	10 mins	Ask all students to reach an excerpt from Peggy McIntosh’s, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (1989)
<b>Large Group Discussion</b>	15 mins	<p><b>Lead a large group discussion to process the excerpt:</b></p> <p>Questions to consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What caught your attention or surprised you in the McIntosh article?</li> <li>2) What connections did you make between Metta’s piece and McIntosh’s piece?</li> <li>3) Why do you think McIntosh does not explicitly reference white supremacy in her piece?</li> </ol>



<b>Closing</b>	5 mins	<p>Possible closing remarks:</p> <p>Thinking about white privilege and white supremacy can bring up many unpleasant emotions such as guilt, anger, fear of making mistakes, sadness, and so on. It is important to acknowledge the difference between whiteness and a person with white skin. However, because white privilege influences every aspect of life, we must also remind ourselves that unacknowledged privilege often prevents us from exercising important values such as equality, fairness, justice, and even kindness. I encourage you to continue learning about white privilege and white supremacy, and how you can work in your everyday life to dismantle them.</p>
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