

School You, Inc.

Overview	<p>In this activity, students imagine creating a school designed to maintain oppressive norms. Students will consider not only what institutional oppression looks like, but how it is perpetuated as they are encouraged to make their maintenance of oppressive norms subtle and devious. A debriefing discussion after the activity is concluded will encourage students to reflect critically on how the construction of their imagined school relates to real-life institutions and the perpetuation of institutional oppressive norms. The activity can be structured as a large group discussion/activity, a small group discussion/activity with a facilitator assigned to each group, or a small group activity with the entire class debriefing together after the activity is concluded.</p>
Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To illuminate how institutions can be oppressive. 2) To help students reflect on how oppressive institutional norms are perpetuated and evade critique.
Implementation	<p>This exercise encourages students to reflect on the oppressive norms of the institutions they inhabit, especially the norms of the university. They can be encouraged to think, not only of the university in a macro sense but how institutional norms can play out on the micro-scale of the classroom and consider how they can challenge or resist those norms.</p>
Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Students may be inclined to evoke stereotypes of what oppression looks like instead of engaging deeply with the questions the activity raises. Students should be told that the more <i>obviously</i> oppressive the institution is, the more likely it will be shut down. Encourage them to focus on how to make those oppressive norms less obvious but still deeply felt. 2) Some students may resist engaging in oppressive thought while others may revel in it. Be clear with your students about the learning goals of this activity, and frame this as a role-playing activity. They will have the opportunity to share their experience and reservations during the debrief discussion.
Materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) School You, Inc. Handout
Citations	<p>Adapted for use by the Program on Intergroup Relations, University of Michigan</p>

Session Sequence

Lesson Structure	Time <i>(Estimated amount of time for each component)</i>	Activity Content and Instructions
Introduction	5 mins	The instructor welcomes the class and provides an overview of the lesson: students will imagine creating a school designed to maintain oppressive norms to understand what institutional oppression looks like and how it is perpetuated.
Priming the Group	10 mins	<p>Generate a sense of excitement through tone of voice, high energy, and a sense of fun. This can be accomplished through an icebreaker exercise, especially one that uses competition between participants.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Point out that “this is a brainstorming exercise and there are no wrong answers – this is not a debate.” 2) Only the facilitator has the questions, and this is supposed to be a quick-paced activity. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. You can prime responses with a few clear, prepared examples for each category. b. Examples can also be used to clarify participant understanding of the category’s meaning. 3) Emphasize to students that suggestions need to be <i>as subtle and as devious as possible</i>. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Optional: reward the most devious with a piece of candy.
Running the Activity	20 mins	<p>Go through the five categories: Personnel, Policies and Practices, Constituency, Structure, Mission/Vision/Culture of Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know when it is time to move on to the next category: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When the group has come up with 5-6 good examples. ○ There is a long lull. ○ When energy is still high, and more responses are coming in, but someone gives a suggestion that fits nicely into the next category. • Know when to stop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ You most likely will not have time to go through all the categories. ○ Once you have spent 20 minutes or so on the exercise, filling out the categories, assess the group to see if it is time to prompt reflection/discussion.

Large Group Debrief	10-15 mins	As a whole class discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you offered candy as a reward, who got the most pieces of candy?• What name do we want to give our company?• What do you notice about the organization/school/company we have created?• How does this organization we created reflect reality? The University of Michigan?• Promote further discussion as necessary.
Wrap-Up	5 mins	Point out that what students created in this exercise is information that is regularly communicated to managers and administrators within organizations all the time, but usually informally as “business as usual” practices and advice.