

Overview:

This lesson plan will challenge participants to analyze how institutions can be inclusive to some while excluding others. They will first read the parable “The Giraffe and the Elephant” and then discuss what makes people giraffes and elephants in different contexts.

Background and Information:

This activity was created by Annette Benson and Brittany Biesiada, CILMAR, based on *Building a House for Diversity: A Fable About a Giraffe & an Elephant Offers New Strategies for Today’s Workforce* by Marjorie I. Woodruff and R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr (see citation below).

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Identify feelings of inclusion/exclusion as dependent on context.
2. Recognize that structural exclusion can exist.
3. Analyze the inclusive and exclusive ways that people and organizations typically respond to diversity.

Time:

45 minutes

Group Size:

Entire group

Materials:

The book (see citation), the parable (see [Links](#)), instructions (see [Downloads](#)), and paper/pens.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness:

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Empathy

- To interpret intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview.
- To demonstrate ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group

Other Skills:

Diversity & Inclusion

Activity instructions:

1. Begin by asking participants to read the parable, "The Giraffe and the Elephant" (see [Links](#)).
2. Discuss what makes people feel like an elephant or a giraffe in various contexts—at work, at school, with family or friends, etc. If you're comfortable, feel free to give examples using yourself.
3. In the book, *Building a House for Diversity: A Fable about a Giraffe & an Elephant Offers New Strategies for Today's Workforce*, R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr. says that the following can trigger "an elephant experience" (p. 66):
 - Age
 - Physical ability
 - Physical appearance
 - Education
 - Work location
 - Work experience
 - Acquired status
 - Laborer status
 - Administrative status
 - Functional status

He says that an elephant experience in the workplace is not necessarily determined by race, gender, or ethnicity (p. 65). Ask participants what they think of this statement.

4. Thomas also says that the following can bestow giraffe status upon an individual (pp. 153-154):
 - Ethnicity, race, gender
 - Legacy
 - Excellence
 - Legal ownership
 - Fulfillment of norms

Ask participants if they can think of any other traits that might bestow giraffe status.

5. Thomas says that "neither giraffe nor elephant status is immutable. People can be giraffes in one setting and elephants in another. Many factors have a mirror-imaging dynamic" (p. 154). Based on this statement, ask participants the following question:
 - Can you think of instances in which you or someone else can feel like an elephant in one setting but like a giraffe in another? (An example from Purdue University would be as follows: A director or vice president in Housing and Food Services may feel like a giraffe when their office moves from a residence hall to the administrative building but feel like an elephant when with others who have an office in same building as the president.)

6. In an appendix to *Building a House for Diversity*, Thomas draws upon his previous work, *Redefining Diversity* (1996), in which he asserted that there are eight ways in which people and organizations typically respond to diversity (p. 229):

- Increase/decrease
- Deny
- Assimilate
- Suppress
- Isolate
- Tolerate
- Build relationships
- Foster mutual adaptation

Thomas says, "None of [the above] is inherently good or bad in itself; it all depends on the context." Ask participants, "In what context could you see each of the above being good or bad? "

7. Conclude by asking participants, "What are your key takeaways from our discussion, and how can you apply what you learned to "real world" situations?"

Related Tools:

Similar tools:

- [DOTS - Version 2](#)
- [Exclusion](#)