



# Crash Course in Intersectionality

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**Subject:** Social Studies

**Topic:** Integrated

**Grade Levels:** High School; 11-12

## Overview

This lesson serves to introduce students the concept of intersectionality to help them gain a new framework for better examining themselves and how they fit into the world around them.

**Time:** 50 minutes

## Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Explore the concept of intersectionality
- Analyze current social problems in the United States
- Examine these social problems through an intersectional lens
- Reflect on their own intersectional identities

## Essential Questions:

What is intersectionality?

How can an intersectional lens be applied when examining social problems?

What are privilege and oppression and why is it important to understand them?

## Standards:

CCSS W.11-12.1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

HSS 11.11. Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

## Vocabulary:

*Intersectionality:* Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality refers to an analytical framework that views people through the interaction of their social identities (including gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, etc.) resulting in a unique lived social experience of oppression and privilege, as opposed to an additive model of oppression that views people as the sum of their social identities

*Privilege:* operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups

*Oppression:* the combination of prejudice and institutional power which creates a system that discriminates against target groups and benefits other dominant groups

**Teacher Background:** The teacher should be familiar with Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality,

### Materials:

- Computer
- Projector
- Speakers
- Whiteboard
- [Intersecting Axis handout](#)
- Highlighters or colored pens

### Instruction:

1. Introduction (25 mins)
  - a. The teacher will inform the class that the lesson will focus on intersectionality. The teacher can ask for a show of hands of students who are familiar with the term.
  - b. The teacher will begin the lesson by showing a TED Talk (link here: [https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle\\_crenshaw\\_the\\_urgency\\_of\\_intersectionality?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en)). Before beginning the video, the teacher should inform students that the speaker, Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a law professor who coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989. Additionally, the teacher should give a content warning for the video for discussion and depiction of police brutality, death, and anti-Black racism.
    - i. During the beginning portion of the TED Talk, when the audience does the stand up/sit-down activity, encourage students in the room who are able to participate to do it along with the video.
2. Discussion (10 mins)
  - a. The teacher should lead a discussion to check for understanding of the TED talk and let students share their impressions. Example discussion questions can include:
    - i. What was Kimberlé Crenshaw's thesis in this TED Talk?
    - ii. How did she define intersectionality?
    - iii. What was wrong with the judge's ruling on the original case? What does she compare it to?
    - iv. Why does she say intersectionality is important, especially now?
    - v. Why are issues often intersectional?
    - vi. How will you apply the idea of intersectionality to topics going forward?
3. Self-reflection activity (10 mins)

- a. The teacher will explain that, while intersectionality discusses the interaction of types of oppression, the flip side of oppression is privilege, or the often invisible advantages that come with being part of a dominant societal group. Privilege, just like oppression, is something that people are born with and can't change. No one should be ashamed, guilty, or embarrassed over the amount of privilege or oppression they hold. Everyone has privilege and oppression as part of their identities and being aware of your social identities and the privileges and oppressions you hold is a powerful tool. Where there is privilege, there is the potential for allyship to oppressed groups, making positive use of the power that comes with privilege. Students can also begin to understand their unique social position and how it might shape how they see the world, as well as how others see them (and they see themselves). *(Note for teachers: If you and/or students are unfamiliar with concepts of privilege, great resource to explain and illustrate white privilege, as an example, is Peggy McIntosh's "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, found at: <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>. Allot 15-20 more minutes for students to read and discuss this handout, if interested.)*
    - i. While explaining the definitions of intersectionality, privilege, and oppression, the teacher should write out these ideas on a whiteboard while speaking
  - b. The teacher will hand out print-outs of the Intersecting Axis sheet, found at: <https://cls.unc.edu/files/2017/08/Intersecting-axis-Pauly-1996-.pdf> and invite students (if they are comfortable) to highlight the axes that correspond to their own identities. Students will see that everyone has a unique combination of privilege and oppression that make up their social identity.
4. Concluding discussion (5 mins)
- a. What surprised students in learning about intersectionality?
  - b. Is social identity, privilege, and oppression something students think about often? Why or why not?
  - c. How will students use the framework of intersectionality moving forward? How does it change the way they think

**Assessment Ideas:** The student will choose a social issue they care about and write a 2-page (double-spaced) paper about the intersectionality of that issue that might be often ignored. Some topics may include hate crimes, poverty, wage gap, etc.

### Relevant Resources:

Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color". In: Martha Albertson Fineman, Rixanne Mykitiuk, Eds. The Public Nature of Private Violence. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 93-118.

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