

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE EDUCATION FUND

TEACHING FAIR HOUSING LESSON PLAN

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# **LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE EDUCATION FUND TEACHING FAIR HOUSING AND DIVERSITY LESSON PLAN**

## **GOALS**

The goals of these teaching materials on Fair Housing and Diversity are:

- To help students understand and explore Fair Housing from a moral, ethical, and historical perspective.
- To give students an opportunity to work cooperatively toward a common goal and in the process learn to understand their similarities and celebrate their differences across racial, ethnic, religious and ability/disability lines.
- To explore the meaning of diversity, prejudice and civil rights (historical and contemporary) and the relevance of these terms to their lives.
- To examine the negative consequences of segregated communities.
- To experience the value, for the individual and for the country, of inter-group understanding and interaction -- embracing diversity.

## **MATERIALS**

These materials grew out of a project designed to help middle school students create public service announcements about diversity. They can be used on their own, but are particularly effective when used as a means to help students create posters, skits, or stories or essays designed to educate other people about fair housing. You might be able to partner with a local advertising agency and a local network that would donate their time and resources to help the students create story boards and produce public service announcements that could air locally.

They include activities and readings designed to help your students experience the need for, and power of, civil rights laws such as the Fair Housing Act. They combine oral history with personal exploration and group activities designed to raise consciousness about the feelings engendered by prejudice. The games are designed for the whole class to play. Individual students, or groups of students, can read aloud the stories provided. The games and the stories

are designed to be springboards for discussion about diversity, civil rights in general and Fair Housing in particular.

The games and stories can be used on their own. But one effective way to teach about these issues is to use them to prepare students for some kind of community contest. It could be a contest to make a poster about fair housing. It could be to write and perform a skit, read an essay, or create a public service announcement or a website.

Given the nature of the material, it is best to have students work on their projects in teams.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON FAIR HOUSING FOR YOUR INFORMATION AND TO SHARE WITH YOUR STUDENTS AS YOU DEEM APPROPRIATE**

FAIR HOUSING -- often referred to as "the step-child of civil rights" -- has been among the most difficult legal battles in the civil rights movement.

IN 1968, in the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, the Kerner Commission (as it was known) made its famous observation that "the nation is rapidly moving toward two increasingly separate Americas . . . a white society principally located in suburbs, in smaller central cities and in the peripheral parts of large central cities; and a Negro society largely concentrated within large central cities." Just four paragraphs before that stark conclusion, the Commission called for a national fair housing law as "essential to begin such a movement" for "true freedom of choice in housing for Negroes of all income levels . . . ."

CONGRESS RESPONDED to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and passed the Fair Housing Act -- Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 -- banning discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex in most housing transactions. Also in 1968, the Supreme Court handed down a ruling in *Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co.*, which held that the Civil Rights Act of 1866 bans racial discrimination by private, as well as governmental, housing providers. Together, these two events established the framework for the assault on segregated housing.

THE 1968 FAIR HOUSING ACT provided three means of enforcing its anti-bias rules:

- The Department of Justice may bring lawsuits where a "pattern or practice" of housing discrimination exists or where alleged discrimination raises an issue of general public importance -- e.g., widespread discrimination by a defendant seller, developer or rental firm.
- Administrative complaints can be made to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Such complaints could, theoretically, end up in the courts if pursued by the bias victim.
- Private plaintiffs can proceed directly to court with charges of housing discrimination.

THE 1968 ACT, however, provided only limited mechanisms for enforcement, allowing the Justice Department to go to court only in "pattern and practice" cases or when a group of persons was discriminated against in a manner that "raises an issue of general public importance." In 1972, moreover, the Supreme Court called HUD's role in enforcing fair housing "minimal."

THE NEED FOR FURTHER ACTION was additionally reinforced by 1987 HUD estimates that as many as two million instances of housing discrimination were occurring each year. Twenty years after passing the Fair Housing Act, Congress sought to strengthen the law's enforcement provisions and passed the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, signed by President Reagan on September 13, 1988. The key provisions of the 1988 act include:

- Extensions of the law's basic protection against discrimination in housing to families with children and to people with disabilities.

- Reform of the enforcement and remedies portion of the law, including requirements that the Justice Department represent individual victims of housing discrimination after receiving referrals from HUD. In addition, the enforcement and remedies provisions established a system of administrative judges to decide discrimination disputes and to award actual damages, injunctive relief and civil penalties of up to \$50,000.

AS A COROLLARY to effective enforcement of fair housing laws, Congress in 1987 created the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) to provide grants to private and public fair housing agencies. The Reagan administration and the National Association of Realtors (NAR) sought to constrain the FHIP by barring grants to agencies that engaged in systematic "testing" -- a technique for identifying discrimination by using teams of equally qualified blacks and whites who might, for example, seek to buy the same house or rent the same apartment. Congress rejected the Reagan-NAR guidelines, but a 1992 report found the Department of Housing and Urban Development "has not made any progress in utilizing this important investigative technique in evaluating the complaints it receives."]

FAIR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT became a priority during the Clinton Administration, which saw significant increases in the filing of complaints, increased funding for private fair housing initiatives, reaffirmed commitment to the use of disparate impact theory under the Fair Housing Act, and expansion of the fair housing testing program under the leadership of the Justice Department (which, in turn, helped trigger new pattern-or-practice filings).

BUT OF ALL THE ASPECTS OF SEGREGATION that civil rights has sought to undo, residential housing segregation has been the most intractable. Indeed, the 2000 Census shows relatively little change in residential segregation patterns, despite the nation's growing racial and ethnic diversity. An analysis of new Census data by the Lewis Mumford Center concluded that "[t]he average white person continues to live in a neighborhood that looks very different from those neighborhoods where the average black, Hispanic, and Asian live. For example, the average white person in metropolitan American lives in a neighborhood that is almost 83% white and only

7% black. In contrast, a typical black individual lives in a neighborhood that is only 33% white and as much as 54% black.”

MOREOVER, RELATIVELY LITTLE HAS CHANGED IN THE METROPOLITAN AREAS where most blacks, Hispanics and Asians live. Housing experts measure segregation by a “dissimilarity index”: a 100-point scale, with 100 representing total segregation where all African Americans and all whites live in racially homogeneous areas. In contrast, a “zero” on the scale represents a perfect random housing distribution by race. A 1985 report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights examined 1980 Census data and found that the index was still 70 in the least segregated cities -- Washington, DC, and San Francisco. And in cities like Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland, racial isolation escalated the index to around 90.

BY 2000, conditions had improved only slightly. San Francisco and Washington, DC had segregation indices in the low 60s, while Chicago and Detroit remained in the low 80s – Cleveland had improved to an index of 77.

EARLY ANALYSES OF DATA FROM THE 2000 CENSUS by the Washington Post also concluded that Hispanics increasingly live in largely segregated areas, and that “blacks remain more segregated than Hispanics in every region of the country.” The analysis further found that segregation levels are higher in mid-western cities and large urban areas, “where blacks and whites have a history of living in separate neighborhoods,” while integrated neighborhoods are more common in the faster-growing West and South, and in smaller metropolitan areas.

## ACTIVITIES

### I. THINKING ABOUT DIVERSITY

#### **Diversity Game: Similarities and Differences**

**Purpose:** To let students experience diversity in a tangible way.  
To help them understand that there are lots of ways of grouping people.,  
To help them experience the ways that they are similar too, and different from, their classmates.

#### **How to play:**

Ask everyone, including teachers to stand in the middle of the room. Read from a list of statements about likes, dislikes, gender, race and ethnicity. With each statement, ask students to whom the statement applies to walk to a particular corner of the room. The groups should be fluid in numbers and participants. As students move around the room, ask them to look at who is in their group at that moment, and who is not in it. Ask them to think about how they feel.

#### **Suggested Statements:**

Note: These can vary to fit your particular class. Remember that it is useful to have some statement that applies to no one in the room. Make sure you use a mix of lighter statements with the more serious ones.

If you are female, walk over here (indicate corner)  
If you are male, walk over here (indicate another corner)  
If you like popcorn. . .  
If you are Asian American. . .  
If you have ever been angry . . .  
If you are Latino. . .  
If you like rap music . . .  
If you are African American. . .  
If you are over thirty. . .  
If you have a brother. . .  
If you are Jewish. . .  
If you are bi-racial. . .  
If you have a sister. . .  
If you've ever been in love. . .  
If you were born in a country other than the US. . .  
If you've ever been the object of prejudice. . .  
If you've ever felt prejudice yourself. . .  
If you like alternative music. . .  
If you live next door to a neighbor whose race or ethnicity is different from your own.  
If you've every been angry. . .

If you're Native American. . .  
If none of the racial or ethnic groups mentioned so far apply to you. . .  
If you like chocolate. . .  
If you like classical music. . .  
If your blood is red...

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What was this experience like for you?
2. Did anything about the groupings surprise you?
3. Were you ever uncomfortable?
4. What was the purpose of this game?

**II. FAIR HOUSING MONOPOLY GAME: WHY DO WE NEED CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION LIKE THE FAIR HOUSING ACT**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of Fair Housing Monopoly is to provide students with an opportunity to experience and reflect on the unfairness of engaging in a process governed by rules that are different for different people. The rules of the game are based on the experiences of many minority groups before the fair housing laws were passed. Students will be randomly assigned a number at the beginning of the game that will help or hinder their chances to win the game. Based on the assigned number, some students will be allowed to buy only certain properties, while others will be able to buy more or less. As students play the game, they are encouraged to keep notes in a journal to use in discussion.

**Equipment:**

One Monopoly set.  
Five squares of paper folded over. On the inside of each is a different number from one to five.  
Small bowl or other container to hold the squares of paper.  
Pads of paper and pencils for each student playing

**Number of Players:** 5 players or 5 teams of players.

**The Process:**

Tell students that they are going to play a version of the game Monopoly called Fair Housing Monopoly. Have each player (or a team representative) pick a number from a container which determines the name of their team and what rules apply to them. Announce the following:



Player or Team # 1 is only allowed to buy the properties Mediterranean and Baltic  
Player or Team # 2 is only allowed to buy Mediterranean & Baltic and Boardwalk & Parkplace.  
Player or Team # 3 is only allowed to buy railroads and utilities  
Player or Team # 4: is only allowed to buy properties leading up to Free Parking  
Player or Team # 5: is allowed to buy anything.

Aside from those rules, the game proceeds just like regular Monopoly.

**Rationale for rules:**

Rule # 1: It was common practice in many parts of the country for minorities to be limited to renting or buying housing only in the poorest section of town. Thus, expressions such as: AOn the wrong side of the tracks, @ ghetto, etc.

Rule # 2: Very very wealthy minorities might be able to also buy property in extremely rich neighborhoods, but were excluded from middle class communities.

Rule # 3: Discrimination in housing has existed for centuries. For hundreds of years in Europe, for example, Jews were not allowed to own property and were forced to become merchants or peddlers, giving rise to the stereotype of Jews as shrewd business people.

Rule # 4: In some circumstances, minorities could move beyond the ghetto, for example live residences near modest business areas, but they were still excluded from the more desirable middle class communities.

Rule # 5: Some racial and ethnic groups have always been able to live anywhere they choose.

As your students are playing, ask them to take notes in response to the following questions.

1. How do you feel about getting the number you chose?
2. How do you feel toward the other players?
3. Do you think you have a good chance of winning?
4. Do you think this game is fair?
5. Do you still want to play?
6. What can you do to change your situation or the situation of others?

**Note:** Monopoly takes a long time to play. You and your students might choose not to finish the game. You might even choose not to actually play, although it is probably useful to at least give them some playing time. You may find that a discussion about the impact of the restrictions placed on certain teams will be enough to give them a sense of the need for laws about fair housing.

**Discussion:**

Using the questions you asked your students to think about as a guideline, engage your students in

a discussion about their experience, especially about how the experience made them feel. Make sure that you hear from members of all groups, including the ones whom the rules favor. For question number six, emphasize that there is no right answer. Responses may range from hopelessness, to refusal to play, to joining with other players and working to change the rules. Talk with your students about the benefits and harms of their proposed solutions.

Ask them if and how this experience relates to issues around fair housing.

The rules of Fair Housing Monopoly are unfair. To make the game fair for all of the people playing, the rules have to be changed. Before civil rights laws were passed, which made discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and color illegal, minority groups were not protected under the laws of the United States. For instance, they could be barred from attending certain schools, drinking out of certain water fountains, voting, and living in certain neighborhoods.

Barriers to housing integration are rooted in the history of discrimination and continue to have effects today. For example, minority fears of intimidation and violence in some white communities still pose serious obstacles to housing choice. Segregation bars access for minorities to remaining all-white areas, which include many of the country's most affluent communities with outstanding educational and economic opportunities. Segregated neighborhoods also prevent people from different backgrounds from getting to know each other.

## READINGS

This component of the lesson includes dramatic readings of brief life stories of people whose lives were affected by prejudice and discrimination and who were involved in the struggle to make the United States a more inclusive society in which everyone is respected for whom they are and provided an opportunity to reach his/her full potential. One of the readings focuses on unsung heroes/heroines, ordinary people doing extraordinary things -- and their involvement as young people.

**Dramatic Readings:** Students can be pre-selected to read and given the opportunity before class to raise any questions or concerns they have about the readings. Narration includes information that illustrates the progress we have made and challenges that remain.

Students can be engaged in conversation about their thoughts and feelings after each reading, after two or three, or after they are presented as a group.

A set of the readings should be provided each student after the last reading.

### I. THOSE WHO DON'T

Choose one student or a group of students to alternate reading lines or paragraphs.

“Those who don’t know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we’re dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake.

“But we aren’t afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davey the Baby’s brother, and the tall one next to him in the straw brim, that’s Rosa’s Eddie V., and the big one that looks like a dumb grown man, he’s Fat boy, though he’s not fat anymore nor a boy.

“All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes.”

Sandra Cisneros  
*The House on Mango Street*

### Discussion Questions

Question: Why are some people who come into this neighborhood scared?

Question: Why aren’t the people who live on Mango Street frightened in their neighborhood?

Question: How do the people on Mango Street feel about going to another neighborhood. Why?

Question: How do you feel outside of your own neighborhood?

Question: What could we do to make people feel more comfortable?.

## **II. JUNE JOHNSON**

Choose two students to read as the Narrator and as June Johnson.

Narrator:

Segregation still exists, but it is now against the law. It was not easy to get the civil rights laws passed. People all over the country worked hard, and even died, to end legal segregation. When June Johnson was fifteen years old, she lived in Greenwood, Mississippi. Black people couldn't drink from the same drinking fountains as white people, or eat at the same restaurants, or go to the same schools. During the long hot summers, they could not swim in the town swimming pool. They were not allowed to vote. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made this kind of discrimination illegal, in many places around the country people ignored the law.

Even though she was fifteen, and even though her mother disapproved, June Johnson began working with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, a civil rights organization devoted to helping get African Americans registered to vote.

June's mother was afraid that June would get hurt. Some civil rights workers had been killed, many had been beaten. June's mother was also afraid that she would lose her job and be unable to support her family -- that happened to many people involved in the movement. At first she forbade June to be involved with civil rights. But June was persistent, and eventually, however, she gave June permission to participate. June attended a week long training in another town on how to be a leader in the Civil Rights Movement.

On the way back from the training, their bus stopped at a rest top. The civil rights workers, six adults and June, tried to eat lunch on the "white" side of a café. They were all arrested and taken to jail. It was several days before they were released. Here is June's story of what happened to her while she was in jail:

June:

"He opened the door to the cell block and told everybody to get inside. I started to go in with the rest of them and he said, "Not you, you black-assed nigger." He asked me, "Are you a member of the NAACP?" I said "Ayes." Then he hit me on the cheek and chin. I raised my arm to protect my

face and he hit me in the stomach. He asked, "Who runs that thing?" I answered, "The people." He asked, "Who pays you?" I said, "Nobody." He said, "Nigger, you're lying. You done enough already to get your neck broken." Then the four of them--the sheriff, the chief of police, the state trooper, and the white man that had brought Mrs. Hamer in--threw me on the floor and beat me. After they finished stomping me, they said, "Get up nigger." I raised my head and the white man hit me on the back of the head with a club wrapped in black leather. Then they made me get up.

"They locked me up. My head was cut open and my dress was torn and bloody. The others were taken away and beaten one by one. I heard Fanny Lou Hamer, an older woman, hollering from another part of the building, "Don't beat me no more--don't beat me no more." Later they brought her back to her cell crying.

"They were denied a doctor and a lawyer for three days, at which point they were booked and charged with disorderly conduct and resisting arrest."

Narrator:

When she arrived home, a mass of bruises and still wearing her bloody dress, there was silence in her house. June's mother never asked her what happened while she was in jail.

June was not the only teenager to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement. All over the south, teenagers went to jail and, in their process, helped their parents get involved.

From Taylor Branch's *Pillar of Fire*  
Sally Belfrage's *Freedom Summer*

## **Discussion**

People like June Johnson risked and even lost their lives to insure the civil rights of other people. We talked earlier about how important it is to have laws that abolish segregation, but sometimes the law isn't enough. Laws have to be enforced.

How do you feel about what June Johnson did?

Did it take courage?

Why was the Fair Housing Act created?

[The Fair Housing Act is one important piece of civil rights legislation that resulted from efforts of thousands of people all over the country, like June Johnson, who devoted their lives to fighting for civil rights. The Fair Housing Act was created to insure that people could not be prevented from finding a place to live because of skin color, ethnicity, or religion.]

Here's an example of why the Fair Housing Act was needed:

### III. NISEI DAUGHTER

Choose two students to read as the Narrator and as Monica (a teenage girl).

Narrator:

A few years before June Johnson was beaten in a Mississippi Jail, and well before the Fair Housing Act was passed, another teenager and her family tried to rent a house in California. This is their story:

Monica Sone was born in this country. Her parents were both Japanese. When she was about your age, her younger sister became seriously ill. Their parents decided to rent a cottage by the ocean to help her rest and recover. Since they were lucky enough to have the money to pay the rent. You would think they would have no trouble finding a nice little cottage, right? Wrong!

Monica:

Early one day, Mother and I set out to find a cottage near the beach where we always picnicked. We found a gray house with a FOR RENT sign on its window, just a block from the beach. One side of the house was quilted with wild rambler roses and the sprawling green lawn was trim behind a white-painted picket fence. When I pressed the doorbell, musical chimes rang softly through the house. A middle-aged woman wearing a stiffly starched apron opened the door. "Yes, what can I do for you?" She asked, looking us over.

Mother smiled and said in her halting English, "You have nice house. We like to rent this summer." Mother paused, but the woman said nothing. Mother went on, "How much do you want for month?"

The woman wiped her hands deliberately on her white apron before she spoke, "Well, I'm asking fifty dollars, but I'm afraid you're a little too late. I just promised this place to another party."

"Oh," Mother said, disappointed. "That's too bad. I'm sorry. We like it so much."

I swallowed hard and pointed to the sign on the window. "You still have the sign up. We thought the house was still open."

"I just rented it this morning. I forgot to remove it. Sorry, I can't do anything for you," she said sharply.

Mother smiled at her, "Thank you just the same. Good-by." As we walked away, Mother said comfortingly to me, "Maybe we'll find something even nicer, Ka-chan. We have a lot of

looking to do yet.”

But we scoured the neighborhood with no success. Every time it was the same story. Either the rent was too much or the house was already taken. We had even inquired at a beautiful new brick apartment facing the beach boulevard, where several VACANCY signs had been propped against empty windows, but the caretaker told us unsmilingly that these apartments were all taken.

That night I went to bed with burning feet. From my darkened bedroom, I heard Mother talking to Father in the living room. “Yes, there were some nice places, but I don’t think they wanted to rent to Japanese.”

I sat bolt upright. That had not occurred to me. Surely Mother was mistaken. Why would it make any difference? I knew that Father and Mother were not Americans, as we were, because they were not born here, and that there was a law which said they could not become naturalized American citizens because they were Orientals.

A few days later, we went to the seaside again. This time I carried a list of houses and apartments for rent which I had cut out from the newspaper. My hands trembled with a nervousness which had nothing to do with the pure excitement of house-hunting. I wished that I had not overheard Mother’s remark to Father.

We walked briskly up to a quaint, white Cape Cod house. The door had a shiny brass knocker in the shape of a leaping dolphin. A carefully marcelled, blue-eyed woman, wearing a pince-nez on her sharp nose, hurried out. The woman blinked nervously and tapped her finger on the wall as she listened to Mother’s words. She said dryly, “I’m sorry, but we don’t want Japs around here,” and closed the door. My face stiffened. It was like a sharp, stinging slap. Blunt as it was, I had wanted to hear the truth to wipe out the doubt in my mind. Mother took my hand and led me quickly away, looking straight ahead of her. After a while, she said quietly, “Ka-chan, there are people like that in this world. We have to bear it, just like all the other unpleasant facts of life. This is the first time for you, and I know how deeply it hurts; but when you are older, it won’t hurt quite as much. You’ll be stronger.”

Trying to stop the flow of tears, I swallowed hard and blurted out, “But, Mamma, is it so terrible to be a Japanese?”

“Hush, child, you mustn’t talk like that.” Mother spoke slowly and earnestly. “I want you, Henry, and Sumi-chan to learn to respect yourselves. Not because you’re a certain color, but because you’re a human being. Never forget that. No matter what anyone may call you.”

The rest of the day we plodded doggedly through the list without any luck. They all turned us down politely. On our way home, Mother sat silent, while I brooded in the corner of the seat. All day I had been torn apart between feeling defiant and then apologetic about my Japanese blood. But when I recalled the woman’s stinging words, I felt raw angry fire flash through my veins, and

I simmered.

Later in the evening, our friend, Mr. Kato dropped in. Father told him that we were looking for a cottage out at the beach and that so far we had no luck. Mr. Kato scratched his head, “Yahhh, it’s too bad your wife went to all that trouble. That district has been restricted for years. They’ve never rented or sold houses to Orientals and I doubt if they ever will.”

My face burned with shame. Mother and I had walked from house to house, practically asking to be rebuffed. Our foolish summer dream was over.

Narrator:

Monica Sone grew up to be a clinical psychologist. She wrote a book about her experiences called *Nisei Daughter*.

Many years later, thanks to the work of the Japanese American Citizens League, and many other civil rights organization including the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, those Japanese Americans still living who were imprisoned were compensated for their anguish.

Excerpted from *Nisei Daughter*, by Monica Sone. Pg.112 – 115, University of Washington Press, 1954 (reprinted 1996)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Could something like that happen today? Why? Why not?

FACT: The Fair Housing Act was signed into law on April 30, 1968. In 1988, the law was strengthened to include protection for persons with disabilities and families with children.

FACT: In spite of the law, most people continue to live in segregated neighborhoods. Integrated neighborhoods are the exception, not the rule.

2. Monica Sone’s mother refers to herself as an “Oriental.” Today, many Asian-Americans find that word offensive. Any ideas why?

FACT: It is a term used to designate Asian Pacific people by people not from that region. It is no longer preferred except for objects such as rugs. What are some other groups that have changed how they want to be described over the years?

3. A few years later, World War II began. The United States was fighting Germany, Italy and Japan. In March 1942, a curfew was imposed on all Japanese Americans on the west coast. Curfew for Germans and Italians was limited to aliens. In April, the state of California fired all Japanese American working in state jobs. 120,000 people of Japanese Ancestry were rounded up



and imprisoned in a detention camps from 1942 to 1946. No one of German ancestry was imprisoned because of their heritage. Why do you think that is?

#### IV. WHO SHOULD HAVE TO GET USED TO THAT?

Choose a student to read a the law professor, or choose several students to alternate paragraphs.

Law Professor

I'm a law professor at the University of Richmond. My husband and I recently located an apartment near the law school. It sounded like the right kind of apartment for us--and, it was the right price! When I called, the manager told me to by and see it. She also mentioned that earlier that day, a student from my law school had called to ask about the apartment. He was actually a student from one of my classes.

That evening my student called me. He had just spoken with the manager and she asked him if I was black or white. He told her, "She's black, but what difference does that make?" She said, "I don't rent to those people - those kind of people."

After that telephone call, I felt a terrible sense of loss--as though I had lost part of myself. The only thing that seemed to be left was my skin color. So I felt like I had lost a lot. And then, I felt very angry. Oh, was I angry! I was angry at society in general. I thought we had come further than that. I was angry that people like that manager and others like her could still be here.

You see, one of the things you have to know about me is that I've never asked anybody to give me anything. I've always worked for everything. Of course, there have been many people along the way who have helped me here and helped me there-- teachers, certainly my parents, and friends and even people I don't know. But I've always worked and earned. And I sit on the faculty at the University of Richmond, not because of the color of my skin, but because I am good.

I am more than competent. I deserve to be there. And, that woman didn't want me in her apartment because of the color of my skin! She didn't care about anything that I had done - nothing. I've never suffered an insult as great as the one caused by housing discrimination. And this is the only time I've ever brought a law suit against someone because I had suffered an insult.

I sometimes think about it like this. It's as though there was a piece of paper with all of this information about me written about it--important information about who I am and what I've accomplished. And she crumpled that paper and threw it away--just because she didn't like the color! I've spent the next two years unfolding, smoothing, trying my best to get the creases smoothed out, so that piece of paper would look almost the way it looked before it had been tossed out. I'm still pressing that piece of paper. I'm still working on the creases, but that paper will never be the same again.

And I had to bring that law suit for another reason. If she could do this to me, then she

could do it to others. If someone doesn't stand up, a lot of people stand up and say enough—enough, you cannot withhold something as vital as housing from someone just because of the color of their skin, national origin or whatever it might be, then I think that, uh, we are letting down all of those other people who sacrificed for us, some of them who gave up their lives., and, it was such a small thing for me to do in a way.

ASo I tell people, ADiscrimination is not just a little thing that you can get over.@ No one gets over it. It is an act of violence against the dignity of the individual. Racism is a weapon. And the people using that are striking you in the heart just as surely as they are using a knife, or a gun or anything else. The only thing is, you don't see the blood and you don't see the holes--but they're there. And because you can't see the damage, it makes it much tougher to explain it to somebody else that people are harmed by discrimination. And every time an individual is harmed by housing discrimination, so is the fabric of our society, one more blip, one more insult that this society has to somehow absorb, because another member has been cut off or in some way been damaged in this society. All of us hurt.

“Discrimination is not a little matter. It's not just something that happens and you get over it, or you get used to it after a while. Who should get used to being degraded? Who should have to ever get used to that?”

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What does the speaker mean when she uses the metaphor of the piece of paper? What does it mean that she's still ironing out the creases?
2. All forms of discrimination are bad. Do you think that housing discrimination is worse than other kinds of discrimination? Why? Why not?
3. Why do you think the law student called his professor? Do you think it was hard for him? What would you have done?

### **CULMINATING ACTIVITIES:**

- Make a poster to be used to publicize the Fair Housing Act.**
- Write an essay about the importance of the Fair Housing Act.**
- Create a skit educating people about the Fair Housing Act.**

**It is important that the culminating activities are undertaken in groups that are randomly assigned. If your school is integrated, this will give students the opportunity to talk about diversity and discrimination across racial and ethnic lines. If your school is not integrated, then random assignment will at least give students the benefit of working with classmates outside of their usual social grouping.**