

TEACHER COMPANION • MORE MESSAGES TO TEACH

Discussion Guide: High School

Companion to the High School Teacher Guide



Six ready-to-lead discussions that expand the “More messages to teach” page of the High School Teacher Guide, for advisory, health, civics, or ELA. Each one has a framing script, how to handle what students raise, a quick activity, and an extension. Six discussion posters are included.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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| 3 Beyond “Inspiration” | 4 Work & Opportunity |
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HOW IT WORKS

How to use this guide

Each discussion runs 10–15 minutes. High schoolers can handle nuance. Give them real questions, real examples, and room to disagree respectfully.

1. Frame it

Introduce the idea with the **SAY** lines and one real-world example.

2. Wrestle with it

Pair-share, then open discussion. Push for reasons, not just opinions.

3. Act on it

Close with a specific action or connection to a class project.

TIPS FOR GREAT CONVERSATIONS

- Set discussion norms: respond to ideas, not people; no real names in examples.
- Use anonymous polls or index cards for honest responses.
- Keep the focus on respect and belonging, not debate about people's worth.
- Bring in voices of people with disabilities (quotes, interviews, articles by self-advocates).
- Connect to curriculum: civics, biology, health, media studies.

IF A STUDENT IN YOUR CLASS HAS DOWN SYNDROME

- Talk with the family and student before your 3.21 week.
- Never ask a student to represent or explain all people with Down syndrome.
- If a student chooses to share their story, let them lead and set limits.
- Keep health, IEP, and 504 details private.

A SAMPLE WEEK OF TALKS

Mon

Ableism is everyday

Tue

Beyond "inspiration"

Wed

Work & opportunity

Thu

Nothing about us without us + Unified

Fri

Your digital footprint + Rock Your Socks

THE LINE TO REPEAT ALL WEEK



"Inclusion is a choice communities make, and you're part of the community."

MESSAGE

1

Ableism Is Everyday

Students define ableism and identify how it shows up in language, assumptions, and physical design.

15 MIN

ADVISORY OR CIVICS

INDEX CARDS

STEP BY STEP

1

Define it

Write the definition on the board.

SAY

Ableism is discrimination or bias against people with disabilities. It's usually not dramatic. It shows up in small, everyday ways.

2

Three places it hides

Give one example of each.

SAY

In **words** ("that's so r-word"), in **assumptions** ("they can't handle a real job"), and in **design** (a stage with only stairs).

3

Brainstorm

Students write one example of each on an index card: from school, media, or their community.

4

Share & sort

Collect cards and read a few anonymously. Sort into the three categories on the board.

5

Fix it

For three examples, the class proposes a realistic fix.



Ableism is everyday. So is changing it.

Poster #1 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"Isn't this just being politically correct?"

It's about accuracy and respect. If a word or design shuts people out, that's worth fixing.

"I've never seen ableism here."

Let's look closer. Are all our spaces, events, and teams accessible? Who's missing?

"Everyone uses those words."

Common doesn't mean harmless. Norms change when people decide they should.

QUICK ACTIVITY: ACCESSIBILITY SCAN

Pairs pick one space in the school (auditorium, gym, cafeteria) and list any barriers they notice. Share findings with the class.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Feed findings into the Inclusion Action Plan or the School-Wide 3.21 Campaign.

Home connection: Ask family: what accessible design do you notice in daily life (ramps, captions, curb cuts)?

MESSAGE
2

Beyond “Inspiration”

Students analyze “inspiration” framing and learn what respectful representation looks like.

15 MIN

ELA OR MEDIA STUDIES

TWO TEACHER-WRITTEN HEADLINES

STEP BY STEP

- 1 Compare headlines**
 Project two headlines you’ve written: “Heartwarming: Teen With Down Syndrome Goes to Prom” vs. “Senior Class President Plans Record-Breaking Prom.”

SAY
 What’s different about how these frame the person?
- 2 Name the pattern**
 Introduce the idea.

SAY
 “Inspiration” framing treats ordinary life, like going to school, working, or dating, as remarkable just because someone has a disability. It’s often well-meant, but it centers how *others* feel.
- 3 Why it matters**
 Discuss: how might it feel to be called inspiring for doing ordinary things?
- 4 Better framing**
 Groups rewrite an inspiration headline to focus on the person’s actions, voice, and accomplishments.
- 5 Share**
 Read rewrites aloud. What changed?



Representation, not inspiration.

Poster #2 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

“But it IS inspiring!”

Admiration for real accomplishments is great. The question is whether we’d praise anyone else for the same thing.

“So we can’t share positive stories?”

We absolutely can! Just let the person be the main character, in their own words.

“Isn’t any attention good?”

Attention that reinforces stereotypes can make it harder for people to be seen as equals.

QUICK ACTIVITY: HEADLINE REWRITE

Each group rewrites one “inspiration” headline and one social caption. Post the best on the class wall.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Connects directly to the Media Literacy Project in the Activity Leader Guide.

♥ **Home connection:** Look for a news story about a person with a disability. How is it framed?

MESSAGE

3

Work & Opportunity

Students explore employment for adults with Down syndrome and what makes workplaces inclusive.

15 MIN

ADVISORY OR CAREER CLASS

BOARD

STEP BY STEP

1

Hook

Ask students about jobs they want.

SAY

What's a job you'd love to have someday? What would help you get it?

2

Reality check

Share the idea.

SAY

Adults with Down syndrome work in restaurants, offices, retail, hospitals, the arts, and their own businesses. Many more would work if given a real chance.

3

Barriers

Brainstorm: what gets in the way? (Assumptions, hiring processes, transportation, lack of support.)

4

What works

Brainstorm what inclusive employers do: clear training, job coaches, flexible roles, and treating employees as full team members.

5

Local link

Which local businesses might already be doing this? Which could?



Everyone deserves a shot.

Poster #3 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"Isn't it charity to hire them?"

Not at all. Inclusive employers hire because people do the job well. Many report strong reliability and team morale.

"They can't do complex jobs."

Some jobs fit, some don't, same as for anyone. The key is matching strengths to roles.

"What can I do about it? I'm a student."

Plenty: advocate at your part-time job, support inclusive businesses, and spread the word.

QUICK ACTIVITY: INCLUSIVE JOB POSTING

Groups rewrite a sample job posting so it's clearer and more welcoming to applicants with disabilities.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Connect to the Show Up for 3.21 Business Outreach activity.

Home connection: Ask family: has your workplace ever hired people with disabilities? What was it like?

MESSAGE

4

Nothing About Us Without Us

Students learn the disability rights principle of self-determination and apply it to school decisions.

12 MIN

CIVICS OR ADVISORY

BOARD

STEP BY STEP

1

The phrase

Write it on the board.

SAY

“Nothing about us without us” is a motto from the disability rights movement. It means people should be included in the decisions that affect them.

2

History

Share briefly.

SAY

Disability rights activists pushed for laws like the ADA in 1990. They didn’t wait for others to speak for them.

3

Apply it

Scenario: a school plans an “inclusion week” without asking any students with disabilities. What might go wrong?

4

Our school

Where are decisions made at our school (student council, event planning, clubs)? Who’s at the table?

5

Commit

Students name one way to include more voices in a decision they’re part of.



Nothing about us without us.

Poster #4 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

“It’s easier to just plan it ourselves.”

It might be faster, but it’s more likely to miss what actually matters to people.

“What if they don’t want to be involved?”

That’s their choice. The point is making sure they’re genuinely invited.

“Does this apply to other groups?”

Definitely. It’s a principle for anyone affected by a decision.

QUICK ACTIVITY: SEAT AT THE TABLE

Students map one school decision: who decides, who’s affected, and who’s missing from the table.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Require every Inclusion Action Plan team to include students with disabilities in planning.



Home connection: Talk with family about a decision made about you without asking you.

MESSAGE

5

Unified Is Better

Students learn about unified sports and inclusive clubs as models where everyone participates as equals.

12 MIN

ADVISORY OR PE

BOARD OR SLIDE

STEP BY STEP

1

Define unified

Share it.

SAY

Unified sports and clubs bring students with and without intellectual disabilities together as teammates: same team, same practices, same goal.

2

Why it works

Discuss: what changes when you're on the same team instead of just in the same building?

3

Our school

Does our school have unified teams, clubs, or activities? Who participates?

4

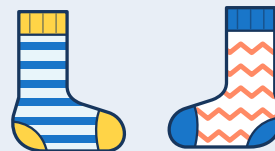
Brainstorm

If you could start one unified activity, what would it be? (Sport, band, art, robotics, service.)

5

Commit

Could any idea become a real proposal for student council or athletics?



Teammates, not helpers.

Poster #5 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"Isn't that less competitive?"

Unified teams do compete, and often in organized leagues. Competition and inclusion aren't opposites.

"I'd just be a helper."

In unified sports, you're a teammate. Everyone plays, and everyone contributes.

"Our school doesn't have one."

Then you could be the one to start it. Organizations like Special Olympics support schools that want to.

QUICK ACTIVITY: PITCH A UNIFIED CLUB

Groups create a 60-second pitch for a new unified activity, including name, activity, and how to recruit.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Contact your athletics director or a local Special Olympics program about unified options.



Home connection: Ask family: what team or club made you feel like you belonged?

MESSAGE

6

Your Digital Footprint

Students consider consent and dignity when posting about others, and build a class posting code.

12 MIN

ADVISORY OR HEALTH

SAMPLE SCENARIOS

STEP BY STEP

1

Hook

Ask for a show of hands.

SAY

Has anyone ever regretted something posted about them? Or something they posted about someone else?

2

The pattern

Describe it without showing real videos.

SAY

Some viral “reaction” videos film people with disabilities without their consent. They’re sometimes framed as cute or funny, and they follow people forever.

3

Consent + dignity

Discuss the two tests: Did they agree? Does it show them with dignity?

4

Write the code

The class writes a 5-rule “posting code” for posting about anyone.

5

Apply it

The code becomes the checklist for your School-Wide 3.21 Campaign posts.



Consent and dignity, every post.

Poster #6 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

“It’s public, so it’s fair game.”

Legal isn’t the same as respectful. Would you want that standard applied to you?

“But I’d be sharing something nice.”

Great instinct! Just ask first, and let them see it before you post.

“Everyone films everything.”

Which is why the people who ask first stand out.

QUICK ACTIVITY: POST OR PAUSE

Read five quick scenarios. Students vote POST or PAUSE and justify their answer.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Post the class posting code by the door and in your campaign materials.

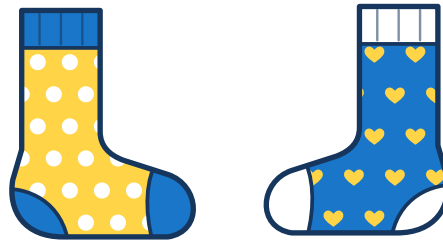


Home connection: Create a family posting agreement together.

Discussion posters

Print on cardstock, cut in half, and post the week's topic. The question at the bottom works as a warm-up or exit ticket. ✂

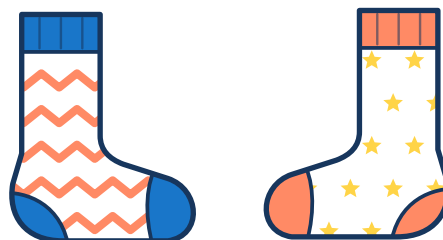
POSTER 1 · ABLEISM IS EVERYDAY



Ableism is everyday. So is changing it.

Where do you see ableism in words, assumptions, or design?

POSTER 2 · BEYOND “INSPIRATION”



Representation, not inspiration.

Is this story about the person, or about how others feel about them?

Discussion posters

Print on cardstock, cut in half, and post the week's topic. The question at the bottom works as a warm-up or exit ticket. ✂

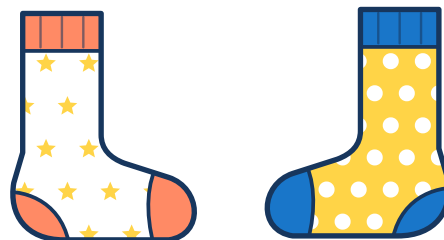
POSTER 3 · WORK & OPPORTUNITY



Everyone deserves a shot.

What makes a workplace truly inclusive?

POSTER 4 · NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US



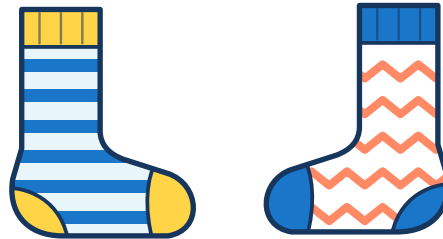
Nothing about us without us.

Whose voices are missing when decisions get made?

Discussion posters

Print on cardstock, cut in half, and post the week's topic. The question at the bottom works as a warm-up or exit ticket. ✂

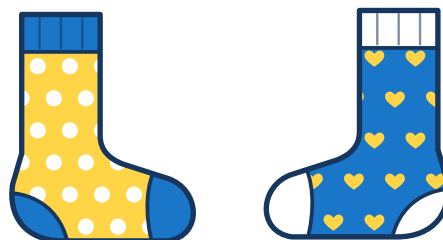
POSTER 5 · UNIFIED IS BETTER



Teammates, not helpers.

What would a truly unified school look like?

POSTER 6 · YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT



Consent and dignity, every post.

Would you want this posted about you forever?