



## LESSON PLAN

### **Middle School Lesson Plan: Discrimination in the Workplace**

#### Objectives

- Students will recognize instances of discrimination since September 11, particularly in the workplace, against Arabs, Arab-Americans, Muslims and those seeming to look like Arabs or Muslims.
- Students will understand the concepts behind Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and how United States law addresses instances of discrimination in the workplace.
- Students will have a broadened appreciation of the diverse ethnic communities in the United States.

#### Procedures/Suggested Activities

- Pre-reading discussion: What is discrimination? What are pre-conceived notions we have of Arab-Americans and Muslims? Have a classroom brainstorm session and record ideas on the blackboard/large piece of white paper at the front of the room. Based on these ideas, discuss myths about Arab-Americans and Muslims that exist as “communal knowledge” in American society. What is incorrect in these myths?
- Pass out handout explaining Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and definitions of key words within the document. This will aid to introduce the concept of law as it practically relates to an issue, discrimination, with which they are familiar.
- Activity 1 (individual): Matching. Provide the students with Handout 1, and have them label the provided examples of workplace discrimination against Arabs/Arab-Americans and Muslims based on the eight examples provided in Title VII:

“R” for race,

“C” for color,

“G” for gender,

“N” for national origin,

“RL” for religion,

“A” for age,

“D” for disability,

“CS” for citizenship status.

*Note: not all of the examples will be applicable in the cases provided.*

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- Activity 2 (pairs): Put the students in pairs and ask them to together come up with examples of discrimination in their own environment-at school, their religious establishment, conversations, at home, etc. Also have them talk about why that particular act of discrimination is wrong and what the positive values are in the persons or groups being discriminated against. The latter discussion will remind the students of previous discussion on Arab Americans and Arab culture. Ask them to present to the group their findings and put their ideas up on the board, both of the examples of discrimination and the values that can be found in diverse environments.
  - Activity 3 (group): Divide the classroom into groups of 3 or 4. Using the examples provided, have them role-play discrimination in the workplace. After each group presents, briefly discuss what they felt, learned, and how the situation could have gone differently.

***Note to teacher:***

*On classroom management:* During the group role-playing activity, be sensitive to repeatedly ostracized and picked-on students by not choosing them to play the role of the discriminated against Arab or Muslim American. Rather, be careful to choose students who are mature and confident enough not to feel personally hurt by the exercise.

*On concepts to be emphasized:* Depending on the academic level of your middle school students, you may wish to elaborate more or less on the legal nature of Title VII. For example, within Activity 3, encourage students to understand the ambivalence of words used in Handout 2 such as “allegedly” and “apparently”. If you wish to utilize the actual law, you will find it at: <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/vii.html>. Priority, however, should be made to create an innate understanding of the concepts behind the law.

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## Handout 1

### Discrimination in the Workplace

#### Key Terms

**bias:** an opinion that is slanted in such a way as to prevent impartial judgment, resulting in prejudice; an unfair act or policy stemming from this prejudice.

**civil rights:** rights guaranteed to individuals by the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights to protect people's freedoms, such as the freedom of speech, the freedom to practice religion, to vote, to have equality before law, and to engage in political activity.

**discrimination:** the unfair treatment or preference for people based on individual and/or group characteristics rather than on personal merit. This includes discrimination by individuals, and those that are established by policies, laws, or institutions.

**harassment:** actions or words that create an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment, unreasonably interferes with work performance, or negatively affects employment opportunities.

**hate crime:** a criminal offense committed against a person or property that is motivated by the offender's bias against a race, religion, or ethnic group. Such crimes include physical assault, vandalism or destruction of property, and even intimidation through threatening words or conduct that causes others to have a reasonable fear of bodily harm (*Arab American Encyclopedia*, UXL Gale Group, 2000, p 194).

**human rights:** the innate rights and freedoms of all individuals; set of declared human rights in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. Article 1 of this declaration states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

**national origin:** a person's connection to a particular national group. This may include biological, cultural, and/or linguistic factors. It is unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an employee because of his or her direct ties to a particular national group or because of any association he or she may have with that group.

**prejudice:** unjustified prejudgments about individuals or groups, usually resulting in negative opinions and feelings towards the individuals or groups in the forms of racism and elitism.

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**stereotype:** a generalization about a group of people, whether racial, ethnic, cultural or religious, that is misleading and often negative and derogatory.

### **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964:**

Federal law prohibits employment discrimination, codified in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act makes it illegal to discriminate against an employee or one seeking employment on the basis of any of eight categories: race, religion, color, age, sex, disability, national origin or citizenship status. Discriminatory practices include bias in hiring, job assignment, promotion, termination, compensation, and various types of harassment or hostility in the work environment. It is also illegal for an employer to penalize an employee for exercising his or her right to oppose and report any of these forms of discrimination. Retaliatory actions cannot legally merit demotion or dismissal.

Whether one is authorized to work or seek employment in the United States as a citizen, resident, or alien, U.S. law guards the right to equal opportunity. Except in the cases of some government contracts, a hiring employer may not discriminate based on citizenship status if the applicant has legal work authorization. An employer also may not discriminate against an applicant or employee based on his or her national origin, associations with persons of a national origin group, marriage to someone of a particular national origin, membership in an organization that promotes the interest of a national group or because his or her name is associated with a national origin group.

### How to respond to an incident or incidents of discrimination in the workplace

It is essential to understand that discrimination in the workplace is ILLEGAL. The most common difficulty in trying to punish the perpetrators of such discrimination is the lack of knowledge among workers of their rights, and of the steps that they should take when an incident occurs. It is important that an employee who experiences discrimination or other employees who witness an act of discrimination keep a detailed record of dates, times, and actions. A record of what occurs is crucial to proving that discrimination in the workplace occurred.

It is also important for employees to learn their employer's policy on harassment and the procedures to follow when a violation happens. If possible, an employee should follow these procedures immediately after an incident occurs. In some cases where the hostile work environment involves an employee's superiors or others who are responsible for enforcing penalties, it is advisable to consult the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) to obtain legal advice and/or to file a complaint.

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## Handout 2

### Discrimination in the Workplace

The following incidents were reported to the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and by news organizations in the months following September 11, 2001. Cut along the lines to make incident cards for each pair/group to discuss as they prepare for activities 2 and 3.

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**September – Rochester, NY:** An Arab-American contractor received daily threats and verbal assaults by coworkers after September 11. Examples include, “Let’s kill all the Arabs we find here,” “We’re going to kill you and send you back where you belong,” and “We should kill all Arabs starting with the ones here.”

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**September – Alexandria, VA:** An American of Moroccan descent working in a department store faced discrimination and harassment from two of his coworkers. After September 11, the two began calling him, “Moroccan terrorist” and “Osama bin Laden’s cousin,” among other things. They engage in anti-Muslim hate speech as well, calling them “pigs” and “terrorists.” They openly and often express their wish to “kill them all.”

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**September – Cupertino, CA:** A Muslim high school senior working at a fast-food restaurant was the repeated target of bias jokes from both his coworkers and his manager. At first, coworkers taunted him, asking him why his “cousins” destroyed the World Trade Center. Sometime later, his manager began testing him as well. “Hey, we’re going to have to check you for bombs,” the manager joked, often in front of other employees. Days later, he was fired after he accidentally threw away a paper cup that the manager was using. The management said he was let go for “performance deficiencies.” (*The Los Angeles Times*, 2/10/02)

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**September 19 – Phoenix, AZ:** An American Airlines pilot who worked with the airline company for the past four years was pulled off line and told that he cannot fly because a coworker allegedly reported that he was sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. After a background check was made, he was put back on and was then able to fly. However, the pilot was concerned that he would be terminated.

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**September 21 – Stockton, CA:** An engineering technician was fired after a series of discriminatory incidents at work. The day after the terrorist attacks, he was given a bad review, although just a week before he had received excellent reviews. That same afternoon he was handed a spreadsheet and asked to maintain and log his activities every hour of the day. No other employee was asked to do this. Finally, his manager terminated him, citing budgetary issues as the reason.

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**September 26 – Houston, TX:** A Palestinian anesthesiologist working at a medical college was assisting three physicians in the operating room during surgery when one of them began to complain about Islam and Palestinians. When the anesthesiologist told them that he himself was a Palestinian Muslim, an argument ensued. The outspoken physician ordered the anesthesiologist out of the room. A replacement anesthesiologist was paged. A nurse and doctor present reported the physician’s behavior to the in-charge nurse and Vice President of the hospital.

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**October 20 – Tinlinville, KY:** An Indian-American employee worked at a restaurant for almost three months. A fellow employee interrogated him with questions such as, “Where are you from? You don’t look like an Indian! Are you from those people?” The employee complained to his manager and showed him his social security card for verification of his citizenship. The next day, he left work because he was upset. The manager then fired the employee for leaving work without permission.

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**October 24 – Wilmington, NC:** A nurse recently converted to Islam and came to work wearing the *hijab*. A doctor called her to his office and said, “You’re being offensive to me and to my clients.” She talked to the head manager who assured her not to worry, that they would discuss it the next day. The next morning, the head manager told her, “I can’t ask you to leave and it’s not legal to fire you, but if you want to leave you can.” He also told her, “If you don’t cover your head, everything will be OK.”

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**December – Agoura Hills, CA:** A music store employee told his Arab-American colleague, “We have to wrap all of you and send you to camps.” This statement was made before the office director, who laughed out loud at the remark. The employee feared losing his job.

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**December – Detroit, MI:** An Arab-American was employed with a high-tech valet company for two years, including one year as a supervisor. According to his claims, he never had any problems with management, or any other employee. In December, he was accused of disliking the United States and suspected of having terrorist ties. It was at this time that he was terminated from his position and asked to leave his work immediately.

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**January 8 – Washington, D.C.:** An Afghani janitor at a Georgetown restaurant began facing harassment from the restaurant's chef, who nicknamed him, "Taliban" and spoke to him in offensive tones. The entire week before he was terminated, he was stripped of his working hours. Finally, the chef fired the Afghani janitor for allegedly having an argument with the restaurant's manager.

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**January 30 – Lawrenceville, GA:** A Muslim-American teacher at a daycare center, who wears the *hijab* (head scarf worn by some Muslim women to cover their hair and necks), was fired after the center's director alleged that she discriminated against her students. The director apparently felt as though the teacher deferred to the Muslim children and showed unfairness towards the non-Muslim students. The teacher denied these accusations. She had taught at the school for two years and never before faced such criticism for her performance. However, during Ramadan (a religious even occurring in the ninth lunar month, during which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset) the director mentioned to the teacher that three parents had complained to her, feeling uncomfortable that the teacher was fasting during the day.