

# Jane Elliot and Jonathan Kozol

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover racial and class differences in schools, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Jane Elliott Experiment
2. Jonathan Kozol Reproduction Theory

## 1. JANE ELLIOTT EXPERIMENT

The **Jane Elliott Experiment** studied racial and class differences in schools. Jane Elliot conducted an experiment in which she divided her classroom into two groups, students with brown eyes and students with blue eyes. She told the whole class that the students with brown eyes were better students--they were more gifted and smarter. Students with blue eyes, however, she said, were less smart than their brown-eyed counterparts; they didn't achieve as much as the students with brown eyes. She also reversed these roles in later class sessions.

### IN CONTEXT

Why did she do this? She did this because of the context of the time during which she was teaching. The Martin Luther King assassination had occurred, and a student asked her why he was assassinated, which opened up a discussion of race and racism. When she asked her students about it, she was shocked to encounter some of the prejudiced attitudes that her students had.

Therefore, she divided the students into the two groups--blue-eyed and brown-eyed--as a way to make artificial distinctions that didn't have true meaning, to show them how those distinctions can cultivate their own meanings.

Before long, students started to behave differently with respect to what Elliott had told them. The brown-eyed students started to act differently, acting superior and entitled. Conversely, by the end of the day, the blue-eyed students were behaving very defeated and submissive. Elliott eventually ended the experiment and explained to them that their resulting behavior was what can happen when you label somebody a certain way. Even though the distinctions themselves don't actually mean anything, the labels and the categories have meaning.



**BIG IDEA**

Jane Elliott's experiment reveals the extent to which people can become victims of **self-fulfilling prophecies**, which are situations where you expect something to happen, either to yourself or to others, and--knowingly or not--you encourage that outcome or behavior, thereby creating the outcome yourself.



HINT

Jane Elliott's experiments also reveal the symbolic interaction basis to human interaction, because the labels that were given went on to become things that were real--the students involved in the experiments constructed the differences through their interactions.



TERMS TO KNOW

### Jane Elliott Experiment

Jane Elliot, an American school teacher from Iowa, developed the blue-eyed/brown-eyed exercise to teach white third graders about racism. This experiment divided the class into privileges and disadvantages associated with eye color to mimic social privileges and disadvantages based on race.

### Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

A situation where you expect something to happen to yourself or others, and knowingly or not, encourage that outcome.

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## 2. JONATHAN KOZOL AND REPRODUCTION THEORY

Jonathan Kozol was a teacher, researcher, and education activist. As a teacher, he had the opportunity to experience school districts in the inner city and in suburban areas. He found that the inner city schools were filled with students with lower socioeconomic standing. The value of property around the schools was low because of the concentration of poor families, and since public schools get a lot of money from property taxes, the schools in the poor areas had very little property taxes coming in to support the school. In suburban areas, however, property taxes were much higher--families were wealthier and had a higher socioeconomic standing.

Therefore, Kozol observed huge disparities between suburban and city schools in terms of everyday teaching implements, like books and desks. Basic items needed to run the school were severely lacking in the city schools but were adequately supplied in the suburban schools. Kozol found this to be extremely unjust, and he became a researcher, going on to study different schools throughout cities in the country. He wrote a book called *Savage Inequalities*, where he documents these disparities in teaching resources between school districts and the different amounts of property taxes in each institutional setting.

Kozol was a teacher first and a sociologist and qualitative researcher second, and later, a traveling activist disseminating his findings.

Kozol's work supports what is called **reproduction theory**, or the idea that social institutions sustain or perpetuate the characteristics of a given social structure. For example, if you are a poor student and you go to a poor school, you'll likely end up being a poor person with little chance to succeed in life, and vice versa. Reproduction theory helps people to think about how the social institutions in society help to perpetuate and sustain the status quo.

## IN CONTEXT

The education system perpetuates the inequalities in society, specifically class divides. In some places there are emerging two-tiered education systems.

For example, in Chicago there is the CPS, or the Chicago Public School system, in addition to a whole wealth of other private schools that cater to students who don't want to go to the CPS, whose parents have the money to send their students elsewhere, to fancier, more specialized, expensive private schools.

Therefore, in Chicago, the issues with the two-tiered education system can be validated by reproduction theory, which purports that the two-tiered education system helps to reproduce class divides in society.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Jonathan Kozol Reproductive Theory

Jonathan Kozol, an American educator and activist, has extensively researched how schools operate to pass advantage and disadvantage on to children through a process called social reproduction.



### SUMMARY

Today you learned about the work of two educators who looked at racial and class differences in schools with respect to school funding, the **Jane Elliott experiment** and **Jonathan Kozol and reproduction theory**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



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