

IF THESE HALLS COULD TALK

Bonus Vignette: Race/Class and Trust

Written by Julie Garza-Withers



Meet the Cast:

Back Row: Jahmelia, Jon, Julie, Will, Marilyn, Maiv Ntxhiav (Sia) & Marc

Front Row: Joe, Tyanne, Leif, Lee Mun Wah, Vera, Carmela — in Berkeley, CA

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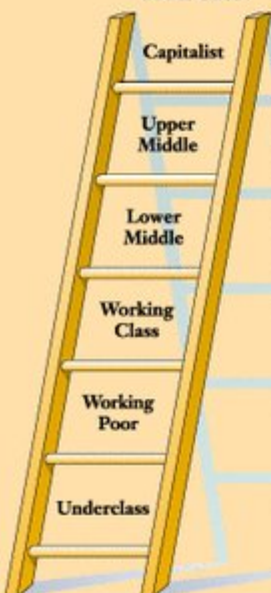
Questions for Homework & Journaling. A Facilitator's Guide



1. In your own words, define social class. What does it mean to have class privilege? How would you explain classism?
2. Explain why it is taboo to talk about money in the United States.
3. How are racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism about fear?
4. Leif says that people get angry and “shut down” during conversations about politics and race and tend to focus on solutions instead. Can you recall examples of what Leif is talking about from your own life?
5. Explain what Lee Mun Wah means when he says, “people of color and minorities learn to play both sides because their lives depend on it.” How might this be different for white people?
6. Tyanne says that working class and poor people worry about being “found out.” Jon replies, “Found out about what?” How would you rephrase what she is saying?
7. Tyanne says, “I try to pass, I try to look and act like people in higher education expect me to.” Carmela adds, “There’s a different expectation for how you’ll be able to speak and what you’ll be able to speak to.” What does it mean to “pass” in higher education? Is it the same experience for white people? How might it be a different experience for people of color? How do class and race influence who can pass and who cannot?

8. Joe shares that he does something in the LGBTQ community similar to passing called “self-editing” and suggests that “in order to function you’ve got to conform.” Imagine and describe the ways that Joe might have to conform in order to function.
9. Analyze the statement, “If they’re poor it’s their own fault because they don’t work hard enough.” How does this message impact poor and working class people?
10. Leif describes how in his family, “table manners were a huge thing” and describes several examples of how he was socialized to eat at the table and that he “tends to notice people’s table manners.” What inference can you make about Leif’s class background? How do you think you would feel eating a meal with Leif? What assumptions do people make about the table manners of people of color or poor and working class white people?
11. Jon says, “For me it’s the complete opposite. I’m kinda middle class but people have this expectation that I am poor.” Describe the reasons why others assume Jon is poor when he is not.
12. What conclusions can you draw from the discussion Jon and Leif have about class, race, and expectations? Why does Jon say, “It must be nice?”
13. Will describes how his parents gave him “the atmosphere and the environment to learn all the upper middle class and middle class language” and says he feels like “a different type of Black, I find my experience just to not really fit.” What does it mean to speak like middle and upper class people for Black men?

The U.S. Social Class Ladder



| Social Class | Education | Occupation | Income | Percentage of Population |
|---------------|--|--|----------------|--------------------------|
| Capitalist | Prestige university | Investors and heirs, a few executives | \$500,000+ | 1% |
| Upper Middle | College or university, often with postgraduate study | Professionals and upper managers | \$90,000+ | 14% |
| Lower Middle | At least high school; perhaps some college or apprenticeship | Semiprofessionals and lower managers, craftspeople, foremen | About \$40,000 | 30% |
| Working Class | High school | Factory workers, clerical workers, retail sales, low-paid craftspeople | About \$30,000 | 30% |
| Working Poor | Some high school | Laborers, service workers, low-paid salespeople | About \$18,000 | 22% |
| Underclass | Some high school | Unemployed and part-time, on welfare | About \$10,000 | 3% |

Source: Based on Gilbert, Dennis, and Joseph A. Kahl. *The American Class Structure: A New Synthesis*. 4th ed. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1993. Income estimates follow Duff, Christina. "Profiling the Aged: Fat Cats or Hungry Victims?" *Wall Street Journal*, September 28, 1995a: B1, B8.