



Title: Social Class & Fitting In

Grade: 8

Career Development Model:

Self-Awareness

Nebraska Career Readiness Standards:

- Utilizes technology
- Manages personal career development
- Attends to personal & financial wellbeing

Objective:

- Students will demonstrate awareness of the potential effects of social class.
- Students will evaluate the impact of cultural knowledge, cultural awareness and tolerance on career success.
- Students will consider the importance of civic duty/responsibility in their own community.

Materials and Supplies Needed:

- Abridged New York Times article about Della Mae Justice
- Sheets of notebook paper

Class Instructions:

1. Write the words “social class” on the board. Ask students to provide some definitions of social class. After you have placed several on the board, ask students how you can tell someone is from one social class as opposed to another. The goal is to capture some answers—clothes, styles, ways of talking, expectations, perceived morals—that mark one class from another.
2. Pass out the New York Times article on Della Mae Justice and have students read it. Ask them to pay attention to how it is that Della Mae always knew where she came from, and what effect this had on Della Mae and her work as a lawyer. Teachers should preview the article to define new terms before reading the article.
3. Discuss with students:
 - a. What did they notice about Della Mae’s experiences with class?
 - b. How did it impact her at work?
 - c. What does Della Mae think about moving between classes?
 - d. What were the symbols of class that she did not get or understand?

4. Break students into small groups of three or four. Ask the groups to take out a sheet of notebook paper and consider what they might do if they were in a situation similar to Della Mae? How would it make them feel? How would they deal with these feelings? OR Ask students to consider a time when they have been around people who were of a different social class than they were and it made them feel uncomfortable. Where were they? What type of people were they around? How did they feel specifically? What did they think the other people felt about them? What did they do?
5. Bring students back into a larger group to discuss what they wrote.
6. To conclude the activity, ask students how feeling uncomfortable might affect job performance or the ability to get certain jobs?

Credits/Sources:



"Making my Future Work: A College and Career Readiness Program", U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

<https://www.csuohio.edu/cehs/mmfw/making-my-future-work-0>

The New York Times

Up From the Holler: Living in Two Worlds, At Home in Neither; Class Matters

Tamar Lewin. *New York Times*. (Late Edition (East Coast)). New York, N.Y.: May 19, 2005. pg. A.14.
Edited/Abridged for this lesson

Della Mae Justice stands before the jury in the Pike County Courthouse, arguing that her client's land in Greasy Creek Hollow was illegally grabbed when the neighbors expanded their cemetery behind her home.

With her soft Appalachian accent, Ms. Justice leaves no doubt that she is a local girl, steeped in the culture of the old family cemeteries that dot the mountains here in East Kentucky. "I grew up in a holler, I surely did," she tells jurors as she lays out the boundary conflict.

Ms. Justice is, indeed, a product of the Appalachian coal-mining country where lush mountains flank rust-colored creeks, the hollows rising so steeply that there is barely room for a house on either side of the creeks. Her family was poor, living for several years in a house without indoor plumbing. Her father was absent; her older half-brother sometimes had to hunt squirrels for the family to eat. Her mother married again when Della was 9. But the stepfather, a truck driver, was frequently on the road, and her mother, who was mentally ill, often needed the young Della to care for her.

Ms. Justice was always hungry for a taste of the world beyond the mountains. Right after high school, she left Pike County, making her way through college and law school, spending time in France, Scotland and Ireland, and beginning a high-powered legal career. In just a few years she moved up the ladder from rural poverty to the high-achieving circles of the middle class.

Now, at 34, she is back home. But her journey has transformed her so thoroughly that she no longer fits in easily. Her change in status has left Ms. Justice a little off balance, seeing the world from two vantage points at the same time: the one she grew up in and the one she occupies now.

Far more than people who remain in the social class they are born to, surrounded by others of the same background, Ms. Justice is sensitive to the cultural significance of the cars people drive, the food they serve at parties, where they go on vacation—all the little clues that indicate social status. By every conventional measure, Ms. Justice is now solidly middle class, but she is still trying to learn how to feel middle class. Almost every time she expresses an idea, or explains herself, she checks whether she is being understood, asking, "Does that make sense?"

"I think class is everything, I really do," she said recently. "When you're poor and from a low socioeconomic group, you don't have a lot of choices in life. To me, being from an upper class is all about confidence. It's knowing you have choices, knowing you set the standards, knowing you have connections."

In Pikeville, the site of the Hatfield-McCoy feud (Ms. Justice is a Hatfield), memories are long and family roots mean a lot. Despite her success, Ms. Justice worries about what people might remember about her, especially about the time when she was 15 and her life with her mother and stepfather imploded in violence, sending her into foster care for a wretched nine months.

“I was always in the lowest socioeconomic group,” she said, “but foster care ratcheted it down another notch. I hate that period of my life, when for nine months I was a child with no family.”

While she was in foster care, Ms. Justice lived in one end of a double-wide trailer, with the foster family on the other end. She slept alongside another foster child, who wet the bed, and every morning she chose her clothes from a box of hand-me-downs. She was finally rescued when her father heard about her situation and called his nephew, Joe Justice.

Joe Justice took Della Mae in. She changed schools, changed address -- changed worlds. “The shock of going to live in wealth, with Joe and Virginia, it was like Little Orphan Annie going to live with the Rockefellers,” Ms. Justice said. “It was not easy. I was shy and socially inept. For the first time, I could have had the right clothes, but I didn’t have any idea what the right clothes were. I didn’t know much about the world, and I was always afraid of making a wrong move. When we had a school trip for chorus, we went to a restaurant. I ordered a club sandwich, but when it came with those toothpicks on either end, I didn’t know how to eat it, so I just sat there, staring at it and starving, and said I didn’t feel well.”

After graduating fifth in her law school class, Ms. Justice clerked for a federal judge, then joined Lexington’s largest law firm, where she put in long hours in hopes of making partner. She and her husband bought a townhouse, took trips, ate in restaurants almost every night and spent many Sunday afternoons at real estate open houses in Lexington’s elegant older neighborhoods. By all appearances, they were on the fast track.

But Ms. Justice still felt like an outsider. Her co-editors on the law review, her fellow clerks at the court and her colleagues at the law firm all seemed to have a universe of information that had passed her by. She saw it in matters big and small—the casual references, to Che Guevara or Mount Vesuvius, that meant nothing to her; the food at dinner parties that she would not eat because it looked raw in the middle.

“I couldn’t play Trivial Pursuit, because I had no general knowledge of the world,” she said. “And while I knew East Kentucky, they all knew a whole lot about Massachusetts and the Northeast. They all knew who was important, whose father was a federal judge. They never doubted that they had the right thing to say. They never worried about anything.”

Most of all, they all had connections that fed into a huge web of people with power. “Somehow, they all just knew each other,” she said.

“The norm is, people that are born with money have money, and people who weren’t don’t,” she said recently. “I know that. I know that just to climb the three inches I have, which I’ve not gone very far, took all of my effort. I have worked hard since I was a kid and I’ve done nothing but work to try and pull myself out.”

The class a person is born into, she said, is the starting point on the continuum. “If your goal is to become, on a national scale, a very important person, you can’t start way back on the continuum, because you have too much to make up in one lifetime. You have to make up the distance you can in your lifetime so that your kids can then make up the distance in their lifetime.”