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## DON'T TREAD ON ME: EXPLORING OPPRESSION

**Grades:** 6 and up

**Time:** 60-90 minutes

**Materials:** Oppression quotes and definitions; black/white board & chalk/markers; sets of oppression scenarios/photos (1 set per group – see below)

**Relevant Subjects:** Social Studies and Language Arts

1. Show students the quote: “No one is free when others are oppressed.” – Anonymous

Ask: “What do you think this quote means? What is it trying to say?”

2. Ask students “What exactly does oppression mean?” After you hear their answers, share a dictionary definition, such as the one below:

Oppression: 1. unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power. 2. something that oppresses, esp. in being an unjust or excessive exercise of power. 3. a sense of being weighted down in body or mind (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed.)

Ask students what that definition means to them.

3. Ask students if any of them have ever experienced someone using an “unjust or cruel exercise of their power or authority” over them before. How did that make them feel?

4. Ask students to share some examples of oppression. Write down all responses.

5. Ask: “Do we all agree on what constitutes oppression and who gets oppressed? Why not?”

6. Share with students that you're all going to look at some different scenarios and photos and decide which ones demonstrate oppression and which don't – and why.

7. Pass out to groups of about four students each a series of written scenarios and photos depicting various types of oppression. Have students in each group decide which scenarios and photos demonstrate oppression and which don't. Encourage students to come to consensus in their group, but let them know that it's not mandatory.

Have each group divide the scenarios/photos into two columns: These demonstrate oppression. These do not demonstrate oppression.

Categories of Oppression Scenarios/Photos from which you might create your scenarios/find photos might include:

Racism	Child labor	Sweatshops	Factory Farmed animals	"Free range" farmed animals
Gay-bashing	People as sex objects	Slavery	Migrant workers	Housing discrimination
Vivisection	Domestic abuse	Reproductive laws	Animals in entertainment	Bullying
Gender inequity	Chained animals	Affirmative action	Urban sprawl	Therapy/Assistive animals

8. After each group has finished (or time has elapsed), have students quickly visit the working areas of the other groups to see which examples they chose for each column.

9. Ask students to discuss which scenarios/photos demonstrate oppression and which don't and why. Have their views changed after listening to what others chose?

10. Ask students to consider the question: "How does my own life contribute to oppression?" Ask them to each write down 3-5 examples of how they're contributing in some way to the oppression of others, and then have volunteers share.

11. Lead a brief discussion on the topic: "Where do our tendencies to oppress others come from?"

12. Ask students to create a list of actions that everyone can take to promote justice and equality.

**Activity by Marsha Rakestraw (HECP Graduate)**