



“I love my human rights” series:

Teresa Pocock's story

Classroom conversation guide

Introduction

This guide has been prepared to assist classrooms from grades 4 to 9 to explore themes in BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner's "I love my human rights" video series. The video series uses storytelling as a tool to help personalize complex human rights concepts and encourage empathy and action. In Teresa Pocock's video, she shares the importance of self-advocacy and the right of people with intellectual disabilities to live where they choose. Use the questions provided to explore the video's themes.

To consider in planning the activity

- These questions touch on subjects that may bring up difficult emotions for students who have experienced ableism, have family members or friends with disabilities or experience a similar lack of power in decisions about where they live. You may wish to use some of the questions as journal prompts, so that students can reflect on them individually before discussing them.
- Think about ways to welcome, normalize and support self-regulation of a range of emotional reactions to Teresa's story, including emotions such as discomfort, fear, curiosity, or even superiority.
- Adapt these activities, questions and resources to meet the needs of the students you are working with.
- While preparing for this activity, consider identifying which of these questions could be omitted from the conversation or modified to avoid putting students at risk.
- Check in with students who may be uniquely impacted before the activity to let them know about the content and see how they feel about participating in the activity. Follow up with them after the activity and offer to connect them with the school counselor or other school or community-based supports if needed. Information about the Kids Help Phone and other supports are provided in the Community Resource section.

Getting started

Take steps to ensure that students feel safe and comfortable to express themselves:

1. Tell students that as humans we like to hear about other people's stories. We often make connections with these stories, which may cause us to experience similar feelings to the person in the story, especially if their experience reminds us of something that has happened to us or someone we care about. If this happens, you can take a break or do something to take care of yourself. Help students identify together some methods of self care that are appropriate for your classroom, such as getting a drink of water, paying attention to your breathing or taking a break.

2. Tell the group that everyone has a responsibility to create a space that is as safe as possible, especially for those students who may have or be close to similar experiences as those shared in the video. They will consider ways to do this through a community agreement.
3. Highlight that creating a safe space does not mean that the space will be comfortable for everyone. Some students may feel uncomfortable when they think about Teresa and other peoples' experiences with ableism. Some examples of discomfort may be feeling embarrassed or ashamed for having been unaware of these experiences. It is okay and often helpful to feel uncomfortable in this way because it can help us to think about things that we can do to make things better.
4. The purpose of this discussion is to listen to and learn from one another. Ask participants to help develop a community agreement to create a space where people show mutual respect and listen attentively to what others share. Examples may include
 - listening actively
 - being present
 - sharing only your own story
 - opening your mind to learning new ideas
 - showing gratitude when people share their experience
 - knowing you have the right not to share your story
 - respecting confidentialityOnce the community agreement is developed, the group can come up with ways to ensure that the guidelines are followed and respected. For more information about creating a community agreement, see [Safer space policy/Community Agreements: The Anti-Oppression Network](#).
5. Identify ways for everyone to participate and to be heard. For example, consider taking turns speaking around a circle or pausing from time to time to invite those who have not yet spoken to have the opportunity to contribute.
6. Take breaks. Go outside or stop for a movement break. Pause for snacks. Consider carrying out the conversation over several days.

Concepts covered

Teresa shares how she and her family fought for her right to make her own decisions about where she lives. She shares that she was told she couldn't make her own decisions about where she lived or who looked after her. Her story reflects the ongoing struggles many people with intellectual disabilities face in their fight for the right to live in community after BC closed large institutions housing people with intellectual disabilities in 1996. If students are not familiar with intellectual disabilities, institutionalization, and community living, allocate sufficient time to introduce them or provide opportunities for deeper learning. Resources on these topics are listed at the end of this conversation guide.

Pre-viewing activity

Invite students to think about and/or share examples of decisions that impacted their day today. Which decisions did they make on their own? Which decisions did they make with their caregivers? Which decision did their caregivers make for them? Give a few examples to get the list started.

Viewing the video

Point out the closed captioning and transcript options to assist students in listening to Teresa's story.

Open the conversation



Choose a few of these questions that will work with your students. Begin with questions that will ease students into the conversation in an emotionally safe manner.

- What did you think while watching the video?
- What feelings did you have while watching the video?
- Did you find anything surprising in Teresa's story?
- Teresa describes the nursing home as “not nice.” What do you imagine it might have been like for Teresa to live in a nursing home?
- The video helps you get to know a bit about Teresa’s life in Vancouver. What are some things that are important to Teresa about her life in Vancouver?
- Teresa talks about herself as capable. What do you think this word means? Why do you think the word capable is important to Teresa?
- Teresa calls herself a self-advocate. How did Teresa advocate for herself?
- Teresa shows strong advocacy skills in defending her right to choose where she lives, but also says “the community is helping us” when she talks about her life in Vancouver. Which members of the community are included in the video? In what ways might they support Teresa or others to choose where they live?

Deepen the conversation

Choose a few of these questions that will work with your students.

- Look at the list that you brainstormed before watching the video. Who makes these decisions for you now? How much are you included in the decisions? How does it feel? How do you imagine it will feel to make these decisions yourself?
- Teresa’s story is about the right to decide where to live. What are other decisions that people with intellectual disabilities might want to be free to make themselves?
- Can you think of movies or television shows you have watched that have people with intellectual disabilities in them? What messages about people with intellectual disabilities did you hear in these movies or shows? How true do you think these messages are?
- Teresa and her family wanted the Ontario government to apologize for saying Teresa couldn’t make her own decisions. Why do you think this apology was important to Teresa?
- You’ve probably heard of racism or sexism. Ableism is a similar term that refers to treating people with disabilities differently in a harmful way, such as leaving them out or making it hard for them to be included. What are some examples of ableism you’ve noticed or experienced?
- Teresa describes herself as “pretty amazing”. Many words about disability do the opposite by referring to the disability as a barrier or burden or something a person suffers from. What words do you think we should use to talk about people with disabilities?
- According to BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, barriers for people with disabilities might include how we build things, the rules we make, the technology we use, or even our attitudes. What are some barriers you can think of that make things hard for people with disabilities and how can these barriers be removed or prevented?
- In BC, individuals who have experienced discrimination in employment, housing, or services (such as stores, restaurants or a doctor’s office) can make a complaint to the BC Human Rights Tribunal. The video states that the largest number of complaints made to the Tribunal are made by people with disabilities. Why do you think this might be?
- The video concludes with the sentence, “We are inspired by champions like Teresa.” People with disabilities often say they don’t want to be inspiring. They say it sends the message that people with



disabilities shouldn't be expected to do normal things everyone else can do. This makes it harder for people with disabilities to get the services and supports they need to help them do the normal things everyone else can do. Do you think this video makes this mistake? Why or why not?

Learning more

Choose from these questions and/or resources below to guide continued learning or discussion.

- Teresa talks about loving her human rights, especially the right to choose where she wants to live. Is the freedom to choose where to live a human right? Is it a right for people with disabilities?
- In 1996, BC was the first province in Canada to close large institutions for people with intellectual disabilities. How was this decision made? What impact did it have on people with disabilities living in these institutions? Since 1996, have other provinces made similar decisions?
- Are there adults with intellectual disabilities living in nursing homes in BC today? What is this experience like and why is it decided this is the best option for them?
- What supports and services are available to help people with intellectual disabilities fight for their rights like Teresa?

Bring the conversation to a close

- Invite students to revisit the kinds of decisions they enjoy making for themselves or are looking forward to making for themselves when they are adults.
- Summarize the key ideas in the discussion that reflect a recognition and commitment to protecting the human rights of people with disabilities.
- Invite students to choose one of the decisions from their list to contribute to a visual collection of rights around the phrase "I love my rights!"

Resources

To learn more about human rights and how they are protected in BC

- BCOHRC video: [What are human rights?](#)
- BCOHRC video: [B.C.'s human rights system](#)

To learn more about human rights for people with intellectual disabilities:

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities](#) (video)
- [A right to housing for all: Ensuring a human rights approach inclusive of all persons with developmental disabilities](#) (report)

To learn more about self-advocacy and supports for people with intellectual disabilities in BC

- [Self advocate blog: voices of adults with down syndrome](#) (blog)
- [Down Syndrome International self-advocacy guide](#) (pdf)
- [Community Living BC](#) (website)
- [Inclusion BC](#) (website) and [Inclusion Canada](#) (website)
- [Canadian Down Syndrome Society](#) (website)

To learn more about the history of institutionalization in BC:

- [Truths of Institutionalization in Canada](#)
- [Institutions and People with Intellectual Disabilities](#)
- [BC's Institutions](#)



To learn more about ableism:

- [Ableism 101: What it is, what it looks like, and what we can do to fix it](#)
- [Rewrite the rules - BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner \(bchumanrights.ca\)](#)

Additional resources:

- For support setting up a community agreement: [Safer space policy/Community Agreements: The Anti-Oppression Network](#)
- For text or phone support: [Kids Help Phone](#)

To learn more about other people's stories about human rights

- Video series - [BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner \(bchumanrights.ca\)](#)

