

ENVISIONING DIGNITY

Students/participants use philosopher John Rawl's philosophical construct of the Veil of Ignorance as a means of exploring the importance of dignity in human society.

AGES 10+ | TIME 30-45 MIN

MATERIALS

Copies of the [Envisioning Dignity worksheet](#) for all students
Pen or pencil

DIRECTIONS

PONDER: Students/participants close their eyes and use their imaginations to envision the following situation: *You are not born yet, but you will be soon. You have no idea which family you will be a part of, which country you will live in, what your physical and intellectual capabilities will be, whether you will be a boy or a girl, rich or poor, healthy or sickly, in or out of a conflict zone, physically safe or unsafe, etc.*

CREATE: Review the worksheet with students/participants and ask them to fill it in. Students/participants Think/Pair/Share when they are done. The facilitator writes students/participants ideas on the board.

CONNECT: Tell students what their situation will be when they are born. As you give them the designations, ask them to write them down (note: these percentages roughly represent the global situation).

- **SEX:** All students/participants in the front half of the room are girls. Those in the back are boys.
- **MONEY:** One student/participant closest to you is a billionaire. One other student closest to you is comfortably wealthy with a net worth of \$750,000. The next 20% have a net worth between \$10,000 and \$100,000. The 50% at the back of the room have a net worth less than \$2,200. Everyone else is worth between \$2,200—\$10,000 (note: these statistics roughly mirror the global wealth distribution. Source: Credit Suisse Global Wealth Database).



- **EDUCATION:** The 85% closest to you can read and write. The rest cannot. The 7% closest to you will have a college degree. The rest will not.
- **SHELTER:** The 80% closest to you will have shelter. The rest will not.
- **FOOD:** One person farthest from you will be dying of starvation. The next 10% farthest from you are malnourished. The 40% closest to you will be overweight. The next 15% are obese. The rest are normal weight.
- **WATER:** The 10% farthest from you do not have access to safe and clean water. Everyone else does.
- **CONTINENT:** 60% are in Asia, 15% are in Africa, 10% are in Europe, 10% in Latin America and Caribbean, 5% are in North America
- **FRAGILITY, VIOLENCE, AND CONFLICT:** The 30% on the left side of the room live in countries impacted by fragility, violence, and conflict. The rest do not.
- **INTERNET:** The 50% at the back of the room do not have access to the internet. The rest do.

REFLECT: Ask students/participants to reflect on their birth designations and return to their worksheet. Hold a class discussion. Ask them,

- How would you update your worksheet to make sure you can live the life that you envision for yourself?
- What role does dignity play when envisioning the life that you want, how you want to be treated, and how humans treat each other?
- Why is it critical to consider dignity when envisioning the way humans treat each other?

EXTENSIONS OR GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

- Students/participants can learn more about John Rawls and his Veil of Ignorance.
- Students/participants can explore the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and make connections between it and the exercise they did.

Connect with our Global Dignity community and explore our Teaching Dignity resources and curriculum at [GLOBALDIGNITY.ORG](https://www.globaldignity.org).