ARCHIE BUNKER'S NEIGHBORHOOD

An Interactive Role Play
Compiled by Tina Crayton and Michael Wickey
Introduction
Archie Bunker's Neighborhood

GOALS
The main goal of Archie Bunker’s Neighborhood is to create an experiential role play that fosters an understanding of what it feels like to be oppressed and discriminated against, as well as what it feels like to be in the power position in society. In short, society is recreated in this role play. Other goals:
- To create an arena for an open forum to discuss how oppressions negatively effect our communities
- To allow an open forum for questions and possible answers
- To provide an experience where people can think and learn
- To foster real life experience of oppression and power, thereby giving way to an understanding of these dynamics
- To empower people to make a step toward creating a better society and making changes in their own lives

MATERIALS
Masking tape, scissors, index cards, construction paper, sheriff's badges, play money, file labels, property price list

ACTORS
3-4 sheriffs, 1-2 housing authorities, 1-2 building inspectors, 1-2 jailers

FACILITATORS
Archie Bunker's Neighborhood is a highly interactive exercise. It is a difficult exercise to facilitate because people are confronted with their own prejudices and biases. It can be volatile if not handled in an appropriate fashion. It is necessary that each facilitator examine the issues surrounding oppressions before even attempting to facilitate this program. It is important that all facilitators—especially if you have never done this before—discuss how they want the role play to develop. Make sure you have set goals for the outcome of the discussion.

Putting Archie Bunker's Neighborhood into Action

Part I. The Set-up

FLOOR PLAN
1) Create a neighborhood by outlining a space with masking tape. The space should be big enough to hold the number of participants, but tight enough that they feel cramped.
2) You will need a room that is large enough to facilitate this role play. You need to accommodate the number of people who will participate, and you need to keep in mind that the facilitators will need to be able to move around the entire neighborhood.
3) Make sure that you have totally set up the room before the participants arrive. As soon as people walk into the room, the facilitators should be in their roles.
4) The groups are divided up based upon societies statistics. You can use real ethnic groups, animals, colors from a box of crayons or whatever division is best going to get the point across.
5) Make sure that the majority group has the largest amount of space, and then allow each group less and less space based upon their places in society.
JAIL
The jail needs to be an area off to the side that is not directly attached to the community. It can be made up of chairs, or you can also map it off with masking tape as well. The jail should also be close and cramped.

OFFICE OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY
This person needs a table and a chair. They can have their permits and all paperwork sitting on the table. They need to have the property price list posted on a wall behind them. They also have the extra money because they make change when people come to purchase property.

BUILDING INSPECTOR
This person does not have an established office. They meander around the community inspecting the objects that people are building. When the housing authority gives them a building inspection form, they then go to that community and check the building against safety codes. They work closely with the housing authority.

Part II: The Characters

All characters need to have some type of sheriff badge. They can all use the same type. These badges represent the authorities in society.

SHERIFFS
The sheriffs have the strongest presence in the community. They are responsible for keeping the peace and making sure that each group stays in line. They highlight both the covert and overt natures of oppression and prejudice. However, they should never use racial or ethnic slurs—only stereotypes may be used. They can randomly take people from the minority groups in for questioning, ask them for their green cards, take bribes, etc. The sheriffs can also do favors for people, and in general, they can be really evil. It is a nice added touch if one sheriff tries to do good but is continually thwarted by the system.

HOUSING AUTHORITY
The housing authority gives out supplies for building the property, often in a very arbitrary manner. If someone in line is from an underrepresented group, they can have the person wait in line, especially in order to serve someone from the majority group. They can change the prices or give the power group two buildings for the price of one, etc. This is also a good place to demonstrate how the system can help to create a sense of oppression.

BUILDING INSPECTOR
An embodiment of institutionalized oppression, the building inspector should be very covert about his or her actions, especially in the beginning. Taking away land and buildings—without returning the money paid to build them, rezoning areas to make sure none of the majority groups buildings are built too close to bad neighborhoods, etc. are all good ways to act out this part. Subtlety is valuable in this role, particularly in the beginning.

JAILOR
This role is for the person who wants to make the least impact on the role-play. The main responsibility is to keep the people in the jail under control. However, the jailor should also keep the
prisoners close together and should continue their oppression. Solitary confinement consists of removing a troublemaker from the room entirely, and remember that the jailor is certainly not above taking bribes.

Part III: The Experience

RUNNING TIME
1 to 1 1/2 hours are needed for the role play and discussion

NUMBER OF PEOPLE
25 to 65 people are needed. (The number of facilitators for each role is dependent upon the number of participants.)

STEP ONE
Have the participants enter the room in single file. As each person comes in, place a label on them. This label should be made previously and should say to what group the wearer belongs. The assignments should more or less be made randomly, but someone who obviously belongs to an underrepresented group in society should be placed in the majority in Archie Bunker's Neighborhood. Of course, you will most likely have to have people from the majority in society in the majority during the role play, and that is okay. After labeling, send each person to the appropriate neighborhood. (If at all possible, try to place people you know are friends in different groups.)

STEP TWO
After everyone has been place into a group, the main sheriff introduces all of the authorities and explains that

- each group is going to be given about 20 to 30 minutes to build a community. Draw everyone's attention to the list of buildings available displayed behind the housing authority.
- the sheriffs will let everyone know how much time is left in the role play
- each group must elect one representative to send to the housing authority to purchase building materials. This is the only person allowed to leave the individual neighborhood
- any questions should be addressed now.

This sheriff then goes around to each group with their money.

Each group has a different amount of money. They do not know this until the end of the role play.

STEP THREE
The role play begins. The facilitators should be generally congenial in the beginning but become ever more overt with comments and oppressions that exploit the stereotypes held of each group in society. Remember only to use stereotypes—no racial slurs. If people ask whether they can make money somehow, tell them they cannot. If they ask if they can hire others to work for them, tell them they cannot.

STEP FOUR
After the 20 to 30 minutes allowed for the role play, the main sheriff should end the building part of the game. Ask at this point that all of the individuals who have been jailed be returned to their neighborhoods, and ask everyone to sit down in their neighborhoods. Go around the room asking
each group to share how much money they were given and what they built with their money. Always applaud the efforts of each group after they present, and try to end with the majority group getting a rousing ovation.

END OF ROLE PLAY
After the sharing part is over, the role play is over. Have the participants take off their labels and sit in one large circle. It's now time to process.

Part IV: The Processing

Begin the discussion that follows the role play with some basic questions about the experience:

- How did this feel?
- Did you know how much money other groups had?
- How did you feel being labeled?
- Does this happen in society?
- How did it feel when you were constantly oppressed/being helped? How many of you played up the stereotypes?

Just let the group go with the discussion, but make sure to keep them on task. Be sure to address the issues of community and what happens to students/people who feel marginalized. Every discussion will be different.

As you facilitate the discussion that follows the role play and as you help participants deal with their experience later, remember the following:

- Eliminating oppressions and inequalities is necessary if we are to be sustained as humans.
- It may be a frustrating struggle, but it is necessary.
- Focus attention on individuals rather than the group mentality.
- Hatred is taught to people. Therefore, it can be unlearned, however difficult this process might be.
- Unity within one's group is not necessarily bad. The "bad" comes in when other people feel marginalized by the unity of that group.
- Fighting for equality does not have to be a revolution but can happen from individual to individual.

If time allows, it would be nice to read a poem or paragraph about peace and freedom to bring closure to the discussion. In any case, remember that Archie Bunker's Neighborhood will leave unfinished business with everyone who walks away from it. It is meant to begin a healthy dialogue—not to solve all the problems of oppression.
Follow Up Activities

Archie Bunker’s Neighborhood

Compiled by Michael Wickey

People may or may not be buzzing after experiencing Archie Bunker’s Neighborhood, but whether they felt the exercise itself was particularly provocative, the issues that surround the role play are ultimately more important. Here are some ideas for journal prompts or just for general discussion purposes.

Oppression
- What is oppression?
- In what ways are the following groups oppressed in our society, if at all? African-Americans? Native Americans? Hispanic-Americans? Asian-Americans? Gay men, lesbian women, and bisexuals of both sexes? Women?
- What motivates people to oppress others?
- What is institutional oppression? Examples?
- Why is it important that we all work to end oppression in our society?

Stereotypes
- What is a stereotype?
- What stereotypes are held about the groups mentioned above? Are there stereotypes held in our society about feminists? heterosexual men? Democrats? Republicans?
- How did you know that any of the stereotypes that you listed above are really held by anyone in our society about individuals in these groups? Who "taught" you this? When? Why?
- Have you ever caught yourself basing your interaction with another solely upon a stereotype that you held of that person? What did you do?
- When accused of holding the stereotype that African-Americans are poor, Peter claims that he is just playing the odds. He claims that a large portion of African-Americans are poor, so he is just going with the greater odds. How would you respond to Peter’s logic?
- How do we eliminate stereotyping? Can we?

Acceptance and Tolerance
- In your opinion, what is tolerance? Acceptance?
- Do you believe that it is okay to fire someone, evict someone from a rental unit, etc., based solely upon race? Sexual orientation? Ethnicity?
- Do you believe laws that protect individuals from such actions by others in society should be on the books?
- Do you think tolerance can be learned? What about acceptance? Is tolerance itself a value that we should all teach? What about acceptance?
- Is there a group that you personally have trouble tolerating or accepting? Why?

Humor
- Much of our humor is based upon ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. and the stereotypes about these things. Do you believe that there is humor in our differences? Do you believe this brand of humor can be hurtful? When?
- Some relationships are built largely around a common sense of humor and the practice of oppression. Do you have any relationships like this? Do you know anyone who does? Do you believe this kind of friendship to be healthy?

- Have you ever used a slur ("nigger," "faggot," "bitch," etc.) for humorous effect? Have you heard others do so? What was your reaction? What would your reaction be today? Why are these words so effective in this way? Do they dehumanize the individuals being so labeled?

- If you were an individual who had built a sense of humor around the practice of oppression and the use of stereotypes, how would you feel if society no longer accepted such behavior? Do you think that you can retain such a sense of humor without actually believing or practicing this oppression (not even in small ways) in everyday life?