

PAYCE podcast: Phenomenal Woman

Description: PAYCE Fellow Alexis Jones' podcast delves into what motivated Dionna Langford to run for Des Moines, Iowa school board. The youngest African-American woman to serve in Des Moines, Dionna offers an enthralling narrative of real-life obstacles she faced when deciding to run. She also describes how they have helped to shape her perception of what changes need to occur to repair and rebuild Des Moines. Jones is a recent MA recipient from Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University. Langford's story gives hope in a world full of opportunities in which women are told how to present and carry themselves.

Keywords: race, culture, sexism, women's rights, gender, racism, equality, youth, activism

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- Identify some of the events (both positive and negative) which have influenced Dionna's experience at work [Knowledge: information gathering]
- Differentiate between overt and covert prejudice [Analysis: taking apart]
- Consider how Dionna's identity as a woman and African-American has affected her interactions with her constituents [Synthesis: putting together and Evaluation: judging the outcome]

Activity

- Listen to the Phenomenal Woman podcast <http://paycestories.org/>
- Form small discussion groups and answer the critical thinking questions. Write up your responses and submit one response per group.
- Rejoin the class and discuss the questions as a large group.

Critical thinking and reflection questions

1. Race and gender are two social identities that impact everyone's experience in life. Dionne describes being treated differently because of these social identities – what are the examples she shares?

2. Have you experienced overt or covert racism? What about overt or covert treatment based on other identities?

3. As systems of oppression, racism and patriarchy are based on the idea that some members will be privileged or discriminated against based on their race or gender. What are some other social identities (gender, socioeconomic status, citizenship status, sexuality age) that you think face discrimination? Which ones are privileged? Which ones are discriminated against? Why does that matter?

4. As Dionna notes during the podcast, she has faced covert racism many times during her tenure. Can you identify in which way the phrase mentioned at 2:50 “We would never send our kids to that school!” and “those Oakbridge kids!” might convey notes of racism or discrimination? Do such ideas or prejudices exist within your community about certain areas, neighborhoods, or communities? How do such conventions come to be?

5. PAYCE Fellow Jones decides to conclude her podcast with Maya Angelou’s poem *Phenomenal Woman*. What’s the message of this poem?

6. Do you feel empowered to engage in politics? Why or why not?