Teaching Differences
Primary Content Area: English 1

Introduction
Myths and misconceptions about people with disabilities impact all of us. Learning to replace these myths and stereotypes with real stories about real people is an important step toward ending discrimination and eliminating the barriers that limit people with disabilities. This service-learning project is designed for teachers to implement while teaching Of Mice and Men and can be as simple or complex as you would like. Writing activities listed are suggestions. You should adapt the project to the needs of your students.

Project Goals
- Students will read, discuss, and reflect on Of Mice and Men.
- Students will learn about differences among people in the community.
- Students will write in multiple genres about difference.
- Students will visit a center for the developmentally disabled.
- Students will develop a sense of responsibility to others.
- Students will reflect on difference and being different.

Procedure/Project Sequence
1. Talk to students about disabilities. What does the word disability mean to them? What are the pejorative terms that students hear and use related to people with disabilities or people who are different? Bring in a list of mental and physical disabilities. What do students already know about these disabilities? What do they want to know? Should people be treated differently because of their disabilities? Why?
2. Bring in an article from a newspaper or magazine that deals with difference. Use an article about autism, mental illness, developmentally disabled adults or children, physically handicapped individuals (but not cognitively), or some other disability. Share it with your students.
3. Students should brainstorm about times when they have seen or been a part of some other form of discrimination. Discuss how other forms of discrimination are similar to the stigma and stereotyping that happens to people with disabilities.
4. Ask students to journal in response to what has been read and discussed. Have students pick a disability that they want to learn more about.
5. Have students write the disability of their choice in their journal. Teachers can have students do some initial research on their own or in class.
6. Begin Of Mice and Men. Have students use their reading journal as issues of difference arise in the text: class, race, gender, developmental disabilities.
7. Contact your local CARC foundation or alternative organization (i.e. United Cerebral Palsy) serving children or adults with developmental disabilities to find out about volunteer opportunities in your community (see below). Set up a volunteer day field trip making sure to discuss specific types of activities you want your students to conduct during their visit. For example, most centers will help you create four or five work stations for your volunteer day. Students at each station will perform a specific activity with their adult partners, such as memory book making, color poems, name collage, etc. The clients then rotate through each station. Make sure students have a chance to eat lunch with the clients at the center. Pair two students with one adult client during lunch time. Encourage students to lead conversations and socialize with their client.
8. Following the service activity, brainstorm with students about the kinds of things you can do as a class to promote respect and limit the use of stereotypes.
9. **Suggested writing activity:** Ask students to write a news article or poem about an incident or event in the story or about their visit to the center. Teachers should give students a model to work from, but allow students to be creative.
10. **Suggested writing activity:** Ask students to write a biography (made up) of one of the characters they like or dislike from *Of Mice and Men*, or about themselves, or someone they met at the visit.
11. **Suggested writing activity:** Ask students to write a letter to the boss of the ranch persuading him to take better care of his employees, or have students write a letter to Curly about how he treats Lenny, his wife, and the other employees. How should Curly behave? Alternatively, write a letter to someone they met on their visit.
12. Guide a reflection based on the field visit. Have students put together their poem, story, song, news story, and/or biography into a multi-genre paper/project. The writing should in some way show some understanding of disabilities and difference. Or have students write in just two or three genres of their choice about what they learned (from their experience) about how to treat people who are different.

### Community Partners/Resources

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Envision Unlimited</th>
<th>Great Lakes ADA Center</th>
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<td>8 S. Michigan Ave., suite 1700 Chicago, IL 60603 312 346 2218 <a href="http://envisionchicago.org/">http://envisionchicago.org/</a></td>
<td>1640 W. Roosevelt Road, Room 405 Chicago, IL 60608 312 413 1407 <a href="http://www.adagreatlakes.org/">http://www.adagreatlakes.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Texts: <em>Of Mice and Men</em>, John Steinbeck</td>
<td><em>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night</em>, Mark Haddon</td>
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<td><em>Epileptic</em> (graphic novel), David B.</td>
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### Addendum Standards

This project addresses the following Common Core State Standards:

**RL.9.2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

**W.9.4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

### Duration

Students should spend 8-14 hours, depending on the amount of time spent interacting with residents on this project.

**Preparation:** Discussion/Research/Journaling – 3-5 hours

**Action:** Visit to center for people with disabilities – 3-5 hours

**Reflection:** Writing/Discussion – 2-4 hours