

## ***“Who Wants to Join the Klan?” Exercise***

**Objectives:** To illustrate how easily people might be lured into joining organizations that promote prejudice and intolerance.

**Audience:** High school students and adults

**Materials Needed:** Copies of the questionnaires, and writing utensils

**Time Required:** 30 – 90 minutes depending on option chosen and length of discussion

This teaching tool can be used in two ways. Read over the directions and questions in both options and decide which option will work best for your class.

### **Option A**

**Teacher Instructions:** To begin, ask students to fill out the generic “Membership Application” that is provided. Second, ask questions #1-6 to engage students in a discussion about the application. Third, explain that the questionnaire is actually based on an application used by the Ku Klux Klan around 1920-1930. Show them the actual Ku Klux Klan application questions (see attachment). Ask them to comment on this application. Use questions #7-10 to initiate and guide this discussion.

1. What type of organization might use this application (e.g., a bank, a church, a club)?  
*(Teachers might want to write these answers on the board to keep track of students’ responses. Discuss why students answered as they did.)*
2. List some words that describe the organization that this questionnaire represents (e.g., patriotic, family-oriented, religious, political, employer).
3. From our discussion, do you think that you would like to be a member of this organization?
4. Are there any particular questions that confused you or didn’t seem to belong?
5. What do you think is meant by “pure Americanism”?
6. What would your reaction be if I told you that this questionnaire is based on an actual application to join the Ku Klux Klan from the early 1900’s?
7. Do you have any idea how many members the KKK had in the 1920’s?  
*(The Klan was most popular in the 1920’s. In Indiana alone, the Klan claimed 350,000 members; see Wade, W.C. (1987, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.)*

8. Why do you think this questionnaire appealed to so many people?  
*(Make the point that it is vague and doesn't single out targets)*
9. Do you think the vagueness of the questionnaire helped or hurt the KKK? How?  
*(It allowed them to portray themselves as patriotic and family-oriented so people would join)*
10. Do you think there is anything about this questionnaire that would make the applicant feel special?

### **Option B**

**Teacher Instructions:** Option B is a bit more invasive than Option A. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to use with more mature students. Also, Option B requires more time than Option A.

To begin, ask students to complete the generic "Membership Application" that is provided. Next, ask the entire class the following questions:

1. What type of organization might use this application (e.g., a bank, a church, a club)?  
*(Teachers might want to write these answers on the board to keep track of students' responses. Discuss why students answered as they did.)*
2. List some words that describe the organization that this questionnaire represents (e.g., patriotic, family-oriented, religious, political, employer).
3. Based on our discussion, do you think that you would like to be a member of this organization?
4. Are there any particular questions that confused you or didn't seem to belong?
5. What do you think is meant by "pure Americanism"?

Next, ask students to separate themselves into groups based on their application answers. Use the following criteria to separate the students. If a student was not born in the United States, they can stay in their seat. If a student is not Caucasian, they can stay in their seat. If a student is not Christian, they can stay in their seat. If a student's parents are not Christian or were not born in the United States, they can stay in their seat. If a student is somehow affiliated with another country or government, they can stay in their seat. The remaining students can go to the front of the classroom.

Next, ask students the following questions based on whether they are sitting down or standing up. You might begin by soliciting answers from the students who are sitting down.

6. If you said earlier that you would like to join this organization, do you still feel the same way? Why or why not?
7. What does it feel like to be included? What does it feel like to be excluded?
8. If you are sitting down, would you change something about yourself to be included if you could? Why or why not?

Next, tell the class that the questionnaire actually is based on an application for the Ku Klux Klan that was used during the early 1900's. Get reactions from both groups of students. Explain that the students left standing would have been "eligible" for membership. Ask if the students who are standing felt elite or superior before they found out what they had been chosen for.

Explain to the students that the Ku Klux Klan drew people into their organization by making it seem like a social club that had a religious orientation. The group portrayed itself as patriotic and family-oriented. Leave time for student discussion. The discussion can be led with the following questions:

9. Do you have any idea how many members the KKK had in the 1920's and 1930's?  
*(The Klan was most popular in the 1920's. In Indiana alone, the Klan claimed 350,000 members; see Wade, W.C. (1987, The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America. New York: Oxford University Press.)*
10. Why do you think this questionnaire appealed to so many people?  
*(Make the point that it is vague and doesn't single out targets)*
11. Do you think the vagueness of the questionnaire helped or hurt the KKK? How?  
*(It allowed them to portray themselves as patriotic and family-oriented so people would join)*
12. Do you think there is anything about this questionnaire that would make the applicant feel special?

### ***Suggestions:***

If teachers are concerned that students might feel "singled out" by this activity, there are several safeguards that might be used. For example, teachers might use this activity in two classes and trade anonymous response sheets between classes to protect students' identities. If the activity was confined to one class, students could leave names off the questionnaire, or use fake names. The response sheets could then be handed in and then randomly redistributed. Each student would then proceed with the activity based on the answers that appear on his/her questionnaire.