I THINK THEREFORE I ACT

by Valerie Smith, adapted from Dave Stark's adaptation of the article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh

PURPOSE
Based on the Privilege Walk, this activity encourages students/participants to develop an awareness of the kinds of choices we make every day that impact other people, nonhuman animals, and the environment.

GRADES
9 and up

TIME
A few class periods

MATERIALS
- copies of the "humane walk" statements
- copies of the questions for reflection
- art materials; material for free writing
- white board and markers

SUBJECT AREAS
Language Arts, Psychology, Social Studies/History

COMMON CORE STANDARDS
Forthcoming
PROCEDURE

1. Ask students to line up in a single line facing a wall (they will need room to take a few steps forward).

2. Let students know that you'll be reading a series of statements that reflect possible choices in relation to our impacts on people, animals, and the earth.

Emphasize that this exercise is not a competition. Assure them that we all have different amounts of exposure to the issues addressed by each statement, and that the reason we are standing in lines will be revealed at the end of the activity. Let them know that this activity presents an opportunity for them to consider the choices they make now, and to consider choices they could make toward a more humane lifestyle. Emphasize to them that none of us is exempt from taking further action; there is always something we can do differently, once we are aware of our options.

3. Outline the procedure for the activity. Tell students the following:

   - For each statement, take one step forward if it reflects your typical behavior, or stay in place if it does not.
   - Statements are grouped into categories; you will be asked to return to your starting line at different points during this exercise.
   - You may ask a clarifying question if you do not understand a
statement.

- You will have opportunities to reflect individually and with your peers at the end of this exercise; please remain silent for the first part of this exercise (unless you have a clarifying question).

**Note:** You may wish to adjust the statements depending on the age and other factors of your participants.

4. Read to students each of the following statements and give students time after each statement to step forward or remain where they are standing.

- When a choice exists, I regularly choose locally grown food.
- I have visited a farmer’s market during the past nine months.
- I can name at least three sources of hidden costs for water bottled in plastic.
- I have one bottle or container that I refill with water or another beverage.
- I bring my own bags to the store.
- I make food choices, in part, on country of origin, history of production, amount of packaging, and/or type of ingredients.

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- I am aware of and choose cleaning, personal care, and other products guaranteed never to have been tested on animals.
- I avoid supporting events or companies that use animals for entertainment (i.e. zoos, circuses, etc.).
- I try to be aware of how my choices will affect nonhuman animals and choose options that do more good and less harm.
- I have taken action at least once during the past year on an issue related to protecting animals.
- I try to know the production history of the clothing I buy.
- I make purchases based, in part, on country of origin or sweatshop-free certification.
- At least sometimes I choose "alternative" sources for getting clothes, such as thrift stores, clothing swaps, upcycling, or sharing.

[Back to original position]

- I have used a source of public transportation when one was available (i.e. bus, train) at least once during the past six months.
- I/my family try/ies to “drive smart” and combine errands when I/we
drive.

- I have explored alternate forms of energy during the past six months.
- I have implemented at least one energy conservation strategy/tool in my home in the last year.
- I recycle as much as possible.
- I have and use a compost container or bin.
- I try to use non-toxic products.

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- I have given money to at least one public service or charity organization this year.
- I can name at least three organizations in my area that work to help people
- I can name at least three organizations in my area that work to help protect the environment.
- I can name at least three organizations in my area that work to help protect animals.
- I have provided time to at least one organization in my area that works to help people, animals, and/or the earth.
- I have volunteered for a project in my community at least once within the last six months.
- I try to stay informed about important issues in my local community.

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- I vote regularly.
- I vote even when there are state or local referendum issues on the ballot, but not state or national candidates.
- I know the names of my local, state and national representatives.
- I have contacted a legislator to make my opinion known on a controversial issue I care about at least once in the past year.
- I make an effort to follow world events through the media, Internet, or other sources.
- I am aware of the origins of the news sources I regularly use, including who owns/controls them and their possible biases.

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- I have read at least one book during the past six months written by or about someone whose background, life, or beliefs significantly differ from my own.
• I avoid telling jokes or making statements intended to make fun of or be unkind to someone based on race, country of origin, sexual orientation, religion, ability, or physical attribute.

• I have spoken out at least once in the past year when someone told a joke or made a statement I perceived as offensive to members of some oppressed group.

• I have regular contact with people whose race, country of origin, sexual orientation, religion, ability status or socioeconomic status is different from my own.

• I have discussed oppression with someone whose race, country of origin, sexual orientation, religion, ability status or socioeconomic status is different from my own.

• I have taken at least one action during the past six months to address issues related to oppression.

5. Give each student a copy of the statements to silently review for a few minutes.

6. Have students reflect on their experience using the following questions and directions (provide them with copies). You may wish to give them time to free write their responses as well as engage in creating visual media to reflect some of their responses and questions.

   a) Close your eyes and think about the exercise. For which groups of questions did you step forward most often? For which did you stay in place most often?

   b) How did you feel when other class members stepped forward, and you did not? What might you learn from having peers as a point of comparison for each question?

   c) Were there some areas that you think you could easily change your current behavior, and would like to do so?

   d) Were there some areas for which you believe you have very limited choices? Make a list (written, graphic representation, etc.) of these. Think about some of the obstacles that currently prevent you from making different choices. Think also about things that allow you to make responsible choices; where are the unused or unrecognized (until now) opportunities?

   e) Write or draw a graphic representation of areas about which you would like to know more.

   f) Of which choices are you most proud? Which would you most like to help educate others about?

   g) How might you have answered these questions five years ago?
7. Divide students into groups of about four to five. Have small groups consider their responses to the reflection questions and discuss:

a) What strides have you made in these life choices and why?
b) How do you evaluate what choice is right for you?
c) Who is currently in your circle of compassion? Why? Whom would you like to extend your circle of compassion to include?
d) What are some of the obstacles you encounter in making choices that do more good and less harm? What ideas do your peers have that could help you (or others) address these obstacles?

Note: Remind students as often as you need to that it will be important in their conversations to remember that everything, nearly, lives in the grey area of considered choice. This is where critical thinking comes in.

8. Have the small groups also explore:

a) Think about the systemic obstacles that get in the way of changes in behavior on a large scale (beyond people in this room).

(Example of a systemic obstacle: The public transportation in your city does not have any stops close to the Saturday Farmer’s Market during market hours. But it makes frequent Saturday stops right in front of Sprawl-Wart, the mega store.)

b) As a group, brainstorm actions that small groups of people, and individuals, can take to start addressing one of the systemic obstacles.

c) Discuss how privilege can free us to live more humanely; how does poverty affect food choices, for example? What can we do to open these opportunities to more people?

9. Bring the small groups together to share what they discussed in their reflections; their ideas for addressing individual obstacles; their brainstormed list of systemic obstacles; their list of small solutions; and their insights about privilege. You may wish to capture themes and high points on a white board or similar.

10. Invite students to reflect silently on the following:
In terms of being a conscientious citizen rather than a passive consumer, what choices am I satisfied with? What choices am I dissatisfied with?

WHAT NEXT STEPS WILL I TAKE IN MY OWN LIFE?
You may want to have students free write their responses (after having time to silently reflect and/or create a visual representation of their next steps.

11. Set a time several weeks from now for students to report back on their next steps.