Scenario 1 – “My Uncle the Racist”

My extended family is pretty close. We all live nearby so on every holiday, birthday, or festivity of any kind we get together to celebrate. I love all of them, but sometimes my uncle can make that difficult. He is always making incredibly racist comments and jokes. Some of my family members laugh to be polite, or ignore him, but I can tell it makes many people uncomfortable, including me.

Our most recent family gathering was for Christmas, and that was the last straw! I brought my girlfriend, a Mexican-American, over to meet my family. Everything was going well until we started talking about immigration law, when suddenly my uncle said “That’s the problem with all these wetbacks, they sneak into our country and reap all the benefits without paying any taxes in return!”

I couldn’t believe he would say that right in front of my girlfriend! Her family has been living in the U.S. legally for generations, she doesn’t even speak Spanish. Now I want to confront my uncle and tell him to stop making such racist comments in public, but I don’t know how.

Imagine you are in this situation. How would you handle it? Discuss your response in your group and fill in your answer on your worksheet.

Scenario 2 – “That’s So Retarded”

All teenagers use slang. I understand that completely. What I don’t understand is why we use slang that is so derogatory like “That’s so ghetto,” or “That’s so gay.” People say these things all the time, and they don’t even fully understand what they’re saying.

I mean, take me for instance. I’m your average teenager. I get decent grades, but I’m no 4.0 student. I run track, and I have a small group of friends that run with me. No one would notice me in a crowd, unless I’m with my little brother. He has Downsyndrome. When we are in public people are always staring at him because of the way he looks, the way he acts, and the way he talks. He is the happiest kid I know, and he tries his best at everything he does, but that doesn’t change the way people look at him. I hate those stares, the pointing, the laughing. Who are all you people to judge him?

That’s why I hate it when people say “That’s so retarded.” How can a homework assignment be retarded? Or someone’s shoes? And people don’t even realize that they are comparing this homework, or those shoes, to someone like my little brother. There is nothing wrong with him. There is no reason to use that kind of slang.

Imagine you are in this situation. How would you handle it? Discuss your response in your group and fill in your answer on your worksheet.

Scenario 3 – “Speak English, this is America”

Did you know that there is no official language in the United States? Obviously English is the most widely spoken, but there is no document written by the federal government that says it is the country’s official language.

I was born in El Salvador, but I have been living in the U.S. since I was eight. I speak both English and Spanish fluently, but I can’t read or write in Spanish, my first language. When I started school here I didn’t speak any English. People in school laughed at my accent and asked me why I couldn’t just learn English. At first it was hard, but now I don’t even have an accent.

I’m lucky that I had the chance to learn English. My mom brought my two sisters and me here, but she doesn’t speak any English. She works three different jobs so that she can afford to take care of us, and her coworkers all speak Spanish. My sisters and I try to teach her some stuff, but she doesn’t have time to take any classes to learn. When I speak Spanish to her in public I sometimes hear people whisper about us, “We’re in America, just learn to speak English already.” Some people even say it to our faces. They don’t know what it’s like to work as hard as my mom, to try so hard and still never get ahead.

Imagine you are in this situation. How would you handle it? Discuss your response in your group and fill in your answer on your worksheet.

Scenario 4 – “Girls ain’t nothin but…”

“Girls ain’t nothin but trouble.” “Girls ain’t nothin but hoes.” “Girls ain’t nothin but bitches made for entertainin’.” I can’t even count the number of times I’ve heard a man say something like this. It’s so unfair. I may look young, but I have a Bachelor’s and a Master’s degree in Nuclear Engineering. That’s right, I’m a rocket scientist, and I make $125,000 a year, and that is more money than most men can even hope to earn.

I didn’t get to this point by luck, or by sleeping my way to the top. I have worked hard my whole life. My family couldn’t afford to pay for college, so I got scholarships. The men in my field were getting promoted faster than me, so I worked to be twice as good at my job as they are. I may sound arrogant, but I have overcome a lot of obstacles. You know one of my college professor’s threatened to fail me if I didn’t sleep with him? And just last week I overheard a group of my coworkers rating my butt on a scale of 1-10. Men may find me attractive, but that doesn’t mean they can treat me like an object for their pleasure. I have a brain that I make good use of, I’m not just some “hoe” or “bitch” that you can objectify. It’s just that every time I hear a man say this and I try to defend myself, and all women, they say that I’m proving the point.

Imagine you are in this situation. How would you handle it? Discuss your response in your group and fill in your answer on your worksheet.

Scenario 5 – “That’s a Girl’s Job”

I am a second grade teacher in San Francisco, CA. Recently, while talking about jobs and careers I asked each student to explain to the class what his or her parents do for a living. It was all going well until Ricky said his dad is a ballet dancer. Now I know Ricky’s dad is one of the best dancers in the Alonzo King LINES Dance Company, but then Susan blurted out, “Your dad is a ballerina?! That’s a girl’s job!”

Poor Ricky almost started crying. He looks up to his dad so much and Susan really hurt his feelings. I tried to explain to the class that there are no jobs that are only for men, or only for women, even though it used to be that way. Now we know that men and women are equal, and they can do the same jobs equally well, but it didn’t seem to help. Many more of my students have started teasing Ricky because his father dances ballet. They don’t understand that his father travels the entire world, performing for huge audiences in a world renowned dance company. I don’t know what to do to help them understand that it’s okay for a man to be a ballet dancer, just as it is ok for a woman to be a firefighter.

Imagine you are in this situation. How would you handle it? Discuss your response in your group and fill in your answer on your worksheet.