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This Teacher Taught His Class A Powerful Lesson About Privilege

With a recycling bin and some scrap paper.

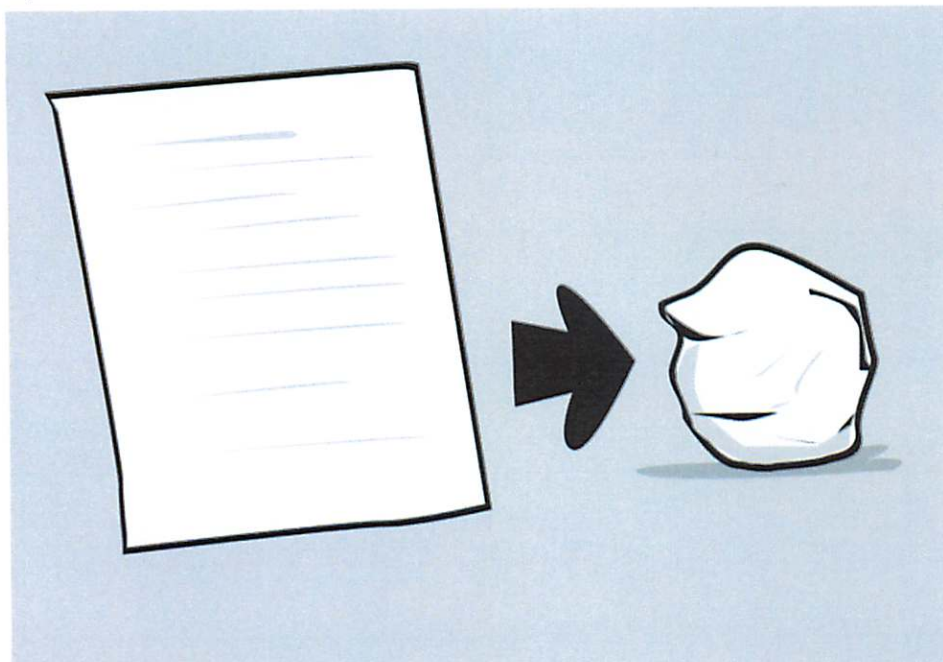
posted on Nov. 21, 2014, at 1:30 p.m.

 **Nathan W. Pyle**
BuzzFeed Staff

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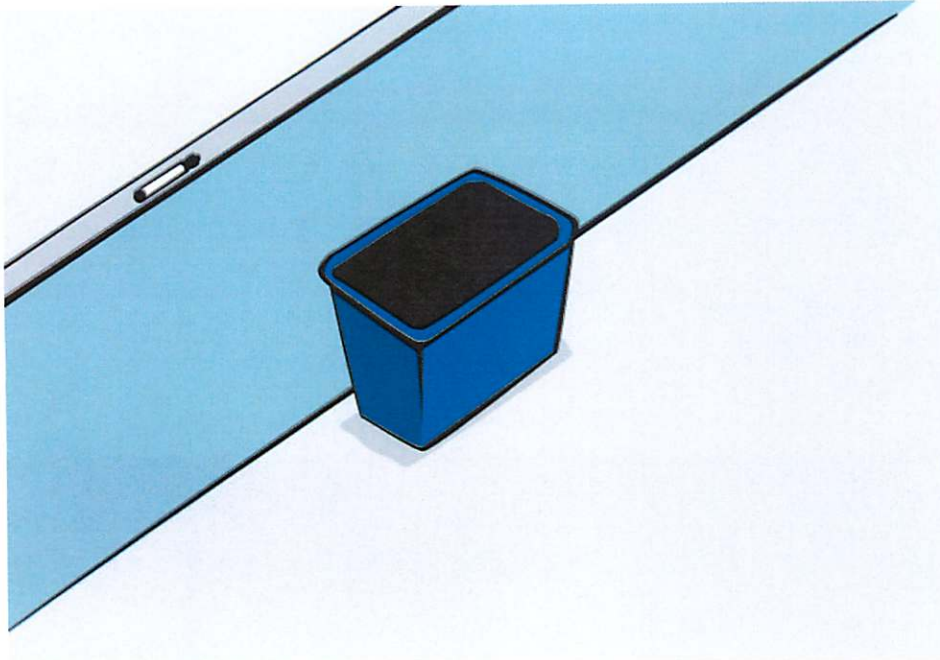


I once saw a high school teacher lead a simple, powerful exercise to teach his class about privilege and social mobility. He started by giving each student a scrap piece of paper and asked them to crumple it up.



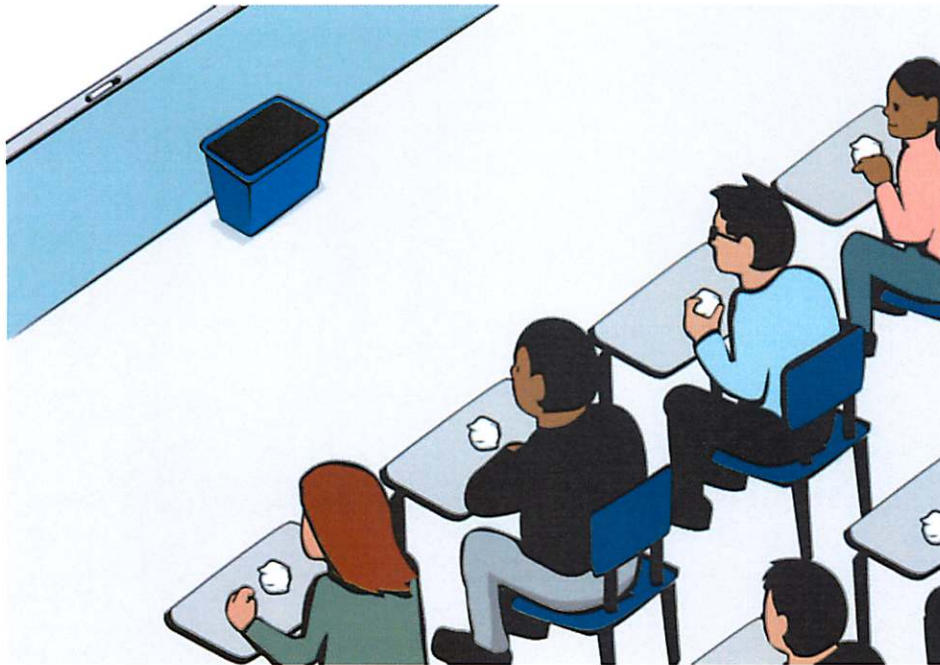
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Then he moved the recycling bin to the front of the room.



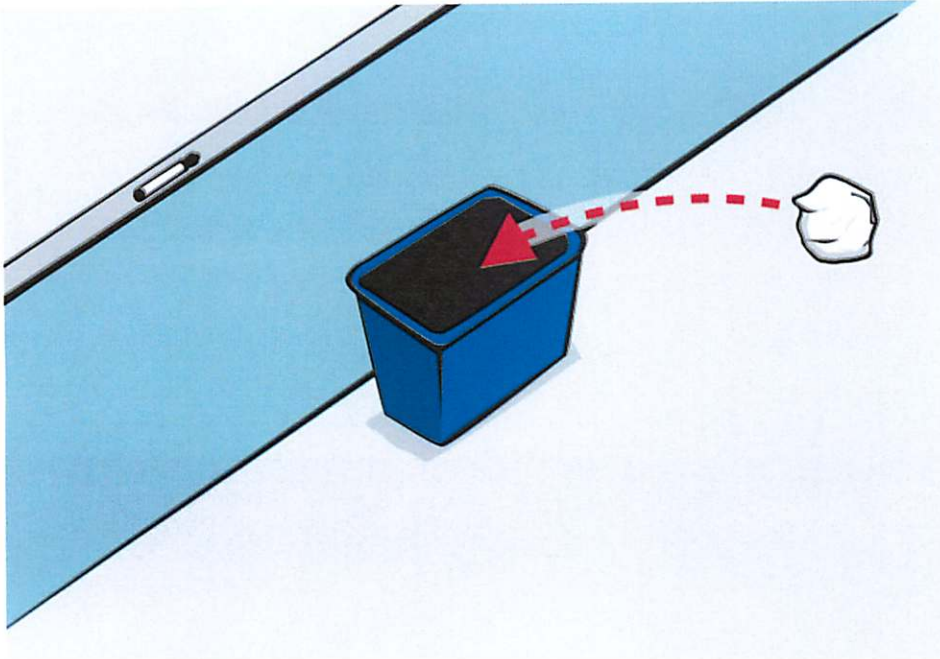
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He said, “The game is simple — you all represent the country’s population. And everyone in the country has a chance to become wealthy and move into the upper class.”



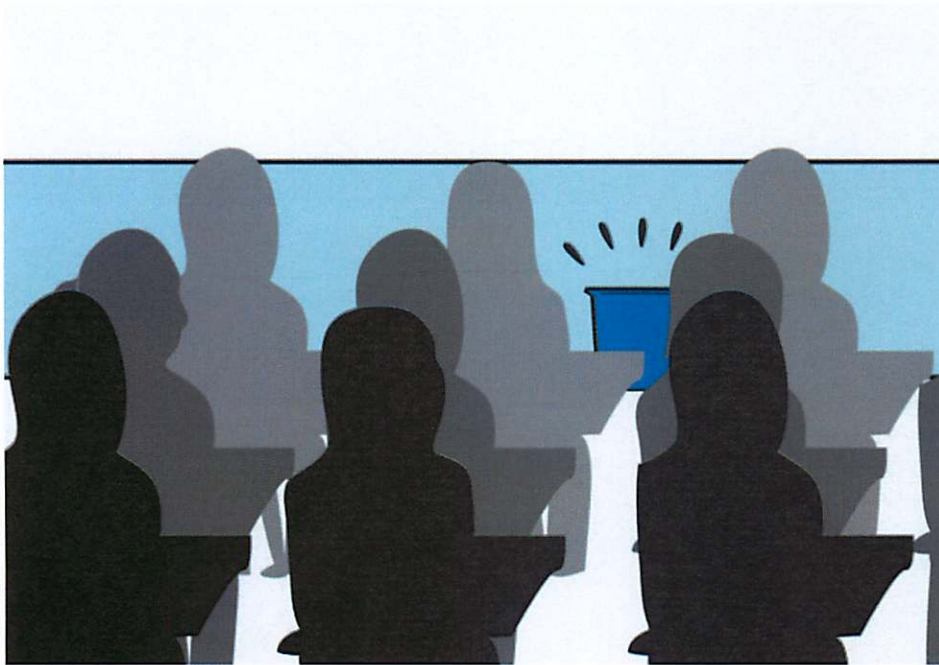
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“To move into the upper class, all you must do is throw your wadded-up paper into the bin while sitting in your seat.”



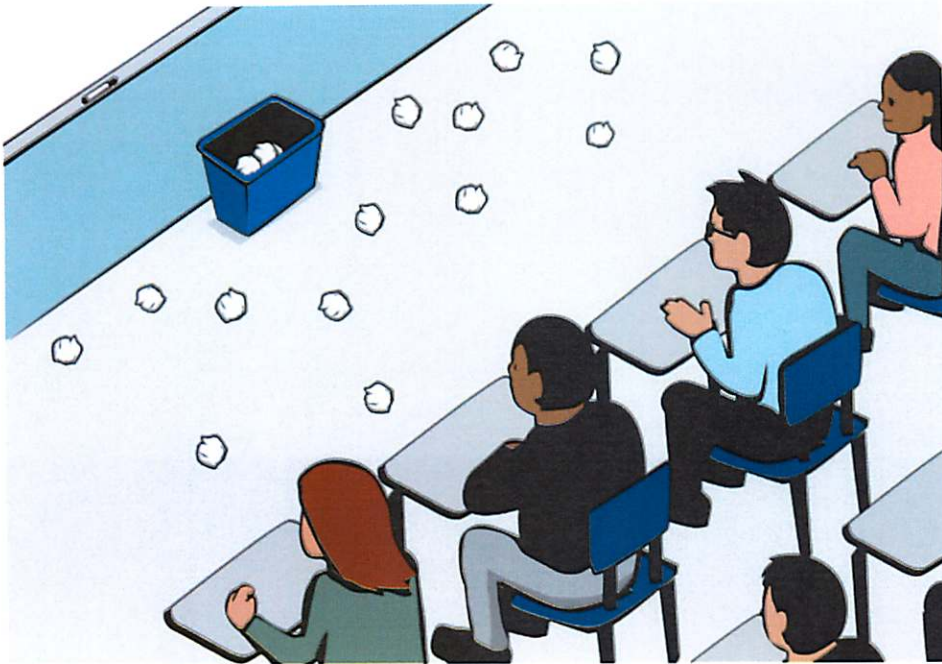
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The students in the back of the room immediately piped up, “This is unfair!” They could see the rows of students in front of them had a much better chance.



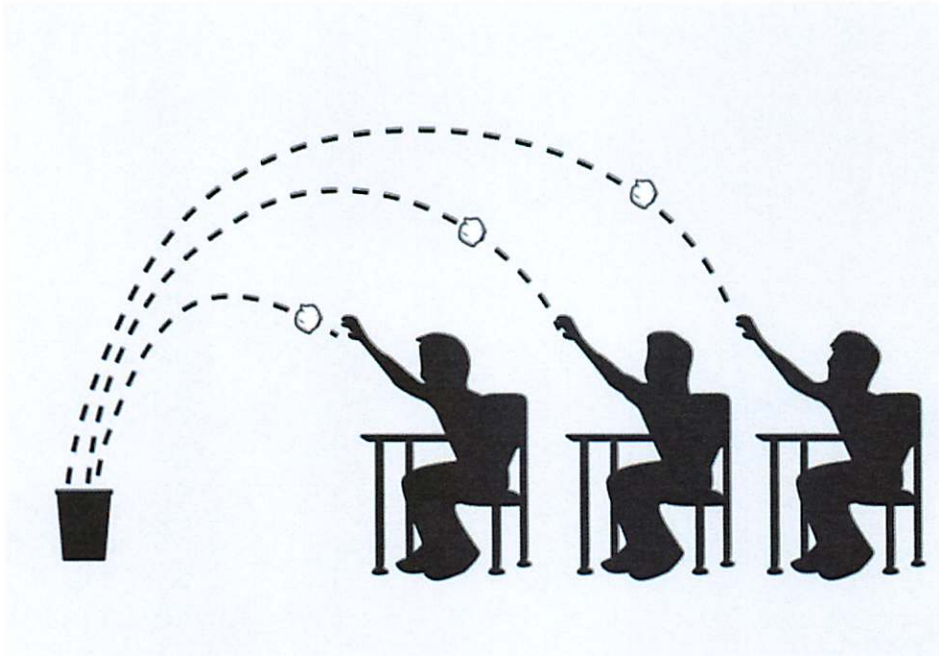
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Everyone took their shots, and — as expected — most of the students in the front made it (but not all) and only a few students in the back of the room made it.



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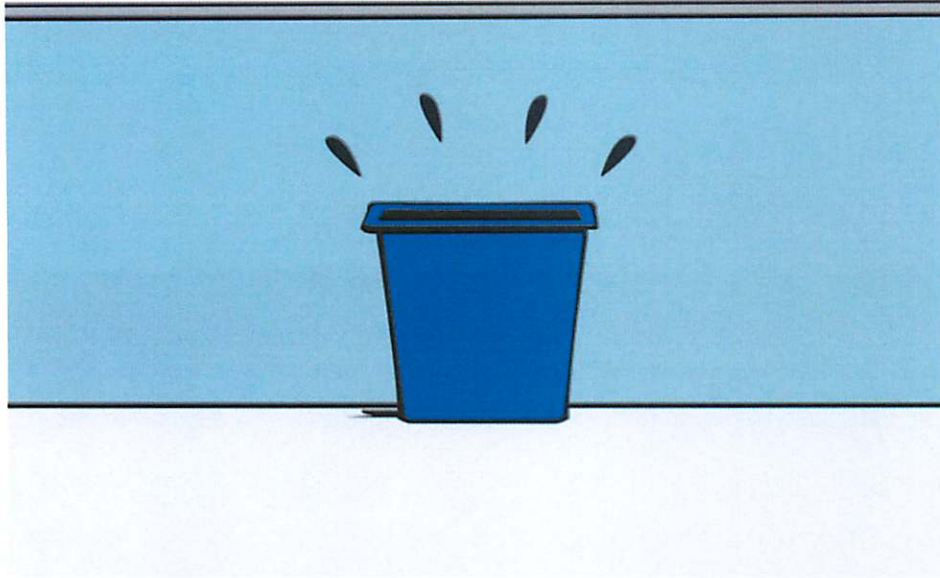
He concluded by saying, “The closer you were to the recycling bin, the better your odds. This is what privilege looks like. Did you notice how the only ones who complained about fairness were in the back of the room?”



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“By contrast, people in the front of the room were less likely to be aware of the privilege they were born

into. All they can see is 10 feet between them and their goal.”



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“Your job — as students who are receiving an education — is to be aware of your privilege. And use this particular privilege called “education” to do your best to achieve great things, all the while advocating for those in the rows behind you.”

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