



True Leaders in Equity

Guide to the 4-H Performing Arts Equity Challenge

“Actors are agents of change. A film, a piece of theatre, a piece of music or a book can make a difference. It can change the world.”
—Alan Rickman

What’s the Challenge?

Be a global citizen by exploring and expressing what equity means to you through performing arts—presentation, music, dance, theater, etc.

The challenge is open to any youth (ages 5-19) who are part of 4-H or any school/youth organization that partners with 4-H. To participate, submit a video (or link) of your performance/presentation. There are three categories (Junior, Senior, and Team) and each category has three prizes (\$150 for 1st place, \$75 for 2nd place, and \$50 for 3rd place).

Submit your entry using the form [Maine 4-H Equity Challenge 2023 \(Google Form\)](#). For more information contact 4-H through UMaine Extension in Cumberland County at extension.cumberland@maine.edu or call 207-781-6099.

Why does it matter?

“If you feel as though you don't fit in this world, you're probably here to help create a new one.”
— Javier Galitó-Cava

Many of the top issues facing society today, both in the U.S., and worldwide (i.e., health care, food security, economy, education, health care, crime, poverty), can be traced back to issues of equity. Youth are a huge part of driving change in the world. In fact, historically, youth have played a pivotal role in many issues (cue Civil Rights Movement,

Vietnam Protests, Indigenous Water Rights...). Having a mindset of being responsible for people, places, and things around the world and believing that your actions impact others, is being a global citizen. You can be a global citizen too, and we need you to be! Performance is a powerful way to give voice to the pain, struggles, joy, and triumphs of the world. What do you see that needs to change? What sparks of hope are out there? Show us what you see through music, dance, or theater, and maybe you'll inspire others to think differently or take action.

Background

Equality is when each individual of a society or a group receives the same resource or treatment regardless of what may be needed to achieve a desired outcome. Equity is when an individual or group receives the unique resources and opportunities needed to reduce or eliminate the barriers. The goal with equity is to make things fairer for everyone. Most people want things to be fair. But many people disagree about what fair looks like. What does equity look like to you? What you think matters. You can use performing arts to explore for yourself what it means to you and what it means to others. Performance art is a powerful form of both exploration and expression because music, dance, and theater help us play out what's in our hearts and minds. Once we see or hear it played out, we can often make new discoveries about whatever topic inspired the art to begin with. As performers, we may experience the performance differently than a spectator. We can use this unique performing arts connection to come together, or at least come to terms with what equity is and what we want from it.

How do I do it?

1. **Find your inspiration.** Performing arts—a song, a dance, a piece of theater (such as a play or movie) each will tell a different story to each person who experiences them. What story do you want to tell or capture? A good way to find your inspiration is to look at other performances related to equity. These could be performances for which the artist intended equity to be a focus, or they could be those that just speak to you of equity, regardless of the circumstances in which they were created. Following are some examples.
 - Music
 - [Brown Girl](#) by Aradhna
 - [One Day](#) – original by Matisyahu; cover by Yonina (an Israeli couple)
 - Dance
 - [SEED Dance Co. dances](#) to *Trama* by NF
 - [Eva Igo dances](#) to *Creep* by Radiohead
 - Theatrical

- [Yellow Babies](#)—movie clip from *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*
- [Natural State is Freedom](#)—movie clip from *Amistad*
- Other
 - [Expend](#) - performance art by Prue Stevenson
 - [Equity](#) - spoken word and music performed by Theo Jerome Feeney and Ezrha Miriam Watt-Hayden

2. **Pick a topic.** Equity is a huge topic, so you'll need to dig a little deeper to find something more specific that moves you. Try some of these exercises to help you narrow down your focus.

- List. List as many things as you can about equity—what it is, what questions you have about it, what it affects, how it impacts your life or those you know, etc..
- Free-write. Think about equity. Then start writing. Anything goes, and spelling matters less than this “*tipo*” (typo). If only questions come to mind, write them down! Include how you're feeling about the topic. Keep the pencil (or keyboard keys) moving for at least 10 minutes.
- Loop. Looping is a way of freewriting. Start by freewriting, and then stop. Then find an idea in that writing that appeals to you and free-write again, this time about that topic. Repeat this a few times, and you may find the topic you want to focus on for the challenge.
- Mind map. Write your topic in the center of a piece of paper. Then think of things that relate to it—its impacts, issues, your experiences with it, etc. Draw a line connecting any ideas that relate to each other. This will create a kind of web. Look at where there are clusters of ideas that all connect that interest you. This can help you see the topic in new ways.

Performing arts are all about self-expression—about getting out the thoughts and emotions that burn in us the most. After doing one of the above exercises, what compelling ideas or questions came up for you? Pick one of these ideas to take to the next step.

3. **Pick a format.** Most performing arts will be either music, dance, or theater of some sort, but sometimes performing arts combines these things. The thing that ties them all together is that they're meant to be shared with others as a performance.

4. **Develop your performance.** Once you know what format you would like to try, it may help to find someone who knows more about it who can help you get started. Looking for examples is another way to inspire your creativity.

Remember that developing a performance is a process! Even the best performers go through many many versions before they're ready to perform in front of an audience. So don't worry about what it looks like just yet—polishing comes later.

5. **Get feedback.** Once you have a version that you feel OK about (doesn't have to be great yet), it's time for some feedback. The first person to consult is yourself. Review the [Performing Arts Rubric](#) to make sure you're on track. Then find someone willing to watch your performance. But make sure to find someone who will give you *helpful* feedback. Saying "that was great!" is not very helpful. Good feedback means they've shared something with you that you can use to make it better.
6. **Revise.** Once you know what to improve, you can work on making the performance better. And because development is a process, you may need to repeat steps 5 and 6 (feedback and revision) two, three, or even four times!
7. **Polish.** Once you're satisfied with your work, it's time to put on those finishing touches. Use the following checklist to get you started.
 - Any costumes are finished and functioning properly.
 - Any needed props or scenery are finished and functioning properly.
 - Sound system works.
 - Lighting is coordinated and/or in place.
 - You have a venue (place and time) for your performance (see step 9 for ideas).
 - You've invited people to the performance and you have an idea who is coming.
8. **Reflect on the process.** Before your performance, it's both helpful for others and vital for you as a learner to think about what you've gotten out of the experience so far. If you take your performance to a 4-H judging experience like the county fair, the judge will want to know what you learned from the experience. Write a short paragraph about what you learned (you'll add to this after the performance too). Not sure what to write? Start by answering the following questions.
 - Why did you choose to perform this topic?
 - What did you learn about equity, and/or what questions did this challenge bring up for your about equity?
 - Why did you choose this particular format to explore the topic of equity?

9. **Share your performance!** It's the big day. Make sure you take care of yourself the day before and the day of your performance by getting plenty of sleep, food, and water. Following are some ideas for how you can share your performance.
 - Enter your performance into a local festival, contest, or county/state fair.
 - Ask a trusted person to take a video of your performance and then play it later at any venue or share it over social media.
 - Invite a local professional artist to get feedback.
 - Invite friends and family to your house to see your performance, and then use it to spark dialog with them about the equity topic you chose.

10. **Reflect on the performance.** Let's add to your reflection from step 8 by thinking about the performance itself.
 - How do you think your performance went?
 - What would you do differently next time?
 - How did performing help you explore equity?
 - Overall, what did you learn from doing this project?
 - What do you hope others get out of reading your work?

What's next?

What else do you want to know about performing arts? About equity? Here are some ideas for how you could take the learning further.

- Try another equity challenge project ([Photography](#), or [Writing](#)).
- Use the [Photography](#) or [Writing](#) Challenge to add a visual or text to your performance.
- Explore your topic from another angle, perhaps by trying to answer other questions the project brought up for you.
- Try exploring equity through another performing arts project, this time picking a different format.
- Notice the quotes at the beginning of this challenge guide. Find your own quotes that speak to you of equity or express something to you about how writing helps you explore equity.