

# TED TALK: STEM, DIVERSITY, AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR AMERICAN SPACES

This discussion guide is designed for programming at American Spaces. American Spaces should work with their Public Affairs Section to ensure that this topic and video are appropriate for American Spaces audiences.



Photo from video on Ted.com

### VIDEO INFORMATION

**Video Title:** *STEM, Diversity and Higher Education in the United States*

**Year Release:** 2015

**Duration:** 12 min

**English Level:** Intermediate

**Speaker:** *Jedidah Isler* - Jedidah Isler is an American astrophysicist and educator and an active advocate for diversity in STEM.

**Themes:** Women's empowerment, equal opportunity, racial and gender equality

[Link to Video](#)

### VIDEO CONTEXT

Jedidah Isler's inspiring talk addresses the important value of diversity in the field of STEM and other academic paths. She tells us how she dreamed of being a scientist since she was a young girl and discusses the challenges she faced while becoming the first black woman to earn a PHD in astrophysics from Yale University. In addition to taking upper level courses in physics and mathematics, Ms. Isler found that to make her dreams a reality she had to confront cultural barriers as well. Fortunately she did not allow prejudice to stop her. In her talk, Ms. Isler emphasizes that minority individuals entering fields that have been traditionally closed to them shouldn't be deterred either. She refers to minority members entering previously closed fields as "liminal persons" and expresses that we as a society keep pushing "past these first steps of diversity into full inclusion and diversity."



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of STATE  
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

## KEY VOCABULARY

**STEM** – Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

**Sociotechnology** - Things that are part of complex systems that have both technical and social impact. Some examples of sociotechnology would be: email, blogs and social media sites.

**Liminal Person** - Individuals who are on the threshold of something new, a transitional phase in their lives.

**Racialized Gender Bias** - Discrimination based off of the intersections of both one's race and gender.

**EducationUSA Advising Centers** - Assist potential students around the world gain learn about higher education in the United States. They are often located in American Spaces. There are over 430 advising centers located in more than 175 countries.

## TIPS ON VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING

- This video is shareable on social media, and Facebook's watch party feature can be used to stream this video.
- Consider inviting a local expert or U.S. official to facilitate discussion during and after the webinar.
- Preview the video beforehand to determine which parts you will show.
- For more tips go [here](#).



## Discussion Questions

1. How does Jedidah suggest that liminal people can expand the possibilities and discoveries in STEM? Why are liminal people equipped to do this?
2. What inspired Jedidah to persevere through the study of Astrophysics despite obstacles? Have you had a moment of inspiration like this?
3. In what ways do you believe that liminal people reshape the workplace and academia?
4. Is higher education right for me?
5. How could studying in the United States help me achieve my goals?

## Additional Resources

- **The World Comes to America to Study** - Nearly 1.1 million international students attend American colleges and universities to pursue a variety of different paths.
- **Education USA** - See if studying in the U.S. is right for you, and learn how to make it happen!
- **Share America: U.S. Universities Adapt to Help International Students** - U.S. colleges are focusing on ways to keep international students safe while furthering their educations despite the new coronavirus pandemic.
- **Smithsonian Science and Education Center: Girls and Women in STEM** - Lesson and Activities

