

FANDOM FORWARD ►

MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

THE HERO TOOLKIT

VOLUME 1



Fandom Forward is a project of the **Harry Potter Alliance Chapters Program**. Founded in 2005, the Harry Potter Alliance is an international non-profit that turns fans into heroes by making activism accessible through the power of story. This toolkit provides resources for fans of the Marvel Cinematic Universe to think more deeply about the social issues represented in the MCU and take action in our own world.

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INTRODUCTION

"I STILL BELIEVE IN HEROES."

Why do we love superhero stories? Some have argued that it's because they show us a world where individuals can truly make a difference; that they show us the kinds of people we wish we could be. But the truth is that we already live in that world – there's a hero in all of us, and new teams of Avengers are ready to assemble around the world.

As the Marvel Cinematic Universe continues to gain popularity and new fans – *agents*, even – join the ranks every day, we have an opportunity to draw inspiration from these stories to examine some of the issues in our own world. We call it fan activism.



FAN ACTIVISM:

Drawing parallels between popular media and the real world to make social issues accessible and mobilize fans for positive social change.

This toolkit will give you some basic tools to address three real world issues through the lens of the MCU: sexism, ableism, and political engagement. It draws content from the MCU prior to *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, and also references content from the greater Marvel Comics universe.

HEROICS 101

We're about to get deep. Social issues can be tough to talk about, and the issues in this toolkit are no exception. As the Captain America of your Avengers, it's important that you follow some basic guidelines when leading any group through this kit:

1. PROTECT YOUR TEAM

Before you start, make sure everyone on your team feels safe and included. You never know what a particular issue may mean personally to someone, or how a discussion may impact them. A great way to start is to set some guidelines as a group for what is and is not acceptable on your team. If things start to get too uncomfortable, don't be afraid to end a line of discussion or steer it to another topic. Remember that not all of us are ready to be agents – make sure you let your team know you'll be participating in a discussion or action beforehand so that everyone can choose whether or not to participate.

2. DON'T HULK OUT

There's a reason that we can't solve social issues overnight: they're complicated. Different viewpoints are okay – take time to listen, let everyone speak, and challenge each other *without* devaluing each other's opinions or resorting to personal attacks. We hear yoga is great for calming the nerves.

3. TALK FIRST

Don't pull a Thor here – it's important to discuss issues before immediately taking action. Use the Talk It Out sections to think about these issues before deciding how you want to tackle them. Mjolnir will thank you.

4. DON'T BE LIKE TONY

Don't assume you know everything about an issue, especially if there are people on your team who have personally experienced an issue or whose identity you are discussing. Allies are awesome, but it's more important for the voices of those who have lived these experiences to be heard. The best way to be an ally is to make sure they have space to speak.

5. TAKE ACTION

When you and your team feel ready to jump in, use the Action suggestions to follow in the footsteps of the Avengers and become your own community's heroes. If your team comes up with a different action, that's awesome – don't be afraid to get creative!

6. KEEP LEARNING

We've only begun to scratch the surface – social issues are even more complex than the Marvel universe, and that's saying something. Take what you learn from this kit and continue to educate yourself on the issues.

NEED BACKUP?

That's okay, there's a whole team of volunteers ready to help. If you wanted to call us the S.H.I.E.L.D. of fan activism, who are we to stop you? Just send us an email at fandomforward@thepalliance.org – we're happy to answer questions or help you with facilitation or action items.

ALL HEROES ARE FLAWED

We've done our best to represent the issues in this toolkit as accurately as possible, but because these issues are so complex there are bound to be things we missed or things you have different views on. If you find factual errors in this toolkit, please let us know!

ISSUE 1

SEXISM

“WHAT WOULD CAP SAY IF I LEFT HIS BEST GIRL BEHIND?”
“HE'D SAY 'DO AS PEGGY SAYS.'”



Prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination on the basis of sex. This toolkit specifically focuses on the issue of representation of women in media, but sexism is a broad and international issue with many facets.

Marvel fans know that women can kick ass and save the day just as well as men, but despite saving the world countless times over they still face discrimination. [The Miss Representation Project](#) provides just a snapshot:

MEDIA REPRESENTATION

- Women in media are often oversexualized or portrayed as accessories or sidekicks to a male lead's storyline.
- In 2011 only 11% of film protagonists were female and women represented only about 37% of prime-time TV characters.
- Negative or limited representation in media sets the stage for cultural perceptions of women as weak, incapable, or sexual objects.

VIOLENCE

- 1 in 4 girls experience teen dating violence
- 1 in 4 women are abused by a partner in their lifetime
- 1 in 6 women are survivors of rape or attempted rape

WORKPLACE INEQUALITY

- White, able-bodied American women earn 77 cents to every dollar that white men earn. Women of color and disabled women earn even less.

REPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

- Women make up 51% of the US population but comprise only 20% of Congress
- Men occupy 80-95% of the top decision making positions in American politics, business, the military, religion, media, culture, and entertainment



PEGGY SAYS:
-ISMS ARE SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED IN A SOCIETY SO THAT A CERTAIN GROUP HAS MORE POWER THAN OTHERS. IN THIS CASE THAT GROUP IS MEN, THEREFORE WOMEN CANNOT BE SEXIST.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MARVEL

The Marvel Cinematic Universe has a **long list of female characters**, many of whom are wonderful representations of dynamic female characters. The Marvel comics also **feature powerful women**. Of course, Marvel is not without its issues when it comes to representation of women, and frequently objectifies female characters in the narrative or through the behavior of other characters.



SKYE



RAINA



JEMMA SIMMONS



MELINDA MAY

AGENTS OF S.H.I.E.L.D.

Characters like Skye, Jemma Simmons, Melinda May, Bobbi Morse, and Raina are physically and mentally strong characters with incredible skills in their respective fields – including not just field agent work, but tech (Skye is a hacktivist) and science (Simmons and Raina). *Agents of SHIELD* is also important because of the inclusion of women of color in several main roles (Melinda May, Skye, Raina).

SHIELD, created by Joss Whedon, does sometimes fall into what has been criticized as the “Joss Whedon Model of Feminism,” where female characters are often beaten, tortured, or raped by men in order to prove their strength in a way that male characters would not be subjected to. Whedon’s strong female characters are also often lambasted for being strong “specifically in the way that Joss Whedon would like to sleep with” and for the narrative’s focus on their sexuality. Many

criticisms of Joss Whedon’s feminism in his other works carry over to Marvel’s *Agents of SHIELD*, which are included in the Resources section of this toolkit.

AGENT CARTER

Agent Carter not only represents a female-led Marvel title, but actively explores the issue of sexism in the workplace while deconstructing stereotypes of femininity and strength. Peggy Carter combats evil on a daily basis while attempting to push past perceptions of her as weak, out of place, and nothing more than a love interest to Captain America. The historical nature of the show in no way negates its relevance to modern day issues of workplace equality, stereotyping, and representation in positions of power.

However, **many argue that** *Agent Carter*’s feminism is one dimensional and, while addressing the inequalities experienced by white women, does not explore other oppressions that intersect with the patriarchy, like race and class. *Agent Carter* does, however, **pass many of the tests** that are used to determine positive representation.

THE AVENGERS FILMS

The Avengers films (*Iron Man 1-3*, *Captain America 1-2*, *Thor 1-2*, and *The Avengers*) feature a number of female characters in various capacities, including Black Widow, Peggy Carter, Jane Foster, Maria Hill, Pepper Potts, and Lady Sif. All of these characters are independent, intelligent, and skilled, and fill valuable roles in the progression of the narrative.

However, none of the major Marvel franchise movies are female-led, even though these characters exist, are capable of driving a story, and are popular with the fan community. While women purchase half of the movie tickets sold in the United States, only 30.8% of speaking characters are women, 10.7% of movies feature a balanced cast (where half of the characters are women) and even fewer are female-led, despite the success of female-led films like *The Hunger Games*, *Brave*, and *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.

Within the franchise, many of the female characters are hyper-sexualized or are written primarily as love interests or supports to male hero counterparts, like Peggy Carter (in *Captain America*), Pepper Potts, and Jane Foster. Tony Stark is a womanizer throughout *Iron Man 1* and *2* and frequently objectifies women and disregards them for all but their sexuality. Within the narrative, Black Widow uses her sexuality to her advantage and as an element of her abilities as a spy, but in out-of-universe marketing, she is almost always shown as a sexual object.

In the MCU, Marvel tends to portray its strong female characters primarily within a single model of strength and sexual appeal with limited diversity. However, the strength of these characters really is undeniable – without Black Widow and Peggy Carter, Captain America would be incapable of fighting back against HYDRA, and Tony Stark would have more than a little trouble without Pepper Potts.

OTHER FEMALE-LED MARVEL STORIES

This is not by any means an exhaustive list, but if you're looking for more awesome Marvel ladies this should help you get started. Where possible, links to the comics are included. For a few more recommendations, check out this [Quick Guide to Marvel's Female Solo Titles](#).

Ms. Marvel: Ms. Marvel is incredibly popular and has been well received since the beginning. The main character, Kamala Khan, is a Pakistani American Muslim teenager who gets super powers and has to try to figure out how to balance her superhero life and her real life. Kamala is a great character: she's funny, smart, brave, nerdy, and just all around awesome. The

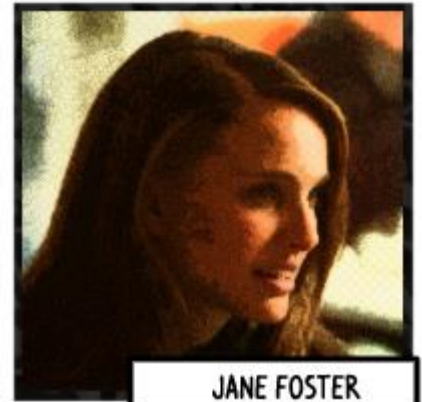
series is also great because it doesn't require a deep knowledge of the Marvel universe to enjoy.

Captain Marvel: Carol is all kinds of butt-kicking awesome and The Carol Corps are an active fan base with a really great online community.

Black Widow: Anyone who has seen the MCU movies is familiar with Natasha Romanoff, aka



BLACK WIDOW



JANE FOSTER



LADY SIF



PEPPER POTTS

Black Widow. Her solo series shows more of the murky world of espionage she works in and gives more insight into her character. The story follows Natasha trying to find a way to atone for what she's done in her past but in her own Black Widow way. The series is also beautifully illustrated and written.

She-Hulk: Unlike her cousin, Bruce Banner, Jessica Walters doesn't lose control when she hulks out. Also she's green all the time, but totally rocks it. This series explores her creating

Upcoming: A-Force: This May, Marvel will be publishing an all-female Avengers team that will include some of the characters already on this list! Make sure to support this title and other titles featuring strong female characters.

her own legal practice and getting caught up in some messy super hero business.

Storm: Ororo Munroe has been part of the X-men since the mid 1970's and is one of the most popular X-men. In her solo series, we get to see her on her own as she travels the world to protect people and mutants everywhere. While it's unlikely she'll appear in the MCU anytime soon, her comic is really well done and she's one of the most recognizable female superheroes.

THE MYTHICAL "FAKE GEEK GIRL"



PEGGY SAYS:
JUST STOP.

Unfortunately, comics have frequently been associated with misogynistic and objectifying content and fan behavior. Many female fans do not feel comfortable in fan spaces like comic book shops and conventions because of gatekeeping in fandom and the potential for harassment. Movements like **Cosplay is Not Consent** attempt to change behaviors towards women in fan spaces.

Negative portrayals of women in fandom have led to what has been dubbed the "fake geek girl," an idea that female fans, especially young fans, are only *pretending* to be fans of something. The truth is that women have **a long history of important contributions to the comic book industry**; more importantly, everyone – no matter their background or how recently they became a fan – can be a fan of something. The great thing about fandom is that there are no requirements for unironic enthusiasm.

TALK IT OUT

Use the discussion questions below to guide conversations about sexism and female representation in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. You can think about the questions on your own, talk it out with friends, or even have a discussion at a fan meetup.

- What are examples of everyday sexism, both of the major and microaggression variety, you see in your life? What about in the media?
- Who do you think of when you think of heroes? Role models?
- What impact do superheroes have on your life? Do you see superheroes as role models?
- Do you feel like there are superheroes that you can relate to/you can see yourself in/reflect your identity?
- Is it important to see characters that reflect your identity?
- Who is your favorite female MCU character? What female characters (in the MCU or outside of it) do you consider to be heroes? Role models? What about outside of fiction?
- Do you see any of the personal or professional issues these characters face as women reflected in your own life?
- What issues do you think most affect women in your community, whether personally or professionally?
- Do you feel that you can contribute something to help alleviate these problems?
- What would you need in order to be able to?
- Many people use [the Bechdel Test](#) as a standard for measuring the representation of women in a film. Which Marvel films or shows pass the Bechdel Test? Which do not? Does the Bechdel Test accurately show the representation of women in that piece of media?
- Explore some [other standards](#) for [measuring representation](#) of women in media. Do you feel these are more useful? What does the simplicity of the Bechdel Test (and the inability of so many films to pass it) say about poor representation of women in media?
- The MCU has been criticized for only having one female-led project (*Agent Carter*) in comparison to its many male dominated films. Why do you think female-led projects are important?
- *Agent Carter* has also been critiqued for its lack of inclusion of people of color. How does this represent the importance of intersectionality?
- How do *Agent Carter's* shortcomings reflect the shortcomings of mainstream feminism in regards to the support of and inclusion of women of color?
- What female characters in comics do you think should be added to the MCU?
- Do the comics do a better/worse/about the same job on representation as the MCU? Why?
- What do you think the MCU does right in its treatment of female characters? What does it do wrong?
- Sometimes female fans are excluded from certain nerdy things due to the myth of the "fake geek girl." What are some examples of this? Is it important for fandom to be open to everyone? What can be done to help alleviate this problem?



ACTION!

Ready to be an *agent* of change (see what we did there?)? Here are some suggestions for ways you can raise awareness about representation of women in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

CELEBRATE MARVEL WOMEN

- Make posters for an elementary school, high school, or public library that feature images and text about inspirational female characters
- Write a blog post about why a Marvel woman has inspired you and why positive representation is important
- Post images of your favorite Marvel women with an inspiring quote that makes you feel like you could be a superhero
- Focus on showcasing strength and intelligence beyond combat, like the many women in the MCU in STEM fields
- Ask your local movie theatre and comic book shops if you can share your posters and art there!

#POSELIKEASUPERHERO

- Participate in [#PoseLikeASuperhero](#), a social media movement by Women You Should Know
- It's [scientifically proven that standing like a superhero for 2 minutes a day](#) has measurable positive impacts on your health and mental wellbeing
- Show people around the world that everyone can be a superhero.

CHANGE THE SCRIPT

- Identify Marvel media where female characters are oversexualized and compare it to the way male characters are portrayed
- Submit fan art of male characters in the same sexualized positions as their female counterparts to [The Hawkeye Initiative](#)
- Create fanart that recreates Marvel media with female characters in less compromising positions
- Print out a number of base models for costume design and have your Chapter or group create new costumes for comic or cinematic universe Marvel characters like Black Widow and Captain Marvel
- Recreate character designs that give the Marvel Universe women more individuality in appearance, body type, race, and other elements
- Ask your local movie theatres and comic book shops if you can share your posters and art there.
- Create new Marvel characters that fit what you want a female superhero (or villain!) to be and design costumes and powers for them
- *Bonus:* create your own superhero film as a Chapter or fan group starring one of the heroes you design or starring a member of your Chapter or fan group as the superhero you always knew they could be.

INVESTIGATE!

- Poll members of your Chapter or group about their favorite Marvel characters. Who is their favorite? Why? How many of their favorites are women? How many female Marvel characters can they list compared to the number of male Marvel characters they know? How many of their favorite Marvel media pieces are female-led? Use the list of female Marvel characters provided in this toolkit to see how many Marvel women your chapter or group members know. *Note: you can also use this action as an introductory activity or ice breaker for your Chapter or group!*
- Go out into the field and ask members of your community, school, or city those same questions. Create a video or blog reflecting on what you learned. Who were the most popular Marvel women? Why? What does this say about the importance of or lack of existing representation?
- Go see *Avengers: Age of Ultron* as a group. Ask audience members your questions before and after the film starts to see what people interested in Marvel know compared to people on the street.

SUPPORT MARVEL WOMEN

- Hold a showing for your Chapter or group of MCU media that features strong female characters
- Host a discussion afterwards using the Talk It Out questions above
- Create a library of female-led Marvel titles for your Chapter or visit your local library or comic book shop to find out more about Marvel women in comics
- Share these comics with girls in elementary schools or ask your local library if you can showcase female-led Marvel titles
- Many filmmakers believe that movies with female leads would not succeed at the box office. Prove them wrong by taking your Chapter or group to see a current movie with a female lead, or host a showing of a movie that features strong female characters.

WHAT IF? LADIES STYLE

- One way to judge how well media has represented women is to imagine whether the story would still make sense if the female character were [replaced with a sexy lamp](#). Let's reverse this - in the way that many fanfiction writers use an alternate universe or "AU" to explore other ways the story could have taken place, let's put female characters in protagonist positions and see what the story could have been.
- What would *Agents of SHIELD* have been like with May as director of SHIELD? What about the Avengers with Black Widow in charge? Captain America with Peggy Carter instead of Steve Rogers? Thor with Lady Sif? Iron Man with Pepper Potts? Imagine your favorite piece of Marvel media with the major male and female characters switched.
- Many Marvel comics do feature major male superheroes as women, like the new [female Thor](#). What would the MCU be like if all the major male characters were women instead? How would Iron Man's character change? Captain America?
- Create fan art, videos, fanfiction, or social media posts for our own 'What If?' situation ([a popular series of Marvel comics](#) that examine how the Marvel Universe might have been if something were different) and share them with #FandomForward!



Art by [Parker Goodreau](#).

ABLEISM

“WHATEVER HAPPENS TOMORROW, YOU MUST PROMISE ME ONE THING: THAT YOU WILL STAY WHO YOU ARE. NOT A PERFECT SOLDIER, BUT A GOOD MAN.”



The belief that those with disabilities or neurodivergencies are lesser than able-bodied or neurotypical people and the discrimination that stems from that belief.

While much of this information is U.S.-centric, disability is an international issue, and various laws and regulations exist around the world to prevent discrimination. Additionally, social norms have a profound impact on the treatment of individuals with disabilities.

STEREOTYPING

- Disabled people are all very different! There’s no one proper way to be/feel/act disabled.
- As of the 2010 US census, 56.7 million people, or 19% of non-institutionalized civilians, have a disability, and more than half of those would describe it as severe.

ABLEIST LANGUAGE

- Disabled people, people with disabilities... People prefer different language ([person-first](#) or [identity-first](#)). Pay attention to those around you, and remember that person-first/identity-first language discussions are intra-community and not for allies to argue. This packet uses identity-first language.
- Language is always changing, so stay up-to-date as much as possible.
- [Many terms in our common vernacular](#) are deeply ableist and represent negative views towards disabled people or people with mental illness.



PEGGY SAYS:
NEURODIVERGENT MEANS A PERSON'S BRAIN WORKS DIFFERENTLY THAN SOCIETAL STANDARDS OF "NORMAL" – IT'S A WAY TALK ABOUT THINGS LIKE AUTISM OR MENTAL ILLNESS WITHOUT CLASSIFYING THEM AS "UNHEALTHY"

UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

- In 1997-1999, for individuals aged 25 to 61 years old, in the United States, 88% of people without disabilities worked 52 hours or more, while 34% of people with disabilities worked 52 hours or more.
- Disabled individuals in the United States are protected from workplace discrimination under the [Americans with Disability Act](#), but discrimination is often hard to prove

LACK OF ACCESSIBILITY

- Most website creators do not take into account [standards for web content accessibility](#).
- Disabled students often do not recognize [their rights in higher education](#), and higher education institutions frequently do not follow the standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act

LACK OF AWARENESS

- Many people do not realize that invisible illness still qualifies as disability.
- Visible: wheelchair user, missing/amputated limb, poor muscle strength/coordination, etc.
- Invisible: Deafness, mental illness, chronic health problems, etc.

INSPIRATION PORN

- [Inspiration porn](#) refers to the trend of sensationalizing and objectifying individuals with disabilities in order to make able-bodied people feel good/inspired
- This puts the focus of combating disability on able-bodied people, a [common but well-meaning mistake](#) made by allies

REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY AND NEURODIVERGENCY IN MARVEL

The Marvel Cinematic Universe includes several characters, both superheroes and characters without powers, who are disabled, chronically ill, or neurodivergent. This direct representation, especially in the case of superheroes, is deeply important. Superheroes are characters that young people look up to, and the existence of disabled superheroes shows young people with disabilities that they are capable of being heroes despite the stigma and difficulties that they face. It also helps to shift societal perceptions of disability, increase awareness, and decrease the stigma of talking about illness, neurodivergency, and disability. Indirect parallels are also important in changing the way that we think about disability and the way we perceive ourselves and the people around us.

AGENTS OF S.H.I.E.L.D

Agents of SHIELD represents disability directly through Fitz' story arc and indirectly through parallels between disabled individuals and those on 'The Index.' Skye's struggle after being placed on the Index is a strong parallel to the struggles of a disabled person after diagnosis, including changed behavior from loved ones, difficulty considering how to return to her previous life, fear of institutionalization and poor treatment, and coming to terms with and understanding changed abilities. Fitz shares these experiences, which is probably why he feels so strongly about helping her and reminding her that just because she's different doesn't mean there's something *wrong* with her, a stance that the institution of SHIELD doesn't tend to share. Those placed on the Index are generally seen as dangerous, and in many cases (like Skye's) SHIELD searches for ways to "cure" them of something they may feel is just part of who they are – often to the point of harm. This has been a major theme of the Inhumans story arc.





DANIEL SOUSA

AGENT CARTER

Agent Daniel Sousa is a wounded war veteran whose insight and skill is incredibly valuable to the SSR. Sousa does his job with his disability, not in spite of it. Sousa's disability is a part of who he is, not what he is, and while the show explores the issue of ableism in the workplace and internalized ableism, it does not dominate Sousa's character arc. Because of Agent Sousa, *Agent Carter* passes the [Oracle Test](#).

THE AVENGERS FILMS

The Avengers films (*Iron Man 1-3*, *Captain America 1-2*, *Thor 1-2*, and *The Avengers*) do include some representation of disability, particularly mental illness, but it is often left unexplored and in some cases poorly handled. The Avengers films also occasionally fall into a trope known as "Evil Cr*ppl," in which the primary villain of the series is disabled, particularly seen in *Iron Man 3* with [Aldrich Killian](#). This trope has a negative societal impact because it reinforces the common social perception of disability as a signifier of negative personality traits.

The issue of erasure of disability in the Avengers films is a significant one:

- Bruce Banner mentions his depression in several lines of dialogue, including one in *The Avengers* when he mentions a suicide attempt, which is promptly forgotten about.
- In certain comics, [Agent Clint Barton \(Hawkeye\) is deaf](#), but this has been [ignored in the films](#) and has been poorly handled in later comics.
- In certain versions of the origin story of Thor, Thor is sent to Earth by Odin to learn humility (as he is in the film *Thor*) but [this time in the body of disabled doctor Donald Blake](#).
- Tony Stark's arc reactor is essentially an assistive aid for a long-term and life-altering injury. Like many medicines and treatments, the arc reactor keeps him alive but also represents a significant danger to his long-term health as well. Tony also experiences PTSD-related panic attacks and flashbacks.
- Bucky Barnes has a prosthetic arm.



HAWKEYE



IRON MAN



CAPTAIN AMERICA

Erasure happens in another way too: both Steve Rogers (Captain America) and Matt Murdock (Daredevil) have disabilities that are negated by their power. [Steve Rogers has a long list of diagnoses](#) that prevent his enlistment in the army in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, but the super serum erases his disabilities with no further mention or exploration of them. Daredevil is blind, but his power essentially negates his disability. This is a common problem in superhero stories, but the truth is that for all of these characters their disability is and should be part of who they are. Steve Rogers is Captain America because of his bravery, selflessness, kindness, dedication, intelligence, and skill – none of which are changed by a superhero injection.

TALK IT OUT

Use the discussion questions below to guide conversations about ableism and representation of people with disability in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. You can think about the questions on your own, talk it out with friends, or even have a discussion at a fan meetup.

- What are some examples of institutionalized ableism? What are some examples of disability microaggressions?
- Have you ever witnessed or experienced a situation of ableism?
- What are some examples of ableist language? Have you ever said something that might have been ableist? Keep in mind that ableist language includes neurodivergencies and mental illnesses as well as physical disabilities. In what context did you say it? What were your intentions behind saying it? What are some words you could have used instead?
- If you are an able-bodied person, what are some things that you don't have to think about as a result of your status as an able-bodied person?
- If you are an able-bodied person, are there any places in your life that a disabled person couldn't access? How can those places be made more accessible? How can you as an individual take action to make those places more accessible?
- Are there any characters in the Marvel Cinematic Universe who have visible disabilities? Are there any characters in the MCU who have invisible disabilities? What about neurodivergencies or mental illnesses?
- Do these characters represent an accurate portrayal of the disabilities/etc. they are said to have? How are these characters treated by the narrative (not by the other characters in the MCU, but by the way the story itself is told)?
- Are there any characters in the Marvel comics who have disabilities, neurodivergencies, or mental illnesses? If these characters exist in the Marvel Cinematic Universe as well, are their disabilities included, or are they ignored? If these characters do not exist in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, why not?
- Oftentimes, it will not be specifically stated that a character has a certain mental illness or neurodivergence, but they will be intentionally 'coded' in that neurodivergency. Are there any situations in the Marvel Cinematic Universe where this is true? Is this coding valid as representation? Is it important? What are the positives or negatives to 'coding' a character in this way?
- Other times, characters will not be stated or 'coded' as disabled, neurodivergent, or mentally ill, but fans will 'headcanon' them a certain way. Is this valid as representation? What are the positives or negatives to disabled/neurodivergent/mentally ill headcanons? How does it impact the way individuals see a piece of media?
- What is the importance of representation of disability/etc. in media? How does portrayal of disability in media affect attitudes towards disabled/etc. people outside of media?
- What impact might the existence and portrayal of disabled/etc. superheroes have on attitudes towards disabled/etc. people outside of the Marvel Cinematic Universe? What other impacts might it have on wider society? What impacts might it have on the entertainment industry?



Alright Change Agents, ready to take action? Here are some suggestions for ways you can raise awareness about ableism and representation of disability in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

CELEBRATE!

- Make posters for an elementary school, high school, or public library that feature images and text about inspirational disabled characters
- Write a blog post about why a character like Steve Rogers has inspired you and why positive representation is important
- Post images of your favorite Marvel heroes with inspiring quotes that highlight the fact that anyone can be a superhero regardless of disability status
- Ask your local movie theatre and comic book shops if you can share your posters and art there!

IDENTIFY ABLEISM

- Many people don't even realize that their behavior and language is ableist. Identify language that might be ableist and pledge as a group to stop using those words and phrases. [This article provides alternatives to ableist slurs.](#)
- Identify a list of tropes and stereotypes regarding disability that lead to ableist attitudes. Think about pieces of media you love that might fall into these tropes and stereotypes.
- Create a thoughtful language campaign in your community that encourages others to be aware of the impact of the language that they use. Use parallels and imagery to the Marvel universe to make your message more impactful.
- Become a better ally to people with disabilities by [researching what it means to be disabled](#) and how you can provide better accommodations and be more inclusive.
- Individually or with your Chapter or group, visit a public space and either try to imagine what barriers you would encounter as a disabled person, or if you have a disabled person in your group who feels comfortable sharing their experiences ask them to explain some of the barriers for them in that space. Think about how the space could be changed for a [more universal design](#).

INVESTIGATE!

- Poll members of your Chapter or group about their favorite Marvel characters. Who are their favorites? Why? How many of their favorites are disabled? How many disabled Marvel characters can they list compared to the number of able-bodied Marvel characters they know? Do they know that characters like Steve Rogers and Tony Stark qualify as being disabled? What about Hawkeye? How many of their favorite Marvel media pieces include a disabled character? Which of these pieces portray disability honestly or positively? *Note: you can also use this action as an introductory activity or ice breaker for your Chapter or group!*
- Go out into the field and ask members of your community, school, or city those same questions. Create a video or blog reflecting on what you learned. What does this say about the importance of or lack of existing representation?

- Go see *Avengers: Age of Ultron* as a group. Ask audience members your questions before and after the film starts to see what people interested in Marvel know compared to people on the street.

SUPPORT DISABLED CHARACTERS

- Hold a showing for your Chapter or group of MCU media that features disabled characters, like the new *Daredevil* series or *Captain America: The First Avenger*
- Host a discussion afterwards using the Talk It Out questions above
- Create a library of Marvel titles that feature disabled characters for your Chapter or visit your local library or comic book shop to find out more about disabled characters in comics
- Create fanart or fanfiction that clearly and honestly includes the disabilities of characters like Hawkeye and Steve Rogers.
- Explore how even when disability is represented in the MCU, it is often sensationalized or negated by technology. Create a new character design for the Winter Soldier with a less fantastic prosthesis, or discuss how Hawkeye's character might be different without Stark hearing aids.
- Identify ways that accessibility aids like canes or hearing aids might be beneficial to a superhero, and create character designs that use these aids as a key element to their fighting technique or power. (Examples might include the [Blue Ear](#) or [the walking stick method of self-defense](#).)

SUPPORT DISABLED PEOPLE

- Use the information and skills as an ally you learned in the 'Identify Ableism' section to be a better ally towards disabled/etc. people.
- Volunteer or support local veterans groups or hospitals like Sam Wilson by connecting to your groups for veterans or sending letters and care packages to soldiers and veterans.
- Connect with a cosplay group or convention in your area or create superhero cosplays as a group to bring superheroes to children in need (like in children's hospitals).
- Collect Marvel comics and Marvel merchandise either as a group or in collaboration with local comic book shops and conventions for children in need (like in children's hospitals or outpatient care).

TALK BACK: DISABLED, MENTALLY ILL, AND NEURODIVERGENT FANS

- Certain actions for awareness and representation have to be completed by people directly affected by the issue and not by allies in order to be truly effective. Allies are most helpful when amplifying the voices of those directly affected instead of speaking over them or speaking for them!
- If you are disabled, share your story of the impact of disabled superheroes and representation (in or outside the MCU) in an essay, blog, or on social media using #FandomForward
- Create fanart, fanfiction, or headcanons surrounding characters in the Marvel Cinematic Universe in the style of [Disabled Harry Potter](#) and [the Zero Room](#). Share them with #FandomForward
- If you are disabled, share cosplay photos of you in your favorite MCU character to challenge the idea that superheroes (and cosplayers) can only fit one image and ability status, even if your illness or disability is invisible.
- Draw attention to the issue of erasure of invisible illness and disability and the dehumanization of people with disabilities by participating in a photo-based social media campaign like [Challenge Ableism](#).
- Create a superhero who is disabled, chronically ill, mentally ill, or neurodivergent. What would be the ideal superhero for you in terms of representation? Explore different ways to accurately and honestly portray disability in superhero media. Share your characters on social media with #FandomForward

ISSUE 3

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

"I KNOW I'M ASKING A LOT. BUT THE PRICE OF FREEDOM IS HIGH. IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN. AND IT'S A PRICE I'M WILLING TO PAY. AND IF I'M THE ONLY ONE, THEN SO BE IT. BUT I'M WILLING TO BET I'M NOT."



For our purposes, when the public advocates or opposes a cause or issue by making their voices heard in government. This can be focused on a specific issue or on attempting to increase voter access and turnout so that the voices of everyone are heard.

While political engagement is an issue that impacts everyone, the information in this section is primarily U.S.-centric. Keep in mind that political issues and civic engagement tactics will vary greatly across communities and nations.

VOTER TURNOUT AND ENGAGEMENT

- On average, **only 20% of eligible voters actually turn up to vote** in presidential elections
- Numbers are even lower for midterms, even though votes in local elections tend to have a far greater impact on the condition of an individual's environment.
- Across the board, young people, voters 18-29, tend not to be actively aware or engaged in the political process.
- Reasons for low engagement include not feeling particularly invested in issues. There is a strong correlation between how much an individual thinks about issues and whether or not they vote.

DISILLUSIONMENT IN GOVERNMENT

- Many potential voters feel as if their votes don't matter
- Corruption and abuse of positions of power leave potential voters and activists feeling as if the political structure is useless
- Youth are increasingly disillusioned with the major political parties and so they reason that voting for no party is better than voting for a party that they don't fully believe in or trust.

POLITICAL EDUCATION

- Many potential voters do not participate in elections because they feel they aren't informed enough to make a decision
- People are much more likely to vote if educated about key political issues and the political process

FREEDOMS CONTESTED IN THE COURT SYSTEMS

- As citizens with the power to vote, we have the responsibility to stand up for or stand with those whose freedoms are under attack. Issues that fall under this category include marriage equality, voting rights, and net neutrality.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN MARVEL

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

In *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Tony Stark tries to create an artificial intelligence that would use robotic drones to maintain peace around the world, allowing humans to live their lives in peace and prosperity. Obviously, this well-meaning idea goes wrong and the Avengers are called in to protect us all from Ultron's reign of terror. What can we learn from this? Peace is not supposed to be easy. There is no all-encompassing solution out there that will take care of the world for us while we enjoy our lives. We each have a responsibility to be informed and to take part in our communities and our governments – not doing so allows the Ultrons and the HYDRAs of the world to take control.

IRON MAN

Tony Stark is disengaged from the world and doesn't realize the impact that his technology and his company's policies have on the world until he is kidnapped for three months and forced to make weapons for a terrorist organization. After escaping, Tony Stark's newfound empathy for the victims of war and awareness of the situation in Afghanistan leads him to rethink his business as a weapons manufacturer and become an advocate for peace. Without Stark's engagement in political issues, he would never have become a hero.

CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER / MARVEL'S AGENTS OF SHIELD

In *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Steve Rogers didn't blindly follow orders or quit when things got too complicated or frustrating. He knew that he had a duty to do what was right by his country and to its people, and because of his dedication to truth, justice, and freedom, he was able to uncover a secret HYDRA plot to gain complete power by infiltrating the government and taking over SHIELD. While most of us will never be put in a similar situation, we do have the same responsibilities.

One of the values that Cap fights for is transparency. When Nick Fury and the rest of the SHIELD power structure begins to keep secrets from him and the public, he sees this as a real problem. How can the people make informed decisions in the voting booth when those that they elected to serve them keep secrets from them? Cap stands up for freedom and free speech. If he didn't care about politics or if he decided to turn the other cheek then no one would have stood in HYDRA's way, and so many of the key figures of the MCU - people who stand up for this world, people like Bruce Banner and Tony Stark - would have been killed by the helicarriers that Cap brought down.



Pay attention to what's happening in your government, both locally and internationally, and when the opportunity comes for you to stand up and let your voice be heard, don't miss it. **Captain's orders.**

TALK IT OUT

Use the discussion questions below to guide conversations about political engagement and civic responsibility in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. You can think about the questions on your own, talk it out with friends, or even have a discussion at a fan meetup.

- How would your favorite superhero feel about the issues you care about?
- How would they try and bring about change regarding these issues?
- How can you use that information to try to make a change in your own community?
- Are there institutions in your community already working towards the same goals as you? How can you work with them?
- The Avengers work as a team to solve the world's big problems. Who is in your team?
- How can you get other people in your community involved in creating change?
- A recurring theme in the MCU is characters feeling like they are being used as pawns by other characters. Discuss how that might be relevant to present day political matters.
- How can some of the secretive actions taken by S.H.I.E.L.D. compare to government scandals that have recently made headlines?
- In regards to your previous answer, how did the characters in the MCU handle it compared to how it was handled in real life? Who handled it better?
- In your opinion, what is the largest political problem facing your community/nation/world?
- What Marvel hero (or villain, no judgement here) resonates with you the most and why do you think that particular character resonates with you so much?
- How has relating to this character changed you?
- What political issue do you think has the largest impact on the largest number of people in your community/country/world? (think big like human rights, climate change, social programs)



ACTION!

Your final mission (for now); here are some suggestions for ways you can raise awareness about political engagement and civic responsibility in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

INVESTIGATE!

- Do you know what's happening at SHIELD headquarters? Take your Chapter or group to your state capitol building. Go on a tour to learn together about the structure of your government.
- Sponsor a trip to the state capitol or to visit a representative for a group of students in your area, or create a presentation for them incorporating superheroes and information about how the government really works.
- Do you know what's currently being voted on in your area? Research some of the legislation currently happening in your community, state, or nation.

EDUCATE

- Approach people in your community, in your Chapter or group, or on the street. Ask them specific questions regarding their awareness of issues and politics in your area. Do they know who their representatives are? Do they know what issues are currently being explored in local politics? National politics? Global? How knowledgeable are they about a specific issue? When you're finished, create a video or blog that summarizes what you've learned and includes a call to action for viewers or readers.
- Create nonpartisan informational materials near election time that include checklists and documentation of candidates' work, as well as information about specific issues on the ballot.
- Captain America has been used throughout American history, both in canon and in real life, as a tool for political engagement. Create materials that encourage voting and political participation, particularly in midterm elections, using Captain America and other superheroes.

GET INVOLVED

- If you've done any of these things, you've already gotten involved in the political process:
 - ✓ signed a petition
 - ✓ donated time or money to a campaign, cause, or candidate
 - ✓ attended a rally
 - ✓ wrote or called your elected officials to voice your opinion
 - ✓ voted
 - ✓ overthrown a secret Nazi organization taking over the government
- If you haven't yet gotten involved, now is the time – remember, if you want the political landscape to change, you have to vote.

RESOURCES

"AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO DID THE READING?"

SEXISM RESOURCES

[#LikeAGirl](#)

[#PoseLikeASuperhero](#)

[10 Things Agent Carter Did Right](#)

[Ada Initiative](#)- Supports women in open technology and culture by producing codes of conduct and anti-harassment policies, advocating for gender diversity, teaching ally skills, and hosting conferences for women in open tech/culture)

[Agent Carter and the Lack of Diversity](#)

[All Our Worlds](#)- Database of diverse science fiction and fantasy literature

[Bechdel Test](#)- Describes the Bechdel Test for media representation of women and lists media that passes

[Cosplay is Not Consent](#)- Facebook page and website for a movement that fights against sexual harassment in fan spaces

[The Expired Feminism of Joss Whedon](#)- A critique of Joss Whedon's model of feminism

[The Fascinating, Flawed Gender Politics of Agent Carter](#)- Further exploration of the gender politics and intersectionality of *Agent Carter*

[Feminist Thor selling way more comic books than dude Thor](#)- Succinct summary of the controversy surrounding a female Thor in the newest Thor comics and the subsequent sales of the comics

[Gender Inequality in Film](#)- New York Film Academy's study and infographic on representation of women in film

[Girl Rising](#)- Organization that aims to empower young girls through education

[The Hawkeye Initiative](#)- Illustrates the hyper-sexualized nature of women in comics, books, and video games by placing male

characters in the same position as their female counterparts

[Hayley Atwell Discusses 'Agent Carter,' Modern Sexism, and Marvel Secrets](#)- Interview with actress Hayley Atwell that discusses sexism in reference to Agent Carter

[Heroic Girls](#)- An organization dedicated to empowering girls by advocating for strong role models in comics

[Hollaback!](#) - An organization to combat street harassment

[League of Women Voters](#)- Citizen's organization that encourages and promotes civic engagement by women

[The Mako Mori Test: 'Pacific Rim' inspires a Bechdel Test alternative](#)- Describes an alternate test for representation of women

[Marvel Cinematic Universe Wiki - List of female characters](#)

[Media Monday: Agent Carter](#)- Exploration of *Agent Carter* and its representation

[Myths, Misfits, & Masks: Sana Amanat at TEDxTeen 2014](#)- TEDx talk by Sana Amanat, editor at Marvel Entertainment, associated with Ms. Marvel, Captain Marvel, and the Ultimate Comics Spider Man, speaks to the nature of comics and representation

[Quick Guide to Marvel's Female Solo Titles](#)- A list of fifteen major female characters in the Marvel comics universe with descriptions and comics locations

[Reconsidering the Feminism of Joss Whedon](#)- Discusses Joss Whedon's feminism in Whedon's *Buffy*, *Firefly*, and *Dollhouse*

[The Representation Project](#) - Focuses on breaking down stereotypes through the use of film as a catalyst for cultural transformation

[Science Grrl](#)- Grassroots organization celebrating women in science; a network of people passionate about passing on a love of science to the next generation with chapters in the UK

[Sexy Lamp Test](#)- Blog that describes and gives examples of pieces of media that pass or do not pass the Sexy Lamp Test for measuring the successful representation of women in a piece of media

[Stop Calling 'Agent Carter' a Feminist Triumph](#)- Further media critique of *Agent Carter*

[The Superficial Yet Satisfying Feminism of Agent Carter](#)- Explores the way that *Agent Carter* is both successful and limited representation

[TEDx: Girls Can Be Their Own Superheroes](#)- John Marcotte of Heroic Girls challenges the audience to look beyond what is labeled as "girly" or "feminine" to explore how such labels limit the potential of future generations

[Through Both Eyes: The Case for a Gender Lens in STEM](#)- Toolkit produced by Science Grrl that explores the need for gender equality in STEM fields

[To Bechdel and Beyond: Feminist Movie Tests](#)- Describes alternative tests for

representation of women besides the Bechdel Test

[Uncovering Hidden Black History, On Screen And On The Page](#)- NPR piece on the intersection of sexism and racism that uses Marvel's Agent Carter as a jumping off point for discussion

[Uplift: Online Communities Against Sexual Violence/YouCoalition](#) - Grassroots group focused around sexual violence in online communities like YouTube fan communities and how to improve relationships between content creators and fans

[We Need Diverse Books](#)- Grassroots organization of children's book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people

[Women in Media and News](#)- Activism group focused on getting honest representations of women in media and tackling problematic representations

[Women You Should Know](#)- Community organization encouraging the spread of women-led stories and editorial content

[Yeah Maybe, No](#) - Short film on the nature of consent

ABLEISM RESOURCES

[Ableism/Language](#)- Describes various terms that represent negative perceptions of disability and how to avoid those terms

[All Our Worlds](#)- Database of diverse science fiction and fantasy literature

[Alternatives to using ableist slurs](#)- Describes various ableist slurs and language that is based in negative perceptions of disability and alternatives to those words

[Barbara Gordon: Representation for the Disabled](#)- Describes the Oracle Test for media representation of disabilities (rest of article also describes disabled character in DC comics)

[Blind man uses his ears to see](#)- News article that discusses 'superpower' nature of 'human echolocation' training

[Boy gets real 'bionic arm' with Iron Man Robert Downey Jr. thrown in](#)- News article that discusses the creation of a 3D printed bionic arm for a young boy with an amputation

[Capes4Heroes](#)- Organization that makes handmade, personalized superhero capes for children in need

[Challenge Ableism](#)- Student led project at Elon University raising awareness of disability, accessibility, and disability services on campus

[Clint Barton is Deaf](#)- Informal Tumblr discussion of deaf representation in the Hawkeye comics

[Comicare](#)- Arizona nonprofit that delivers donated comic books to children in medical facilities

[Disability in Kidlit](#)- Focused on analyzing the portrayal of disabled characters in literature

[Disabled Superheroes](#)- Tumblr blog that compiles reviews, lists, and information about disabled superheroes and stories that feature heroes with disabilities

[Huffington Post: Inspiration Porn](#)- A collection of articles by the Huffington Post exploring the issue of inspiration porn

[Identity First Language](#)- Article that describes arguments for using Identity First language when talking about disability

[Iron Man Meets the Blue Ear](#)- A further news article about the Blue Ear character

[Jay Justice](#)- Popular disabled cosplayer who has worked on Marvel Universe Live!

[Let's Put the Person First, Not The Disability](#)- Article that describes arguments for using Person First language when talking about disability

[Limitless Solutions](#)- Organizations that sponsor and create 3D printed bionic arms for children with amputations

[Meet the Blue Ear](#)- News article about the creation of the Marvel superhero 'Blue Ear' in response to a letter sent by a young boy with hearing aids

[MentalHealth.gov](#)- Provides information and resources on/for various mental health issues

[More Love Letters](#)- Organization that sends care packages of letters to those in need of support

[Pre-Serum Steve's Medical Forms](#)- Informal discussion of the nature of Steve Rogers' disabilities and diagnoses and their implications in the 1940s era

[Protecting the Rights of Voters with Disabilities](#)- Packet put out by the US Department of Justice that explains the Americans with

Disabilities Act in connection to voting rights and accessibility

[The Representation Project](#) - Focuses on breaking down stereotypes through the use of film as a catalyst for cultural transformation

[Rights of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education](#)- Packet that provides resources and information for college and university students with disabilities

[The Spoon Theory](#)- Article that represents a popular way to think about the impact of chronic illness or disability on everyday tasks

[Stella Young: I'm Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much](#)- TED talk by disabled activist, comedian, and journalist on the topic of inspiration porn

[Superhero Supplies / 826NYC](#)- Nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting children in growing writing skills through creativity; uses Superhero Supplies as a front and fund-raiser for the nonprofit

[These Little Notes](#)- Organization based out of New York that sends care packages to teens in psych units

[Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)- Webpage that describes how to make web content that is more accessible for individuals with various types of disabilities or assistive devices

[We Need Diverse Books](#)- Grassroots organization of children's book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people

[The Zero Room, Disabled Harry Potter](#)- Informal examples of blogs that focus on 'headcanons' that characterize existing characters as disabled, neurodivergent, or chronically ill or explore the story setting in the context of illness, disability, and neurodivergency

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

[American Civil Liberties Union](#)- Advocates for and defends civil liberties in court

[CIRCLE](#)- The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, which focuses on youth engagement in politics

[League of Women Voters](#)- Citizen's organization that encourages and promotes civic engagement by women

[Let Me Vote](#)- ACLU voting information and guide

[Project Secret Identity](#)- Cosplay photo campaign to raise awareness of the issues of government surveillance and privacy

[Protecting the Rights of Voters with Disabilities](#)- Packet put out by the US Department of Justice that explains the Americans with

Disabilities Act in connection to voting rights and accessibility

[United States Election Assistance Commission](#)- Collection of resources for voters, including accessibility resources

[Vote 411](#)- Informational website for voters

[Voter Turnout Plummeting in Local Elections](#)- Article that explores the decline in local election turnout and potential ways to address the issue

[Young People and Political Engagement](#)- Interview with Pew Research Center Executive Vice President that reviews the attitudes and trends of the Millennial generation in regards to political engagement

MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE RESOURCES

[Comics Alliance](#)- News source that collects information and events connected to comics and comic-related media like the MCU

[Grand Comics Database](#)- Collects information regarding a massive number and variety of comics

[Hell Yeah Teen Superheroes](#)- Tumblr blog with solid analysis of comics, reviews of teen-led comic books, and information about comics

[Hero Initiative](#)- Organization devoted to helping comic creators in need

[Islamophobic Bus Ads in San Francisco Are Being Defaced with Kamala Khan](#)- News article

that reports on the recent placement of Ms. Marvel images over Islamophobic ads

[Marvel Cinematic Universe Wiki](#) - Wiki source of information about the Marvel Cinematic Universe, including information about specific characters

[TVTropes](#)- Database of common tropes in media including tropes related to major social issue themes that allows you to search by trope or by piece of media

[Quick Guide to Marvel's Female Solo Titles](#)- A list of fifteen major female characters in the Marvel comics universe with descriptions and comics locations

TO ACCESS OTHER HARRY POTTER ALLIANCE CHAPTERS RESOURCES, INCLUDING TOOLS FOR FUNDRAISING, AND EVENT PLANNING, VISIT [THE HPA CHAPTERS RESOURCES INDEX](#).

UNEXPLORED THEMES

While this toolkit has explored three major themes of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, there are many other social issues that are either directly represented in the MCU or explored through parallels. This list represents a handful of those issues and their connection to the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Some of them also include preliminary brainstorming ideas for how to take action to address these issues in your community and in the world. It's important to note that these themes are **no less important** or relevant to the MCU or our world. This is particularly important in the context of the issue of racism. Racism is a key issue in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but the Fandom Forward team that worked on building this particular toolkit did not feel it was properly equipped to discuss racism and the representation of people of color in the MCU fully, and did not want to misrepresent the issue. However, we encourage you to do personal research on the issue of race as it connects to the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the various themes connected to representation of people of color in the MCU, particularly the whitewashing or exclusion of characters of color seen in the comics.

ISSUE	CONNECTION TO THE MCU	PRELIMINARY PROJECT IDEAS
Diversity and Treatment of Minorities	The dynamics of the X-Men world and the conflict between violent and nonviolent resistance strategies, unacceptance and fear of diversity of X-Men mutants and the Index in Marvel's Agents of SHIELD, and superheroes in general (Civil War)	
LGBTQ Representation	Limited to no true representation of LGBTQ individuals in the cinematic universe, 'fanon' of Steve Rogers as bisexual, comparisons between fan representation of a character and the portrayal of a character in the original piece of media, the difference between implied representation and 'queerbating', parallels between LGBTQ individuals and the X-Men mutants, existence of LGBTQ characters in comics not included in the films	Social media campaign to encourage Marvel to create LGBTQ superheroes, feature LGBTQ superheroes in the films, positive fanfiction campaign- encourage true and honest representation of LGBTQ individuals and issues, creating and encouraging fanfiction that shows LGBTQ characters without being disgusting
Representation of POC	Exclusion of characters of color from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, white-dominated universe of the MCU, lack of existence of representation in the MCU, characters like Sam Wilson and Director Fury, controversy over potential black Captain America	Demonstrate support of films with POC protagonists by holding movie days, especially on first release weekends; create fan art that takes existing Marvel characters and reimagines them as POC, explore and discuss the impact of race in the MCU and how changing a character's race would impact the storyline; as a group, create your own superheroes who use their culture and background as a tool for heroism and whose racial or ethnic identity is a valid and included element of their narrative
Whitewashing	Comparison between the race of certain characters in the Marvel comics and their portrayal in the Marvel Cinematic Universe	Creating fanart that represents the characters more accurately to the comics as a social media campaign encouraging awareness of whitewashing in media

Mental Health Stigma	Representation of panic attacks, PTSD as seen with Tony Stark (Iron Man 3), Bucky Barnes; limited mention of Bruce Banner's suicide attempts, mental health struggles as a result of trauma, ableist language and references to Loki and other villains, frequent portrayal of villains as 'crazy', Skye's placement on the Gifted Index and treatment by the rest of the team	Create a fanfiction campaign to showcase and heighten representation of characters with mental illness in the MCU, recreate existing characters in the MCU to share their mental illnesses that may be erased by the MCU
Eugenics	Genetic modification to create superhumans- Captain America, the Winter Soldier (particularly Bucky Barnes' unwilling genetic modification), Red Skull & Hydra's perspective on humanity; the dynamic in the X-Men of mutants versus humans; Raina's and Skye's father's perspectives of humans as lesser beings in need of evolution in Marvel's Agents of SHIELD	
Weapons of Mass Destruction	Tony Stark's work as a weapons creator, Hydra's use of Project Insight, weapons used in Marvel's Agents of SHIELD, X-Men: Days of Future Past's Sentinels, Cuban Missile Crisis in X-Men: First Class	
American Exceptionalism	The creation and use of Steve Rogers' Captain America as a tool for American propaganda during World War II, both in the canon and in history, the dynamic of American superheroes	Identify and discuss examples of American exceptionalism as evidenced in comics and in the MCU, talk about the nature of the villain in various films, particularly superhero films, and how it changes over time to reflect American public sentiment; talk about the nature of dehumanization of villains in various films, particularly superhero films, how this may dehumanize other nations, and how language barriers and full-face masks/other things that remove the identity of a villain are used to solidify the heroic nature of the protagonist and the stereotype of the villain
Clean Energy	The arc reactor, Tony Stark's status as a leader in clean energy, the fight for the Tesseract as an unlimited energy source	Identify clean energy sources and explore their negatives/positives, encourage a local business or school to install solar panels or otherwise use clean, renewable energy; fundraise to sponsor the installment of solar panels or other clean energy sources
Propaganda	The creation and use of Steve Rogers' Captain America as a tool for American propaganda during World War II, both in the canon and in history	Hold a reading party to explore old Captain America comics and other superhero comics from the 1940s to the 1990s and identify how the ideas expressed in the comics change over time to reflect popular perspectives, explore and identify the way that superheroes and well-loved characters are used to change public sentiment particularly during American conflicts, hold a viewing party of Captain America: The First Avenger followed by discussion of these ideas

Treatment of Mental Illness	See mental health stigma, ableism, also SHIELD's treatment of individuals on the Index as a parallel to (and often including) the treatment of individuals living with mental illness, frequent criminalization of mentally ill individuals in comics and comic-based films, lack of mention of treatment or care following mentions of mental illness, Skye's treatment following her placement on the Index in Agents of SHIELD	Participate in the More Love Letters campaign, hold a fundraiser for or participate in projects by the These Little Notes organization, send letters and care packages to inmates
Child Labor & Child Soldiers	The Black Widow program (Natasha Romanof, Agents of SHIELD)	
History Education	Historical placement of films like Captain America: The First Avenger, X-Men: First Class, X-Men: Days of Future Past, historical importance of Captain America as a tool for World War II propaganda	Use of historically placed MCU films as an incentive to explore history; compare the history in these films to history itself, use old Captain America comics as a jumping point into exploration of World War II and American propaganda; use old comics as a way to explore perspectives at the time they were published

We're sure there are even more – don't be afraid to think about how any issue you care about connects to the fandoms you love.

THANKS!

FANDOM FORWARD: ASSEMBLE

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Want to do more of this stuff? With friends? You can join or start a Harry Potter Alliance Chapter now - [find a Chapter near you](#) or [submit an interest form](#).

Do you have fandom expertise to share? You could be our next Fandom Consultant – just email fandomforward@thehpalliance.org to ask about upcoming toolkits.