



## Encountering Race and Racism

*I cannot be a teacher  
without exposing who I am.*

- Paulo Freire

### Facilitator's Note:

Be intentional about how you frame this conversation. Communicate to participants that while these conversations may be difficult, this is a step towards addressing cultural gaps between students and teachers.

*It is strongly recommended to establish group norms prior to engaging in this activity.*

Suggested norms include but are not limited to:

- Address the idea, not the person
- Be fully present and engaged in activities
- Consider the impact of your words and actions on others

**Objective:** Introduce teacher candidates to how encounters with race and racism shape their worldview and the worldviews of their students

### Key Vocabulary:

**Race** – categories assigned to demographic groups based mostly on observable physical characteristics, like skin color, hair texture and eye shape (*Merriam-Webster*)

**Institutional Racism** – Institutional racism refers to the policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor, or put a racial group at a disadvantage. Poignant examples of institutional racism can be found in school disciplinary policies in which students of color are punished at much higher rates than their white counterparts, in the criminal justice system, and within many employment sectors in which day-to-day operations, as well as hiring and firing practices can significantly disadvantage workers of color (*Aspen Institute*)

**Individual Racism** – Individual racism can include face-to-face or covert actions toward a person that intentionally express prejudice, hate or bias based on race (*Aspen Institute*)

**Time:** Approximately 90 minutes

### Getting Started (30 Minutes)

**Watch:** 5 Things You Should Know About Racism <https://youtu.be/8eTWZ80z9EE>

**Share:** After watching, ask participants to share out on the questions “What are some misconceptions you have heard or held about race and racism?” “How were those misconceptions addressed in the video?”

Some misconceptions that might come up include: Prejudice vs. Racism, Intent vs. Impact, Institutional vs. Individual Racism, Colorblindness, Reverse Racism.

**Quick Write:** Have the participants spend about 10 minutes writing on the following prompt:

*What is your earliest experience dealing with race and/or racism? While you are writing, be sure to include as many details as possible, including:*

- *How old were you?*
- *What happened?*
- *How did you feel?*
- *Did you talk to anyone about it? If so, who? If not, why not?*

**Pair:** Discuss your first encounter with race with a partner. What similarities and differences were there in your experiences?

**Poll:** Give participants sticky notes to put the answers to the following questions on chart paper. After posting, give participants an opportunity to gallery walk to see other responses. Or use Poll Everywhere (<https://www.polleverywhere.com>) or Padlet (<http://www.padlet.com>) to display group responses to the following questions:

- How old were you when you had your earliest experience with race and/or racism?
- In one word, describe how you felt?
- Did you talk to anyone about it? (If yes, who?)

*"That's at the core of equity: understanding who your kids are and how to meet their needs. You are still focused on outcomes, but the path to get there may not be the same for each one."*

- **Pedro Noguera**

**Discuss:** What trends were shown in the poll responses? Many children experience their first encounters with race and do not feel comfortable talking about it with an adult. Why might that be? Why would it be important to discuss these experiences with students?

#### Activity (50 Minutes)

**Step 1 – Small Group Discussions:** Divide the four "First Encounters With Racism" stories (<https://nyti.ms/2ul3L6w>) among four groups. Give each group about 5 minutes to read their story silently and jot down individual words or phrases that stand out for them, and feelings or thoughts that emerge. Groups will use the discussion questions (see Resources) to have a small group discussion for about 15 minutes.

**Step 2 – Jigsaw Discussions:** Representatives from each of the story groups will regroup using the jigsaw method with one person from the original story groups forms a new group with at least individual from each other story group. In the new groups, participants will share key points from their story and previous discussion, spending about 5 minutes on each story (for a total of about 20 minutes).

#### Step 3 – Whole Group Discussion:

After the jigsaw discussions, spend about 10 minutes in a whole group discussion guided by the Whole Group Discussion Guiding Questions.

#### Closing and Reflections (10 Minutes)

Give every participant about 5 minutes to reflect and write down their answers to the reflection questions **"What?" "So What?" and "Now What?"** After every participant has had a chance to write down their thoughts, everyone will share out one thing from their "Now what?" reflections.

**Additional Resource:** Teaching Tolerance, <https://www.tolerance.org>

**Extension Activity:** Watch and discuss *A Look at Race Relations Through a Child's Eyes* <https://youtu.be/GPVNJgfDwpw>

- What was new or surprising in watching this video?
- Did anything in the video make you think of your upbringing and/or educational experiences?
- What is the significance of young children forming such opinions at an early age?
- What challenges might teachers face in light of the information shared in this video?
- What roles do teachers play in helping students navigate their own racial identities and the racial identities of their peers?
- How might the information shared in the video shape your approach to your classroom?