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## EXPERIENCES WITH RACE AND RACISM

Race and racism are topics that regularly come up in the news and populate our social media feeds. Whether we are discussing the lack of representation of people of color in media, immigration policies, the racial disproportionality in the criminal justice system or the events in Charlottesville, race is part of our public conversation. Race is an integral part of our history, culture and modern life and impacts all of us in society. Young people are not exempt from these conversations and in fact, want to be engaged in those discussions and should be. This lesson uses stories from *The New York Times* Race/Related column on *First Encounters with Racism* in which teenagers across the country responded to the question: “What is your earliest experience dealing with race?”

This lesson<sup>1</sup> provides an opportunity for students to learn about the language of bias and racism, explore a range of stories (through video and written pieces) of young people’s first encounters with race and racism and reflect on their own early experiences through a writing assignment.

**[Note to Teacher:** It is important to reflect on and consider that you may have students in your classroom who, because of an aspect or aspects of their identity, have been targets of racism or ethnic bias. Be prepared and sensitive to those students, taking into account the extent to which they are a minority or majority of your classroom and plan accordingly. Some participants who have been impacted by bias and discrimination may feel relieved and comfortable discussing these issues and others may feel nervous, scared or angry. Whenever possible, speak with these individuals prior to the lesson to determine how they can feel safe and comfortable discussing these topics.]

See these additional ADL resources: Lesson Plans “[Hair, Identity and Bias](#),” “[Identity-Based Bullying](#)” and “[Slurs, Offensive Jokes and How to Respond](#),” [Teaching about Racism, Violence, Inequity and the Criminal Justice System](#), [Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism](#), [How Should I Talk about Race in My Mostly White Classroom?](#) and [Children's and Young Adult Books about Race and Racism](#).

**Grade Level:** grades 5–7

**Time:** 45–90 minutes

**Common Core Anchor Standards:** Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, Language

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will understand some basic terminology of bias and racism.
- Students will explore different experiences of race and racism through the use of video and reading stories.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this lesson was originally published on The New York Times Learning Network, [First Encounters With Race and Racism: Teaching Ideas for Classroom Conversations](#).

- Students will reflect on their experiences with race and racism by writing a reflective essay.

### Material:

- *Being 12: 'People Think I'm Supposed to Talk Ghetto, Whatever That Is'* video (2015, 4 mins., WNYC, [www.wnyc.org/story/people-sometimes-think-im-supposed-talk-ghetto-whatever-kids-race/](http://www.wnyc.org/story/people-sometimes-think-im-supposed-talk-ghetto-whatever-kids-race/))
- "First Encounters With Racism" article (*The New York Times*, August 2, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/us/first-encounters-with-racism.html? r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/us/first-encounters-with-racism.html? r=0), divide the four stories in this article evenly among students, one story per student)
- [Race/Related Stories: Discussion Questions](#) (one for each student)
- [Graphic Organizer: Writing Activity](#) (one for each student)

### Compelling Question: What impact do our early experiences of race and racism have?

### Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL's "[Definitions Related to Bias, Injustice and Bullying](#)" and "[Glossary of Education Terms.](#)")

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|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| • bias           | • immigration       | • pride           |
| • biracial       | • implicit bias     | • race            |
| • culture        | • institutionalized | • racism          |
| • discrimination | • interpersonal     | • slur            |
| • harassing      | • liberal           | • white supremacy |
| • identity       | • n-word            |                   |

### DEFINING TERMS

1. Ask students: *What is prejudice?* If students have trouble coming up with the definition, have them split the word apart into two parts: "pre," which means before and "judge" which means to form an opinion about something or someone. Ask: *What happens when we put the two parts together?* Explain that would be judging before.

Come to a definition of **prejudice** as judging or having an idea about someone or a group of people before you actually know them. Explain that prejudice (or bias) is often directed toward people in a certain identity group such as race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

2. Explain to students that in this lesson, they are going to explore race and racism and it is important that they know some basic terms. Elicit and explain the following definitions as follows:

**Bias:** An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with fair judgment.

**Discrimination:** Unfair treatment of one person or group of people because of the person or group's identity (e.g. race, gender, ability, religion, culture, etc.). Discrimination is an action that can come from prejudice.

**Ethnicity:** Refers to a person's identification with a group based on characteristics such as shared history, ancestry, geographic and language origin, and culture.

**Identity:** Qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different than others.

**Racism:** Prejudice and/or discrimination against people because of their racial group.

**Slur:** An insulting, offensive or degrading remark, often based on an identity group such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

**Stereotype:** The false idea that all members of a group are the same and think and behave in the same way.

3. Have a brief discussion with students about the difference between the terms: stereotype, prejudice and discrimination. Explain that a **stereotype** is a **belief** about a person or group of people, **prejudice** is an **attitude** about a person or group of people and **discrimination** is an **action** that can follow prejudicial attitudes. It can be helpful to use one specific example (e.g. sexism) to explain how stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination differ from one another but are also connected. With the example of sexism, explain that a stereotype is that girls aren't strong or athletic; an example of prejudice is thinking that girls cannot compete in sports or that they are not as good as boys; and an example of discrimination is not having any female athletic teams at your school.

### VIDEO ACTIVITY: BEING 12

1. Introduce the video, *Being 12: 'People Think I'm Supposed to Talk Ghetto, Whatever That Is'*. Explain that the video is part of a series of videos that explore important topics through the eyes of young people age twelve and that this segment is about students' ideas and experiences about race, ethnicity and racism.
2. Before showing the video, instruct students to take out a piece of paper and while watching the video, they will jot down words or phrases that come to mind in reaction to the video or words that are spoken in the video they want to remember.
3. After the video, have students do a quick go-round where each student states one word from their list to describe their reaction to the video.
4. Engage students in a brief discussion by asking the following questions:
  - What happened in the video?
  - What stood out for you as you watched the video?
  - What examples of bias, stereotypes and racism did you hear about in the video?
  - At the beginning of the video, students responded to the question, "What are you?" Have you ever been asked that? What would be your response to that question?
  - Was there someone in the video that you could relate to? How so?
  - If a video like this were filmed at our school, how would it be similar? How would it be different?
5. Clarify/explain to students that everyone has a racial identity. Sometimes white people don't think they have a racial identity because white is seen as "normal" or the "default." As a result, people mistakenly think only people of color (African-American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Asian people) have a race or racial identity. It is important to emphasize that all people have experiences with race, whether they are obvious, hidden or implied. People might have those experiences directly or witness them happening to others. In addition, they may have certain opportunities or privileges granted as a result of their racial identity. Remind students about the white girl in the video who talked about having privilege because of her skin color.

## READING ACTIVITY

1. Prior to teaching the lesson, read the following four stories that appeared in *The New York Times* Race/Related article "[First Encounters With Racism](#)" and decide in advance whether your students are capable of reading and understanding the stories on their own or if you will read the stories aloud.

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**NOTE:** If you think your students may need some prior knowledge on some of the topics covered in the stories such as police brutality, immigration and ethnic slurs, you may want to provide some background on those topics. ADL has [lesson plans](#) on those topics; some are for high school aged students but you will get some background to provide to the students verbally.

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If you read the stories aloud, have students (while listening) jot down words or phrases that stand out for them, feelings and/or reactions to the stories or additional thoughts they have. These can be added to the list of words that students began while watching the video. Have students save the list for later.

2. After reading each story, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the [Race/Related Story Discussion Questions](#).

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**Alternative:** If you have students read the stories independently, divide them into four groups and divide the four stories equally among the students. Have students who are all reading the same story sit together, then give each group 10–15 minutes to read their story silently. After reading their stories silently, students can use the discussion questions below to have a small group discussion. Then representatives from each of the story groups will report back to the whole class by describing what they read, and sharing some of their group's reflections on the questions below. While students are listening to other groups share, they can continue to jot down words, phrases and feelings that resonate.

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3. After listening to or hearing all of the stories, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
  - After reading and hearing about all of the stories, what stands out for you?
  - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
  - Did anything surprise you and if so, what?
  - How did each person's encounter with racism change them?
  - How were the stories similar to each other? What are some differences among the stories?
  - In any of these situations, how could someone have acted as an ally?
  - What specific ways can you act as an ally to support students whom have been targeted because of racism or an aspect of their identity?

## WORD CLOUD

1. Have students take out the words and phrases they jotted down while watching the video and listening to/reading the stories. One at a time, have students call out some or all of the words or phrases they jotted down. They can repeat a word or phrase that has already been said. As they are doing this, record the words in a word cloud generator like [Word it Out](#), [Wordle](#). If you are unable to use word cloud technology, record all of the words in a semantic web on the board/smart board and place check marks next to those words that are repeated.
2. Share the word cloud with the class and engage them in a brief discussion by asking:

- How do you feel while looking at the words all together?
- What do you see in the word cloud?
- Is it mostly negative, positive or neither? What are your thoughts and feelings?
- Are some words larger (or repeated more than once) than others, and if so, why?
- What patterns do you notice?
- What questions do you have?

### WRITING ACTIVITY: MY FIRST EXPERIENCES WITH RACE AND RACISM

1. Students will now have the opportunity to write their own stories about race and racism. The writing will be a culmination of everything they've learned and reflected upon during the course of the lesson. Have students first consider some of the elements of the four stories they read in order to use some of those strategies for their own writing including: (1) theme and message, (2) figurative language, (3) dialogue, (4) details and experiences, (5) values conveyed and (6) self-reflection. Talk about these elements to the degree necessary for your students. Distribute a copy of the [Graphic Organizer: Writing Activity](#) handout to help facilitate this process.
2. Write the following two questions on the board/smart board and explain to students that they should use one of these overall questions as a prompt for their writing:
  - What is your earliest experience dealing with race and/or racism?
  - What is an experience you've had in which race or racism played a part?
3. As explained above, remind students that everyone has a racial identity. Remind them that in the video, in addition to young people of color, there were also white kids who talked about their experience with race, racism and privilege.
4. Have students write their own race stories by reflecting on these writing prompts:
  - What happened?
  - How did you feel while this was happening?
  - What was your response and what was the response of others around you?
  - Did anyone act as an ally? Describe how and how it made you (or the person being targeted) feel.
  - What impact did the experience have on you? What did you learn from the experience?
  - Did the experience change you or someone else in some way, and if so, how?
5. Have students conference with each other (and you) over the next few days or weeks in order to produce a final piece of writing. This process should include writing, conferencing, editing and revision.

### CLOSING

Have students share their stories with the class by reading them aloud. Consider inviting parents and/or family members in to share this experience with their children.

**ADDITIONAL READING**

- [10 TED Classroom Resources about Race in America](#) (TED-Ed Blog, July 25, 2016)
- [“25 Mini Films for Exploring Race, Bias and Identity with Students”](#) (*The New York Times*, March 15, 2017)
- [“Are We Raising Racists?”](#) (*The New York Times*, March 14, 2017)
- [“Babies of Color are Now the Majority, Census Says”](#) (NPR, July 1, 2016)
- [“Do Conversations About Race Belong in the Classroom?”](#) (*The Atlantic*, September 5, 2017)
- [“Seven Myths of Race and the Young Child”](#) (Research Gate, June 2012)
- [Understanding Implicit Bias](#) (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity)
- [“Yes, Race and Politics Belong in the Classroom”](#) (*Education Week*, August 15, 2017)

**COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS**

Content Area/Standard
<b>Reading</b>
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Standard 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and qualitatively, as well as in words.
Standard 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
<b>Writing</b>
Standard 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
Standard 5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
<b>Speaking and Listening</b>
Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
<b>Language</b>
Standard 3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
Standard 5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

# RACE/RELATED STORIES: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## FOLLOWED BY A POLICE OFFICER

- What happened to Riley?
- What were your thoughts and feelings as you read/listened to the story?
- Why did Riley’s mother prepare him for having an encounter with a police officer?
- What does Riley mean when he says that in his community, a police officer is usually seen as more of a threat than a friend?
- Can you relate to Riley and his experience and if so, how?
- What impact do you think this experience had on Riley?
- In what way is this story about race and racism?

## A SLUR DIRECTED AT ME

- What happened to Marianne?
- What were your thoughts and feelings as you read/listened to the story?
- Why do you think Marianne wasn’t surprised at first when she heard the slur directed at her?
- Why do you think Marianne started thinking differently about her communication with white peers after she moved to a town with more Asian-American people?
- Can you relate to Marianne and if so, how?
- What impact do you think this experience had on Marianne?
- In what way is this story about race and racism?

## LESSON FROM KINDERGARTEN

- What happened to Maya?
- What were your thoughts and feelings as you read/listened to the story?
- Why do you think Maya’s father starting talking to her about race and racism at such a young age?
- Why does Maya feel she has to choose one race over the other in how she identifies herself?
- Can you relate to Maya and if so, how?
- What impact do you think this experience had on Maya?
- In what way is this story about race and racism?

### WHAT I WISH TO TELL

- What happened to Jose?
- What were your thoughts and feelings as you read/listened to the story?
- How did Jose and his friend know the white couple was talking about them?
- What were some of the difficulties Jose faced in his journey, and why did he wish the white couple knew that?
- Can you relate to Jose and if so, how?
- What impact do you think this experience had on Jose?
- In what way is this story about race and racism?



# GRAPHIC ORGANIZER: WRITING ACTIVITY

**OVERALL QUESTION** *(Jot down some notes about either one of the following questions)*

What is your earliest experience dealing with race and/or racism?

What is an experience you've had in which race or racism played a part?

**Theme/Message:** What is the main theme or message I am trying to get across?

**Figurative Language:** What are some metaphors, images or other figurative language I want to use to convey elements of my story?

**Dialogue:** Do I want to use dialogue about an interaction I had? If so, what?

**Details:** What specific experiences, interactions and details are important to share as part of the story?

**Values:** What is at least one important value that I want my reader to take from my story?

**Self-Reflection:** What inner thoughts do I want to convey about this experience and how it affected me?