

**Unit on Racism and Teaching Tolerance in the Classroom:  
“A Guide for Teachers who want to Discuss Issues of Race, But Don’t  
Know Where to Start”**

**Framingham High School  
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### *Narrative and Rationale Behind Lessons*

As a white woman I grew up thinking that speaking about race was wrong. I was taught to be colorblind and not see racial differences. This theory worked in my predominantly white high school and my predominantly white college. However, it was not until I moved to Framingham that I realized that race matters. I looked around the cafeteria and saw all the black kids sitting at one table, the Brazilian kids at another, and the white students at yet another different table. It was not long after that I saw that my honors classes consisted of mainly white kids. I have read Beverly Tatum's book "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" I understand the theoretical reasons behind this. I also understood that racism is wrong and that the United States has a shameful past. But it was not until I saw it, experienced, heard, and felt it in the halls of Framingham High School, that I truly understood what racism is and why race matters.

Race matters because it is present and it is with us. It may not always be relevant but if you choose to ignore it, to be colorblind (as I was), then you may be ignoring a part of someone's identity. If you do not believe that race matters, spend a couple hours with some kids of color and you will see that it does. They constantly ask each other "what are you?" They are also constantly making racist remarks. If race matters to students then it should matter to us. We should teach about it, and not just in the historical context. We need to talk about the issues of race today. We should also teach it to clear up the misconceptions behind those racist remarks you hear in the hallway on any given day. If teachers are not comfortable talking and teaching about race, there is no way to stop racism.

The goal of this unit is for teachers to have a place to begin teaching about issues around race. The first two lessons are designed to do this and serve as an introduction to race. You first must convince students that racism still exists. The Power Point entitled "Wait...Racism..Still Exists..But, We Have a Black President?" is designed to do that. Providing students with facts about the socioeconomic conditions about black Americans will hopefully allow them to see that

racism is a system. In fact, I teach this unit with the assumption that racism is a system. Yet, I also allow the students to form their own definitions about race. In teaching about race it is important not to push your views on students, but to allow them to create their own.

The next lesson in this unit plan deals with the media, which has slowly become one of the strongest agents of socialization. Media is important to use because it is very accessible to kids. Looking at how movies, magazines, and music portray race can be a very eye-opening experience for students. The media is often to blame for promoting and re-enforcing stereotypes; therefore having students analyze this will allow them to look at the media in a different light. Finally, the last part of the unit involves students learning to be active anti-racists. “The Day of Social Justice” hopes to promote change for students. It also allows students to actively experience the issues that have been addressed in class. Along with this project, I have included student work from the Day of Social Justice so that teachers can see the end result of this assignment.

This unit is designed for high school students and can be taught in as little as a week and as long as a month, depending on the room in your curriculum. Teaching about race is uncomfortable and will be tough. If you believe as I do, that it is important, then it can be done. This unit is just one way to help teachers start discussing issues of modern day racism. It is not the only way to teach race in the classroom. But, I truly believe it’s a start.

## ***Six Helpful Hints and Suggestions for Teachers when Dealing with the Uncomfortable Topic of Race***

- **Don't make assumptions about your students' experiences.**
  - Let students speak for themselves about the experiences they have had with race or racism.
- **Tap into prior knowledge**
  - It may be helpful to have your students write about their experiences so you can understand their prior knowledge about race and racism.
- **Ask for help**
  - Guest speakers are a huge help. Find out if your district will support someone who is an expert on the topic coming into your classroom. This could be a good first day activity.
- **Comfort is key**
  - If the students feel uncomfortable they will not open up. Make your classroom a safe space. Set ground rules stating that kids cannot attack each other personally. Hear all your students out.
- **It is okay not to have all the answers**
  - You as a teacher do not need to know it all. It is okay for the students to see you as human. As long as you can provide them with resources for their questions you are doing your job.
- **Let your students know that you have to work everyday to be an active anti-racist.**
  - It is okay to let students know that just like learning math problems learning to be an anti-racist takes practice.



### *Why Race Matters and Why It's Okay to Talk About It*

**Pre-assessment:** Assign ahead of time an assignment asking students to describe how race and culture have impacted their lives.

**Materials:**

- ❑ White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible- Peggy McIntosh
- ❑ Definitions of Racism
- ❑ Mississippi School Holds First Interracial Prom
- ❑ Who are Racists? (Optional)
- ❑ Parents' Social & Cultural Capital (Optional)
- ❑ Street Calculus

**Procedures:**

**Anticipatory Set:**

1. Ask students to discuss their writing on how culture or race has impacted their lives. One way to set up the classroom is in a circle for discussion. If you find students interrupting, you may have to pass around an object and only the student who is holding the object can speak.
2. Ask students to define racism. Then pass out the handout with the definition of racism. Come up with a class definition or ask students to choose their own.

**Middle:**

3. Have students pair up and read “Mississippi School Holds First Interracial Prom.” There is also a movie on this if you have time in your class to show it.
4. Ask the following discussion questions for the students to answer in pairs:
  - ✓ Did the article surprise you?
  - ✓ Why do you think it took until 2008 to have an interracial prom?
  - ✓ What does this say about race relations in America?
  - ✓ Why do you think the crew “did not question segregated dances”?
  - ✓ *Brown v. the Board of Education*, that Supreme court case that limited segregation in schools, happened over 50 years ago...what does this say about the progress we have made as a nation?
5. Now, pass out the “Street Calculus” cartoon without the writing in the bubbles. Ask the student what the kids in Mississippi may have been thinking and how they may have filled out those bubbles.
6. Then pass out the handout with the bubbles filled in. Have students discuss their perceptions and the stereotypes they hold of other races.

**Closing/Assessment**

Have students read “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh. Each student will have an opportunity to read twice. Students will read an item until they have read them all.

Homework: Answer this question: Reflect on today. What surprised you in class today, if anything? Did anything make you feel uncomfortable, happy, sad, or angry?

## **The Cold Hard Facts**

### **Materials:**

- PowerPoint: Cold Hard Facts
- Tupac Song “Changes”
- Cycle of Oppression

### **Anticipatory Set:**

1. Start by discussing last night’s homework with the students. This is a good place to gauge the comfort level and feelings in the classroom. Collect responses. When you read them you will have an opportunity to see how your students are feeling.

### **Middle:**

2. Show students the PowerPoint “Race Matters?”
3. Have students discuss PowerPoint. Describe the idea of systemic racism.
4. Have students listen to the Tupac song “Changes”. Have students discuss the following questions in pairs:
  - ✓ How does Tupac’s life story relate to this music?
  - ✓ What has changed in our world in terms of race relations?
  - ✓ What are the issues according to this song for black Americans?
  - ✓ How does this relate to what we have been studying?
5. Discuss as a group.

### **Closing/Assessment:**

6. Handout “Cycle of Oppression.” Discuss the cycle of oppression in terms of race.

Homework: Have students bring in a magazine that is targeted for the teen audience. Make sure the magazine is school appropriate.

## How Does the Media Construct Race?

### Materials:

- Magazines
- TV clip- One Tree Hill
- Media Stereotypes assignment

### Anticipatory Set:

1. Ask students to create a list of different racial groups. Create a list on the board. Then ask the students to come out and cross off the ones they feel are untrue or do not apply to all.
2. Pass out the handout about *Stereotype Threat*. Explain the significance of how students do or do not live up to their labels.

### Middle:

3. Show “One Tree Hill” clip. This is a T.V. show where the only black character is named Skills and plays basketball. Also, the female characters, cry often and are focused on clothes and makeup
4. Discuss with your students:
  - ✓ How are the characters portrayed in this show?
  - ✓ How are women viewed?
  - ✓ What is Skills’ role?
  - ✓ What is the message in the media if the only black character plays basketball and is not as smart as the other characters?
  - ✓ Can you think of other ways the media portrays blacks, women, and other groups?

### Closing and Assessment:

5. Have students take out their magazines and examine the way Black Americans and other people of color are portrayed. See handout on Media Stereotypes for further instructions.

Homework: Watch T.V. for 15 minutes and write down any and all stereotypes you find.

## Creating Change: Being an Active Anti-Racist

### Materials:

- ❑ Left/Right handout
- ❑ Active Anti-Racist Boxes activity
- ❑ “Day of Social Justice” Assignment

### Anticipatory Set:

1. Collect homework and then have students start Left/Right activity. Have students write down what life is like to be left handed vs. right handed. Students will likely come up with responses such as left handed is more difficult, it is harder to find scissors (resources are scarce), I wish I was right handed, and some may say they feel special. Students who are right handed might say they never think about being right handed, it is easier, and/or life is simpler. Once this is done you can replace the label of right handed/left-handed to male and female. From there you can continue to replace the words with rich and poor, college educated and uneducated, young and old, able-bodied and non-able bodied, as well as white and black. This helps to open up students’ eyes about the challenges certain groups may face.

### Middle:

2. Ask students to take out their notebooks and make a box with four categories: racist - passive and active, anti-racist - passive and active. See example box for details
3. Then, ask students to come up with examples for each box. They will soon realize that no examples fit in the passive anti- racist box and that to be an anti-racist you need to be active.

### Closing and Assessment:

4. Pass out “Day of Social Justice” project. See handout for details. Discuss with students their concerns and issues around the assignment.

Homework: Day of Social Justice!!

## Activities and Attachments

<b>Left handed</b>	<b>Right handed</b>

### ***How Does the Media Reinforce Stereotypes?***

Of the 4 primary influences/agents of socialization, the media has the most identifiable influence on people, especially adolescents, as they explore their self-identity.

Today you are going to examine this phenomenon first hand. Look through your magazine and answer the following questions:

1. Write 10 adjectives that come to mind as you flip through the magazine.
2. How often do you see people of color represented? How are they represented?
3. What is the age of the targeted audience?
4. What stereotypes does the magazine proliferate? Give examples.
5. How true/realistic are the photos' stories? Explain.
6. How might this magazine affect developing racial identities of adolescents? Explain.



**Example Box**

	<b>Racists</b>	<b>Anti-Racist</b>
<b>ACTIVE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Job discrimination</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Slurs</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Comments</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Hate art</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Treating others differently</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Marches</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Protests</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Standing up for others</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Joining groups that support social justice</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Making an effort to be inclusive</b></li> </ul>
<b>PASSIVE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Thoughts</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Looks</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Ideas</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>THIS BOX IS BLANK. TO BE ANTI RACISTS YOU MUST BE ACTIVE!!</b></p>

### Living Experiment: Day of Social Justice

#### Step I: Participate in the Day of Social Justice

Our Social Psychology class will observe a "Day of Social Justice." To participate in this event, your challenge will be to live each minute of that day in as inclusive, unprejudiced, and nondiscriminatory a way as possible.

In other words, for a full \_\_\_\_\_ period you should do your best to embody ideals such as fairness, equality, and diversity.

When carrying out this assignment, consider institutional as well as personal forms of injustice and privilege.

That is, **don't just avoid obvious acts of bias, segregation, and exclusion...act to change these things.**

Think deeply about the issues of discrimination and prejudice and reflect on how these behaviors affect others and the world.

Try to reduce these injustices without behaving in ways that are phony or insincere. It is up to you to define what social justice is and to decide how best to realize it.

Note: To minimize any bias in social reactions, it is best if you do not tell others about the class assignment until after the Day of Social Justice is over.

In carrying out this assignment, try to go beyond superficial descriptive accounts and see if you can arrive at social psychological insights that might improve your life, school, society, or the world.

#### Step II: Write About Your Experience

*Write a two page paper addresses the following questions*

1. How did you define "social justice", and what did you focus your efforts on?
2. If your behavior was different than normal, which person did you like more: the "Day of Social Justice you" or the "normal you"? If you preferred the "Day of Social Justice you," what are the psychological factors that prevent this "you" from coming out on a daily basis?
3. What are the psychological costs and benefits of reducing segregation at school? In your view, do the benefits outweigh the costs?
4. How did others respond to you?

5. Do you think that others noticed a difference in your behavior?
6. What acknowledgment did people make for your behavior, and why?
7. If you wanted to encourage others to behave as you did during the Day of Social Justice, what techniques would you use?
8. How can social psychology be used to foster a more just society?
9. If you were to predict your behavior one month from now, do you think it will be changed in any way as a result of participating in the Day of Social Justice? If so, how? If not, why not?

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