

LOOKING DEEPER AT...

Practicing Difficult Dialogue Discussion Guide



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How might we better prepare people to engage in purposeful discussions about race?

Practicing Difficult Dialogue. Facilitators in this Clip are J’Nelle Chulene & Jaimie-Jin Lewis from Border Crossers

OVERVIEW

In the process of making a film, there is always so much great footage that doesn’t make it into the film cut. The video that accompanies this lesson isn’t in **I’m Not Racist... Am I?**, but shows a workshop that was incredibly meaningful and effective for the group. In this segment two facilitators from Border Crossers - an organization dedicated to empowering educators to address race and racism – run a workshop for the teens to help them practice difficult dialogue about race and racism. They guide the group through a number of role-play exercises to practice how to handle hurtful or misguided comments, and how to support others when having tough conversations. This workshop brought a sense of closure and empowered the participants to initiate tough conversations about race outside of the safety of the group. This lesson includes a video of the workshop, along with discussion questions and follow-up activities for your students.

OBJECTIVES

- To help students practice identifying racism, racial prejudice, or stereotypes in their real-life encounters.
- To provide students with the opportunity to practice speaking up or voicing discomfort when these situations occur in real life.
- To think deeply about how to have difficult conversations.
- To develop the skills to be able to have difficult conversations.
- To build mediation skills in an effort to conduct difficult conversations in a positive manner.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. During the human barometer exercise, Farah mentions that in order to create or be the “change we [the participants] are talking about” they must be able to talk openly and honestly about race, racism, and privilege. Do you agree or disagree? Can you think of an example of a time when it may be best for an individual to be silent when he or she experiences or witnesses racism? To what extent do you think the other participants in the film share Farah’s thoughts or feelings about this change?
2. Kahleek and Terrence differentiate between the notion that it is either an obligation or a choice to step in to make the world a better place. Which of these two options is the ethical action? Which is the realistic one?
3. Terrence argues that it would be exhausting for a person of color to interrupt or step in every time they see or hear racism. Sometimes this idea is understood as people of color acting as “watchdogs” of racism. Given the fact that one of the primary claims in the film is that systemic racism is perpetuated by white privilege, should people of color or white people be the “watchdogs” of racism? Whose obligation is it to speak out against racism and fight against systemic racism?

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, CONT'D

4. Analyze and discuss the following comment made by facilitator J’Nelle Chulene during a role-play activity in this video: “You’re making it sound as though I have white privilege and I don’t. I have worked so hard and I deserve everything, and that’s not because I’m white. That’s because I work hard.” This comment is very much rooted in the dominant cultural narrative about American identity of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps, being a “self-made man,” and achieving the American Dream.

5. What are some of the counter-narratives that conflict with this notion of the American Dream and how do they affect different populations in the United States (e.g. immigration, welfare, social services, maternity leave, same sex marriage)? In other words, are there groups that don’t have access to privilege or wealth, and for what reasons?

Note to Facilitators: Some participants may share the sentiment reflected in J’Nelle’s role-play comment, while others will feel marginalized. Be prepared to handle any conflict amongst viewer opinions by emphasizing the spirit of the film, which is rooted in respectful, honest, growth-oriented discussion about race, racism, and privilege.

6. After watching this segment from **I’m Not Racist... Am I?**, have your group list techniques that one might use to engage in difficult dialogue around race, racism, and privilege. To help this process, begin with the techniques that the participants in the film are taught by the facilitators. For example, one might respond to a racially insensitive statement with questions like: “Why do you think that?” “What do you mean by that?” “Tell me more about why you say that?”

7. As the facilitators in this segment conduct role-play activities, the participants sometimes respond with laughter, perhaps due to discomfort or an inability to respond in any other way. What are the positive and negative effects of laughter or humor in difficult dialogues about race, racism, and privilege?

ACTIVITY

Practice: Role-playing can be employed as a design-thinking tool because it can help people ideate, prototype, and test behavior in unpredictable or difficult situations. The scenarios below offer opportunities for people to ideate, prototype, and test how they might engage in discussions to confront difficult topics like racism.

Step 1: Distribute the “At School” and “At Home” Scenarios (below) and read them out loud. Then ask participants to form groups of three. Each group should choose a scenario, discuss it, and practice (role-play) how they might handle it in real life.

Step 2: Reconvene as a large group. Ask participants to either act out their scenarios or share how they chose to address the situation.

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At School Scenarios

Scenario #1:

You and some of your white friends are at lunch. A friend calls you his “n***ga” → using the full word. You tell him you don’t like that word, but he and your other friends laugh, saying everyone uses it, and why can’t they say it when black kids use it all the time.

Scenario #2:

Some friends are hanging out after soccer practice. After your friend, who is Puerto Rican with a dark complexion, leaves, your other friend, who is usually very nice, says, “She’s so pretty, especially for a dark-skinned girl.”

Scenario #3:

It’s the beginning of senior year and you and your classmates are feeling stressed about applying to college. One friend, who is white, has a high GPA but only average test scores and is worried about getting into a highly-ranked school. She says, “If I were black or Latino, this would be much easier.”

Scenario #4:

Your geometry teacher hands out tests she graded last week and your friend who is Asian American gets a C. The classmate sitting behind him looks at your friend’s grade and says, “Aren’t Asians supposed to be good at math?”

At Home Scenarios

Scenario #1:

You come home from school and a family member wants to know about the documentary you watched - I’m Not Racist... Am I? You explain that there’s a difference between racism and bigotry and that people of color can’t be racist against white people. This family member says that doesn’t make any sense because there is a man who is Mexican who works at the reception desk at her office building who is nice to everyone who walks into the building except for white people, and that makes him a racist.

Scenario #2:

Your parents have heard a lot about the documentary you watched today and are anxious to hear what you learned. The part that stuck out the most to you was when the workshop facilitator said that all white people are racist. Your parents’ jaws drop. “That’s offensive and isn’t true,” they say. “We know plenty of white people who aren’t racist.”