

# LOOKING DEEPER AT...

## Race and Racism Through a Teen Lens

The Students from the film **I'm Not Racist... Am I?** Discussion Guide



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## OVERVIEW

**I'm Not Racist... Am I?** is a feature documentary about how this next generation is going to confront racism. We asked teenagers from New York City to come together for one school year to talk about race and privilege in a series of workshops and in conversations with friends and family members.

Use these questions about the students to get to know them a little better and to provide a starting point for discussions with your students.

## ABBY

1. Abby says that being white seems to be the “norm” and that the part of her that’s “different” is the part of her that’s African American. What do you think she means by this?
2. Abby shares that she has avoided talking about race because she wants to be the person everyone likes and she doesn’t want to make others feel uncomfortable. Can you think of any times in your life when you could have talked about race but decided not to? What kept you from speaking up?
3. Why do you think Abby waited a few days before telling her parents about her experience on the London Tube? What might be some ways that the adults in your life could make you feel more comfortable talking about race?
4. What else stood out to you in this video?
5. If Abby were here, what would you ask her?

## ANNA

1. Did it surprise you that Anna says she identifies as white and as Asian? Why or why not?
2. Anna shares with her peers that she takes it as a compliment when other kids tell her she’s white. Why do you think she feels that way.
3. Anna talks about the stereotype that all Asians are good at school. Some people might think that’s a good assumption to make about people. Do you agree with that? Why or why not? Why do you think it bothers Anna?
4. Why do you think it’s so hard for Anna to talk about race? Do you find it hard, as well? Why or why not?
5. What else stood out to you in this video?
6. If Anna were here, what would you ask her?

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## ADUNNI

1. Adunni talks about the fact that her classmates - at her predominantly Latinx high school - have a stereotype that the black students are more likely to drop out, get pregnant, or be the first in their families to attend college. What did you think about when you heard that?
2. Adunni said her classmates tell her she's "pretty for a dark-skinned girl." What did you think about when you heard that?
3. Adunni talks about her grandfather's activism during the Civil Rights Movement and says that some of the problems he talks with her about are still relevant, but she also thinks there's been a lot of improvement since the 1960s.
  - a. Do you agree? Why or why not?
  - b. What things have changed? What things are the same?
4. Consider Adunni's definition of racism: "When one race is discriminatory towards another race."
  - a. Do you agree with this definition? Why or why not?
  - b. What do you think Adunni's mom means when she says, "Racism is so much bigger than bigotry."
5. What's one question you would ask Adunni?
6. What else stood out to you in this video?

## TERRENCE

1. Terrence says it feels like, "nobody wants me to become anything." Why do you think he feels this way? How do you think this feeling affects his everyday life?
2. What did you think about the police officers who gave Terrence a hard time about his education goals? What could they have said or done that would have been more encouraging?
3. Terrence said, "I want people to accept me for who I am." Can you connect with that feeling? If yes, how so? If not, why not?
4. Terrence says that, "Racism isn't by nature -- it's by the way you're taught." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
5. What else stood out to you about Terrence?
6. If he were here, what would you ask him?

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1. Emma talked about not fitting in to any one racial category.
  - a. Have you ever had to choose a race or ethnicity - either on a form or in conversations with your peers?
  - b. Do you think you should have to answer questions about your race or ethnicity? Why or why not?
2. Emma describes her unique family. What did you think when she shared that she can somewhat see herself as part of a minority group because she's adopted and has two dads?
3. Why do you think Emma is so motivated to learn and speak out about injustice?
4. Do you think white people have a responsibility to speak up about racism? Why or why not?
5. What else stood out to you about this video?
6. If she were here, what would you ask her?



1. Kai's great-grandmother Yuri was a prominent civil rights advocate who was among the approximately 120,000 people of Japanese descent who were held in "internment camps" during World War II. How do you think this family history might influence Kai?
2. Kai says that she sometimes feels like a "fraud" when claiming her black identity. What do you think about that statement?
3. Kai says that there are fewer consequences for making fun of Asian people than there are for African American people. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Kai discusses the common stereotypes about Asian people being smart and successful. Why might these so-called "positive stereotypes" bother Kai?
5. What's one question you would ask Kai if you could?
6. What else stood out to you in this video?

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1. Elio says, “Spanish was my first language, and I can’t speak it anymore.” What did you think when you heard him say that?
2. What did you think about when you heard Elio talk about the way his friends at his school in New Jersey talked about Latinx people?
3. Elio shares that it’s been easier for him to make friends with other kids who identify as Latinx because “our cultures are really similar.” What do you think makes it easier? In your experience, have you found that it’s easier to be friends with people who share similar backgrounds?
4. Reflect on Elio’s first time getting stopped by the police as a 15-year-old. Did he do anything wrong? What did you think when he said his friends told him, “This happens all the time. You’ll get used to it”?
5. What else stood out about in this video?
6. If Elio were here, what would you ask him?

## **ETHAN**



- Ethan is white and has a very racially diverse group of friends, which is not typical for high school students in the U.S. Why do you think racially diverse friend groups are still so unique? What are some things that would have to change in this country in order for this to be more common?
2. What did you think about Ethan’s statement, “I don’t really identify myself racially”? Do you think that’s something Americans should aspire to? Why or why not?
  3. Even if Ethan doesn’t completely identify with being white because of his heritage, he admits he still appears white. How might the fact that others see him as white affect his everyday experiences?
  4. Reflect on Ethan’s ancestors who were born Cherokee but who were able to pass as white and how they had to shed their heritage in order to escape Native genocide. What are some ways in which this family history might connect to modern day racism in the U.S.?
  5. What else stood out to you in this video?
  6. If Ethan were here, what would you ask him?

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1. Farah talks about the responsibilities she has taken on from a young age because her parents don't speak English. What kind of impact do you think these types of responsibilities might have on her education, on her social life, and her goals?
2. Farah identifies as South Asian and Bengali but understands that people don't categorize Bengali or Indian under the general umbrella of "Asian". Why do you think this happens?
3. Farah says that many of her friends of color will be the first to attend college and that, "it's not just that we want to do well or do better or have something better -- we have to." What do you think she means by this?
4. Farah shares a story about a friend's parents assuming her father drives taxis. Why was that assumption so hurtful?
5. What's one question you would ask Farah?
6. What else stood out to you in this video?



1. Sacha's parents and grandparents are from South African and played a significant role in anti-Apartheid activism. How do you think this family history might influence Sacha?
2. Sacha talks about how diverse his friend group was in elementary school and how in middle school and high school, his friends were mostly white and Jewish - like him. What are some things you have noticed about race and friendship groups in your school?
3. Sacha thinks playing sports can be a way to bring people of different races together. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. What else stood out to you about Sacha?
5. If he were here, what would you ask him?

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## KAHLEEK

1. Kahleek attends a charter high school that shares a building with two other schools.
  - a. What stood out to you as you heard his description of his school and the other two schools in the building?
  - b. What do you think about the racial separation he describes?
2. Kahleek states, "I identify myself as myself." What do you think he means by that?
3. Do you think it's important for people to have a racial identity? Why or why not?
4. One of the themes that repeats throughout this clip is the idea of expectations - people expect Kahleek to be or act a certain way.
  - a. Why do you think people have these expectations?
  - b. Can you relate to what Kahleek is saying about challenging other people's expectations? If so, how?
5. What's one question you would like to ask Kahleek?
6. What else stood out to you in this video?