

## **The Colour of my Skin - Teaching Guidelines**

### **Why should we have conversations about race and racism in schools?**

As the testimony in these six films demonstrates, experiences of racism have a lasting impact. In schools, racism can manifest in different ways, from micro-aggressions to openly racist bullying or isolation. Historically young people haven't felt able to share their experiences of racism and this has led to distrust, and loss of identity. Therefore conversations that provide opportunities for reflection, discussion, education and action should be part of developing well-rounded and informed young people. This is important for all pupils, including white pupils. It is important that white children are racially literate and understand the importance of what race and racism means. This work is not just about highlighting discrimination. It is about empowering all children to see the value in all skin colours and ethnic groups.

Schools need to actively model how to talk about race and racism to pupils. It can no longer be dismissed as 'not a problem'. Talking about race should not be a token gesture either – schools should have continuing conversations. Research shows that, from as young as 30 months, children understand racial differences. So conversations may have started in your pupils' primary schools and should continue throughout secondary school.

### **How do we prepare to teach about race and racism well?**

As mentioned above, your pupils may have been engaged in conversations about race and racism previously. It is important to first gauge your pupil's knowledge to see what they understand about race and racism.

As with any sensitive topic, it is also important that you inform parents and carers before showing these films to your pupils. People of colour need the opportunity to prepare themselves for the potentially traumatic and triggering experience that may take place in the classroom. This might be heightened in schools where there are very few children of colour and those pupils may be holding the space and representation for an entire community. Counselling services and signposting for mental health support should also be provided and readily available.

School staff shouldn't rely on a person of colour in the staff or student body, or expect them to carry the burden for the whole school; it is up to everyone to educate themselves. A person of colour should always be consulted (communication is key), but don't assume they will want to lead sessions with students or educate others on race and racism. Instead, ensure that everyone has a chance to share lived experiences and that you ask in what way they would like to contribute or collaborate. Following this, a person of colour should be offered the opportunity to express any need for psychological safety and therapy/counselling before, during or after sharing their experiences.

You should also look at the data in your school. What racist incidents have been brought to your attention? What steps have been taken? What would you do differently now? It is important to listen to the lived experiences of your pupils and parents and be willing to take necessary action, should it be needed.

You should diversify your reading list and social media – good sources of knowledge and training can be found online. See [BAMEed](#) and [DiverseEd](#) for example.

Many teachers feel they lack racial literacy and this might present a barrier to discussing race and racism. Turn to your school community, and collaborate with parents. Be sensitive, genuine and humble about what you do know and what you are seeking to find out. It is important to note that whilst mistakes can be made, they must be acknowledged and that educators should also be willing to apologise. Victims of those mistakes should be given space and support when needed.

### **Ideas for starting discussions about race and racism:**

- Discussions about privilege are hard, but should not be ignored. Terminology needs to be carefully-chosen. This video with [John Amaechi on the BBC Bitesize website](#) might be a good starting point.
- Read *The Good Immigrant* - it offers 20+ diverse voices on what it is like to be non-white in the UK.
- Make the space safe. Acknowledge that students 'might ask/say it wrong' but that is okay. We will all get it wrong until we know how to get it right. As stated above, it is important to note that whilst mistakes can be made, they must be acknowledged and both educators and pupils should be willing to apologise. Victims of those mistakes should be given space and support when needed.
- Use the late MP Jo Cox's words: "We have far more in common than that which divides us" to generate discussion and lessons on diversity. Look at who she was, what she stood for and how hatred and fear led to her loss of life.
- Talk openly about the different ethnic groups represented within your school, celebrate countries of origin, languages, religions, and holy events.
- Include conversations about human rights, equity and equality. Remind pupils that we don't always have to like/agree with something, but we have to respect people's right to exist, live peacefully and practise their religion.
- Use [reliable sources](#) to support your own knowledge.
- Challenge stereotypes and prejudice - these can lead to lasting misconceptions if not explored.
- Consider buying more representative books for your school library and encouraging young people to read them/integrate them into the curriculum.

### **Safe teaching and learning**

These short films are designed to be used with secondary-aged students. However, you should consider your specific cohort carefully and watch the content yourself before using in a classroom.

Respect, equality, and diversity are key features in a well-planned anti-racism lesson. Themes within these films should be used as preventative education, rather than a reactive measure to world or local events.

The PSHE Association states that: *'A safe and respectful PSHE classroom can give pupils the opportunity to reflect on how each individual's behaviour, attitudes and biases affect others and teach them how to recognise and challenge prejudice,*

*stereotypes and discrimination.*’ ([Further reading on the PSHE Association website](#)).

These films provide distanced scenarios to help open up discussion in the classroom. The six stories bring issues to life and help young people understand how to identify discrimination and racism, the impact it has and how to report and challenge such attitudes and behaviours.

The films give a first-person factual account of each young person’s experience of racism. They are not making generalised comments about the effectiveness of public institutions. Each story of racism is unique, although some aspects of each story do overlap – and it is these elements and concepts that should be explored with students so that they understand the complex nature of racism.

The films do contain content which some people may find upsetting. Students may also have had direct or indirect experience of racism or racially-motivated bullying. Some of the stories share the impact of racism on young people’s mental health. There are also examples in which young people recount being let down by institutions or individuals in a position of power, which some students might recognise.

You should be aware that racism fatigue may occur. It is important to note that for children of colour, even when the discussion in the classroom is over, the experiences will not disappear. They are lived every day. Alongside these sessions, you should ensure that your curriculum and teaching resources include positive examples of people of colour in society, and stories of empowerment (the point being that pupils should not only be taught about slavery and civil rights, although this is of course important). Positive representation is important for pupil self-esteem, growth, self-development and self-worth. It also helps white pupils become racially literate – all students should learn about positive contributions from people of colour.

Discussing minority perspectives, stories or issues can often result in minority community members feeling very exposed. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘spotlight effect’.

For young people of colour, it might feel like a whole lesson exploring non-white experiences is about them. They might feel that ‘everyone is watching the lesson whilst watching me’, and that all comments, reflections, and that discussions have relevance to their own narratives and experiences. This can lead to feelings of embarrassment, discomfort, and hyper-visibility.

Before using these films in your lesson, consider discussing them with any young people in your class who might feel exposed by the topics covered. Including these young people in the planning of the lesson gives them the opportunity to highlight (if they wish to) triggering aspects of the lesson, their own experiences and their preferences, all of which can help to build trust. It also enables the teacher to reassure students about the objectives of the learning and ask how they might feel most comfortable to participate. This co-ownership can empower young people who might not want to be ‘the voice’ but still have a voice to share.

Agreeing and co-writing guidelines and rules will establish agreed behaviours. There is an example list below.

It may also be beneficial to highlight misconceptions and stereotypes, providing facts that challenge them. For example, statistically, there are more white men arrested for crimes than any other gender and ethnicity ([Arrests - GOV.UK Ethnicity facts and figures \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/Arrests))

This data could be the basis for a starter activity in which you ask students: ‘should we be wary of all white men?’ During this conversation, students can identify the issues with such a statement. You could use and show the data on arrests and discuss how data can be manipulated and under or over reported, leading to the hyper-visibility of certain groups in relation to crime. This helps to develop critical thought and reflection.

You could extend this further to discuss if greater measures are needed in schools to protect people from white male students and staff. This will of course get much discussion, and is an opportunity for you to flip the focus to people from minority groups. Students will then be more ready to recognise that generalisations are harmful. In the moment when ‘white men’ were the focus, young people who identify as white and male will have experienced the ‘spotlight effect’. This can become the opportunity to agree and build on ground rules that include steps to avoid any individual or group feeling they are in the spotlight.

**Ensure a safe environment for use by doing the following for each lesson in which the films are used:**

- Create or revisit ground rules.
- Remind pupils of any existing ground rules you might already use, or agree ground rules with them before the lesson.
- Judge and comment on what other students say, not on who they are.
- Discuss the situations of the characters in the films, not others’ personal experiences.
- Everyone has the right to pass.
- Encourage and respond to questions safely.
- Avoid repeating racial slurs. The stories highlight slurs and racist bullying – instead talk and discuss the impact of the words and actions used.
- Avoid ‘cold-calling’ students to respond to questions.
- Be open and share with students that we might’ve inadvertently done or said things we recognise from the videos. Reassure students that recognising this and then aiming to be better going forward is healthy and productive.
- Be sensitive to individual students who may be living with or have experience of racism or racist incidents, either directly or indirectly. Sensitivity is important even if you are not aware of any personal experiences in the class – working on the basis that there is at least one person who may be vulnerable ensures safe delivery for all. No-one should feel under any pressure to discuss their own circumstances or experiences.
- Always work within your school’s safeguarding and confidentiality policies and procedures.

If you are unsure of the procedures, seek advice from your Designated Safeguarding Lead, or contact the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000. Signpost students to sources of additional information or support if they need it, including named adults within school.

### **How to use these short films**

Each short film is accompanied by discussion notes. These discussion notes are for guidance only. You may wish to use different questions or statements to stimulate discussion, depending on your cohort. Some might be better to ask and explore before watching the film, some after. There are also suggestions of activities and wider themes to explore the issues further.

After watching each film, allow plenty of time for discussion and sharing of perceptions and opinions. Group students in a way that suits your needs, but always ensure sharing of responses so that everyone in the class hears from one another.

Try to lead discussions with impartial and non-judgemental questioning that encourages students to form their own opinions. Encourage students to both support and challenge one another.

The films can be used one at a time, or grouped together, according to your lesson plan and time available. Two films within a session including discussions, follow up activities and wider exploration will offer suitable time to consider the depth and difficulty of each story.