



# What if we talked about racism?

A pedagogical guide to leading a  
respectful discussion around  
racism in the classroom



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inform • protect • support



Recherche et Action  
sur les Polarisation  
Sociales



<https://youtu.be/ll8ikDkfcGs>

# WHAT IF WE TALKED ABOUT RACISM?

A production of



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# INTRODUCTION

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**The present COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and amplified forms of oppression and disparities experienced by the most vulnerable groups, fueling stigmatization and social exclusion of minorities (Cleveland et al., 2020; Miconi et al., 2020).**

The increase in anti-Asian hate incidents throughout the world and the push for social justice, as advocated for instance by the Black Lives Matter movement, are just some examples of emerging social phenomena affecting youth, their families, and their schools (Minke, 2020; Tynes et al., 2020). This social climate represents a challenge for educators who need to help their students understand and react to current events while preserving emotional and relational safety within their schools and promoting values of equity and solidarity.

**This social climate is affecting the youth, their families, and their schools.**





## **In spite of recent efforts to address microaggressions and bullying, stigma and discrimination remain a reality in schools.**

The increased frequency of discriminatory behaviors during the pandemic has exposed minority and racialized youth to elevated levels of psychological and emotional distress (Grapin et al., 2019; Tynes et al., 2020). It also affects intergroup relations within schools, putting at risk trust among members of the school community (students, parents, staff, and neighborhood). Schools need to address these social dynamics to restore a safe environment for all and prevent developmental disparities in at-risk youth which have long-lasting consequences (Grapin et al., 2019). Interventions which work to reduce prejudice are a promising way to move forward. For example, consciousness-raising interventions designed to teach students about concepts such as bias and privilege can be valuable in affirming the identities of minority students and promoting worthwhile skills such as critical thinking, empathy and perspective-taking (Grapin et al., 2019). Such interventions can also be adapted to include information on prejudice and stigma related to infectious diseases and the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it can be challenging, talking with young people about racism and respectfully consider their opinions about the world is important in order to establish a dialogue that can reassure and validate those who are distressed and promote critical reflection and solidarity among others.



# THE VIDEO

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The 7-minute video and accompanying pedagogical guide have been developed to help teachers introduce the issue of racism in the classroom and to facilitate discussions around students' emotional responses, experiences, and opinions related to the topic. The video does not aim to present any given “truth” or point out the “rights” and “wrongs” of any argument or perspective. It is intended as a tool to shed light on the complexities of the phenomenon and to voice the thoughts of a few young Montrealers regarding ways to make sense of, and react to, what is happening in our world.

The video is organized in **three main sections** and can be presented either as a whole or with breaks between each section. In both scenarios, the viewing should be followed by some time for personal reflection and a group discussion

- **Part 1: reflections on the issue of racism in general;**
- **Part 2: racism in the context of the pandemic;**
- **Part 3: the causes of racism;**
- **Part 4: potential solutions to the problem.**

The video aims to encourage personal reflection and group discussion, with the ultimate objective of stimulating young people into inquiring for themselves, exploring new ideas, thinking critically, and discussing this sensitive topic in a respectful way at school, with friends and with family.



<https://youtu.be/Il8ikDkfcGs>

This document was developed by CoVivre and RAPS 2020



# PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

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## Activity with school staff

Before conducting the activity in class, it is recommended that school staff watch the video together and discuss their perceptions of the situation in their school (this be done via videoconference). Some teachers may feel that they have the necessary skills and experience to lead a discussion with their students. Others may prefer to co-lead the discussion with a resource person. If a teacher would like to share their experiences/ideas, or would like some assistance in facilitating the discussion, they can contact the Polarization Team from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. 7 days a week at 514-267-3979.



# PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

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## Activity with students

### 1. Introduction

The teacher introduces the video to the students by explaining that they would like to discuss the issue of racism with the class and would like to hear the students' thoughts, emotions, and experiences related to it. If the class is receptive, a quick brainstorming activity can be proposed. The teacher asks the students what words or images come to mind regarding this issue and notes the responses on the board (10 min).

### 2. Viewing

The video is shown to the students (7 min).

### 3. Reflecting

The teacher offers the students some time to reflect on their thoughts and emotions regarding the video and then invites them to express them creatively in a form of expression of their choice (e.g., writing, poetry, drawing, photo/picture with explanation, etc.). It is important to offer the students multiple ways to express themselves and to let them decide if and how they want to participate (around 20 min).

### 4. Sharing experiences

The teacher invites the students to share their experiences and creations with the rest of the class. The topic of racism can be socially polarizing and can invoke conflicting ideas. Disclosure of personal reflections or creations should not be pushed, as students may prefer to keep what they wrote or drew for themselves. It is important to remind students to voice their positions and experiences in a respectful manner and to try avoiding comments which could be hurtful to a person or a group. If, however, the discussion is perceived as hurtful or disrespectful, it needs to be addressed in a sensitive manner. It is important that distinctions are made between speech which shocks, stems from ignorance, or minimizes the other's predicament, or that which intentionally hurts through jokes, stereotypes, or through direct discriminatory language. The teacher however should underline the complexity of the phenomenon and the fact that there is not one "truth" but multiple voices and experiences that we need to make sense of (at least 30 min). If experiences of a more personal nature (or interpersonal experiences involving different people in the school) are shared, the moderator should acknowledge the emotions, provide support, and propose a private follow-up after the class if needed.



## 5. Providing resources

At the end of the discussion, the teacher provides a list of resources presenting different points of view on “hot” topics related to racism (e.g., white privilege, colonialism, reverse racism) to further underline the complexity of the issue. The students can look into the list of resources if interested, in order to deepen their understanding of these topics.



# GENERAL TIPS

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- Young people are all different and will have their own ways of reacting and expressing their emotions around difficult topics. It is therefore important to discuss emotions as much as thoughts and ideologies in order to better understand what each young person feels.
- In some cases, young people can adopt idealistic and extreme positions. Discussions become a space for open exchange about different points of view even when the teacher does not agree with their opinions. What is important is maintaining an open dialogue rather than trying to reach a consensus.
- It is important to keep in mind that educators can help young people in their desire to change society and encourage them to channel any feelings of injustice towards making positive change.



# RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

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Anti-Racism Education in Canada: Best Practices

<https://cfrac.com/publications/anti-racism-education-in-canada-best-practices/>

Learning about Racism

<https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/programs/canada-beyond-150/learning-about-racism>

Teaching Tolerance classroom resources

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources>

ETFO's 365 Black Canadian Curriculum

<https://www.etfo.ca/SupportingMembers/Resources/Pages/365.aspx>

Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy

<https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/anti-racism-engagement/resources.html>

# RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

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## **Systemic Racism:**

Systemic Racism Explained (video)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrHIQIO\\_bdQ&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrHIQIO_bdQ&feature=youtu.be)

Zero Tolerance (documentary)

[https://www.nfb.ca/film/zero\\_tolerance-edu/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/zero_tolerance-edu/)

## **White Privilege:**

Seeing White (podcast)

<https://www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/>

What Is Whiteness?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/opinion/sunday/what-is-whiteness.html>

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>

## **Colonialism:**

Colonialism, Explained

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/colonialism-explained>

Explainer: what is decolonisation?

<https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-decolonisation-131455>

## **Reverse Racism:**

Reverse Racism, Explained

<https://www.theroot.com/reverse-racism-explained-1823964786>

Solved: The Myth of Reverse Racism

<https://berkeleybeacon.com/solved-the-myth-of-reverse-racism/>

## **Cultural Appropriation:**

What is Cultural Appropriation? (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQgF1f557YY>

## **Microaggressions:**

<https://www.vox.com/2015/2/16/8031073/what-are-microaggressions>

## **Intersectionality:**

What is intersectionality? (video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1isIM0ytKE>



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