

Racial Equity Workbook

Session 1 - August 2020

Agreement:

This is not performative. This is not just a “box to check.” This is not “self-improvement” space for white folk. Our students deserve real, authentic and lasting efforts. We come to this work with genuine intentions to make our school and community safer and more equitable for all students. We understand that this racial equity work is an integral part of our belief that “Success for all takes us all.”

Signed _____

Date: _____

Journal Prompt: What are your personal intentions for this time? How are you going to ensure that this work is meaningful to you? While we will return to this question later, begin thinking about it now. We’re just getting started, so you may not be sure yet, but it’s important for us to set our intentions from the start. Feel free to come back and add to this response at any time during the session that it feels meaningful to you!

Other Notes

Common Terms for Talking About Race

Racial Equity

BIPOC

B _____
I _____
P _____
Of _____
C _____

When to Use

Racism

Right now, how would you define *racism*? _____

Our shared definition:

_____ + _____ = **Racism**

Other Notes

Common Terms for Talking About Race (Cont.)

Why does this matter?

Thoughts and Reflections on Rachel Cargle's TED Talk

Antiracist

Journal Prompt: After listening to Dr. Kendi speak, what does the term "Anti-Racist" mean to you? How might you apply this to your work with kids?

Other Notes

My Black Friend Corrected My Unwittingly Racist Statement

Sometimes, we may not even be aware of racist language

By Tracy Gerhardt-Cooper, published in Medium, July 9, 2020

This story actually begins with the fact that I don't have a gall bladder. I had mine removed when I was eighteen. This means if I overdo it with rich food, I feel sluggish and bloated. It's just one of my body's quirks.

And that quirk is how I found out I was using racist language without realizing it.

Late last year after a holiday meal, I posted on Facebook that I was suffering from "the 'itis". It's a term I'd known of for a long time that **to me** meant the feeling of being sluggish and overstuffed. Kind of a joke I'd make after overindulging.

Then I learned it had a toxic history.

A former colleague reached out to me on Facebook Messenger about my post. We'd always had a nice relationship. Now and then we'd run into each other and talk about issues of faith and family. We even prayed for needs in each other's lives. Once she moved on to attend seminary, we stayed in touch on Facebook.

In her message, she asked how my family and I were doing. Then, in the most gracious way, told me that the term "the 'itis" actually has a racially-charged connotation. She sent me a link to an article that listed five phrases that have racist origins. Apparently, the term I used is a shortened form of "n****ritis", a derogatory term stereotyping black people as lazy.

I was crushed and mortified, quickly apologizing for my gaffe.

She replied by telling me she knew I could not possibly have known the origin of the term because I'd used it at all. She knew me better than that. Because we already had a relationship, we were able to have this dialogue privately and calmly. I'm grateful for my friend's grace and kindness in calling it to my attention.

As a veteran English teacher who teaches about race, I was ignorant when it came to this particular phrase. Teachers also learn a lesson sometimes. A knowledge gap led to my use of a term that is offensive to Black people. I might have hurt someone by using it, even unknowingly.

I don't want to be that person. I want to be a bridge-builder and advocate. Therefore, I have to be open and willing to hear from others who can enlighten me. Allowing others to speak their truth must be my default setting.

Thank goodness I had someone in my life who was willing to bring it to my attention and educate me. As much as I try to be an ally and do and say the right things, I obviously still have more to learn. I suspect many people do.

Try as I might to get it right, there are certain things I am blind and ignorant to. That doesn't sit well, but it's true. Coming to grips with our own lack of knowledge and understanding as White people can be painful and awkward. When we stumble, responding with humility is key.

White people don't get to define what is and isn't offensive to other races. We must listen, learn, and change our approach. Having a friend who was willing to speak up and explain my error means a lot to me. It helps me be a better ally and builds bridges of understanding where they are lacking. And that's how change is made.

Follow-Up Questions:

What steps might you take to grow from experiences like Tracy's? How might this inform how you will react in a moment of correction?

On the other side, how might you invite learning and growth when you notice a friend, family member or colleague make a racist statement or action?

What else can we take away from Tracy's experience?