

DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

Using Critical Literacy and Emotionally Responsive Teaching to Discuss Racism in a

Literature Circle Unit

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## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

### **Abstract**

This paper contains an instructional unit designed to create space in the classroom for open and honest conversations about racism through enhancing the literature circle format with the incorporation of critical literacy and emotionally-responsive teaching.

The unit utilizes strategies that are research-based and referenced in the paper. Detailed lessons as well as all additional needed materials are included.

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### **Introduction**

Our country is deeply divided along issues of race and racism. In 2016, the Pew Research Center released their results of a survey they conducted that focused on the way race and inequality are viewed by people of different races. The results showed a stark and striking contrast in the way the world is experienced and the way the world is perceived by people of different races.

According to the survey, 88% of black people say the country “needs to continue making changes for Blacks to have equal rights with Whites, but 43% are skeptical that such changes will ever occur” (Pew Research Center, 2016, p. 4). In contrast, only 53% of white people say the country “still has work to do for Blacks to achieve equal rights with Whites” (Pew Research Center, 2016, p. 5).

These statistics paint a clear picture of the difference between the way the world is experienced by blacks and whites as well as the ignorance of white people about systemic racism and its impacts on the life of black people. This shows a need for open, honest communication about race and racism.

Unfortunately, however, many educators choose to ignore discussions about race and racism by staying silent and avoiding the conversation altogether (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson & Powers-Costello, 2011; Flynn, 2012). For many white teachers, this is because the very idea of questioning institutional forces is foreign from the way they were raised and the way they experience the world, and instead they see racism as a personal character flaw within people who are immoral. (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson & Powers-Costello, 2011; Flynn, 2012; Williams, 2004). This belief about racism results in

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white people avoiding conversations about race so as to not make others feel judged (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson & Powers-Costello, 2011; Williams, 2004).

Avoidance of race and racism silences voices that need to be heard, voices of those who challenge the dominate narrative about race, in order to bring a solution to the problem of historic racism (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson & Powers-Costello, 2011; Johnson, 2015; Williams, 2004). The problem is perpetuated when teachers stay silent on racial issues as it “sends a strong message to children that it is taboo to discuss these issues in school” (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson & Powers-Costello, 2011, p. 339). Instead, as Williams (2004) puts it, we need to acknowledge that “race is a pervasive and powerful force that organizes culture and society, and we do our students no favors by pretending it doesn’t affect our lives, including our perceptions and uses of literacy” (p. 164).

### **Purpose of Unit Plan**

The goal of this project is to create space within a middle school literature classroom for open, honest conversations about prejudice and bias, discrimination, racism, institutional racism, power and privilege, and social justice and equity so that we can begin to address and disrupt racial inequities. The unit uses a modified literature circle approach, which incorporates critical race pedagogy (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Brooks & Browne, 2012; Fredricks, 2012; Jocius & Shealy, 2017; Long & Gove, 2003; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004; Newstreet, Sarker & Shearer, 2018; Pace, 2006; Park, 2012; Thein, Guise & Sloan, 2011) with emotionally-responsive reader response strategies (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Eva-Wood, 2004; Eva-Wood, 2008; Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017; Parsons, 2013).

### **Review of the Literature**

By inviting conversations about race and racism into our classrooms, we provide the opportunity to address and counter racism. Through the naming of racism, we are able to “equip children with strategies for interrupting racism” which prepares our students to be “active and informed” participants in our democratic society, “which includes multiple, even dissenting perspectives” (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson & Powers-Costello, 2011, p. 339).

### **Race-Based Discussions in the Classroom**

Several studies (Flynn, 2012; Johnson, 2016; Williams, 2004) have been conducting that focus on discussing race and racism within the classroom, which illustrate the importance of creating this space for open and honest sharing and hearing of stories.

Flynn (2012) focused on the discussions about race, culture, and white privilege that occurred over the period of one week with a diverse group of 8<sup>th</sup> graders. The goals for the discussions included having students practice talking about race and racism, giving a platform for students of color to share their experiences with racism, helping all students develop an understanding of the impact of White privilege, and helping students develop antiracism language and skills. The discussions included topics such as experiences of bias, reverse racism, the role of institutions in perpetuating racial injustice, the Black-White dichotomy, feelings of guilt and responsibility. Through the discussions, the teacher sought to enable “students to see that racism does not occur only in isolated, individual acts. Students can study the ways that skin color privilege has been entrenched

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in our social institutions” (Flynn, 2012, p. 108). At the end of the week, many students expressed appreciation for these conversations and noted that they were a key part of the year.

Another study, conducted by Johnson (2016), focused on exploring race-based conversations through literature. Johnson set up monthly family book club discussions centered around Matt de Pena’s *Mexican Whiteboy* (2010). The conversations were established as a “way to begin critical dialogue across different racial and age-groups” (Johnson, 2016, p. 303). Book club discussions were centered around a combination of open-ended questions that participants brought to the discussions, connections participants were making between the characters and their own experiences, and research-generated open-ended questions that focused on the topics of assimilation, white supremacy/privilege spaces, innocence and race, counter stories, social justice and equity. Reflections on the data from the book club discussions showed changes in “perceptions and beliefs about race, racism, and power” (Johnson, 2016, p. 309).

Williams (2004) shared a different approach for opening up conversations about race in the classroom. He began by noting how many people are uncomfortable about race, how white people are viewed as the “norm,” and how people can counter racism through sharing and hearing counter stories, which help people realize the experiences of others who experience the world differently than themselves. Williams made all these points as he referenced Delgado’s (2000) work (as cited by Williams, 2004) with counter storytelling, which is viewed as a kind of cultural critique. Counter stories are essential within the classroom because “if we listen to the narratives outside the dominant culture, not only for what they tell us about individuals but also for how they help us understand

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different conceptions of our culture and its institutions, they can help us develop an understanding of race that reaches beyond individual morality” (Williams, 2004, p. 167). In this way, “counter storytelling provides us with possibilities for using stories, poems, and essays to challenge the dominant narratives about race” (Williams, 2004, p. 167).

From these studies (Flynn, 2012; Johnson, 2016; Williams, 2004) emerge several implications. First, having open, honest, and safe conversations within the classroom that center on race is essential. Second, using literature and stories to approach these conversations creates the opportunity for students to connect, share stories, and view the world from multiple perspectives.

### **Critical Literature Circles**

Using literature circles to center race-based conversations provides the opportunity for many stories to be shared and heard. This effective and authentic format for reading, established by Harvey Daniels (2006), centers on student engagement, student choice, and student responsibility. Literature circles are student-led, and the discussions focus on hearing and sharing each other’s opinions. In an ideal literature circle, Long and Gove (2003) state:

Students would interpret from more than one perspective and point of view, would be purposeful and reflective, and would question one another, change their minds, and push one another’s thinking as they discussed actions that could be taken in relation to the issues at hand. (p. 354)

This ideal literature circle fits well with McLaughlin and De Voogd’s (2004) definition of the principles of critical literacy that critical literacy should focus on issues of power and promote reflection, transformation, and action; should not simplify problems, but instead

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focus on understanding the complexity of problems; should be dynamic and adaptable to specific contexts; should examine multiple perspectives. However, literature circles do not always result in the type of literature circle described as ideal. Instead, at times, stereotypes are perpetuated rather than critiqued and questioned (Fredricks, 2012; Park, 2012; Thein, Guise & Sloan, 2011).

This perpetuation of stereotypes was seen in the results of a study conducted by Thein, Guise, and Sloan (2011) in which the purpose was to determine the effectiveness of using the traditional literature discussion format for multicultural texts. Within the study, 10<sup>th</sup> grade, predominantly white, students participated in literature discussions about multi-cultural books. Students prepared for each of the group discussions by completing a role sheet, which was based on Harvey Daniels' model.

The results showed that the discussions were successful at digging into the texts, "making real meaning of characters and situations rather than simply summarizing or describing events in the text" (Thein, Guise, & Sloan, 2011, p.18). However, the discussions did not cause students to take critical perspectives. Rather, in one focal group, several students' stereotypes were reinforced. Thein, Guise, and Sloan believe this is because the traditional literature circle does "not provide challenges to students' initial personal responses or an impetus for students to experiment with alternative stances" (2011, p.21). The researchers suggest increasing teacher guidance throughout discussions and modifying the literature circle roles so that critical responses would be more encouraged.

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Jocius and Shealy (2017) as well as Fredricks (2012) sought to solve this problem through incorporating critical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy into the literature circle model, which resulted in what they called “critical book clubs” or “critical literature circles,” respectively.

In the study conducted by Jocius and Shealy (2017), the book club format was combined with strategies to transform the book clubs into critical book clubs that helped the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student participants develop empathy as readers and responders. The goal of the book clubs was to use “literature to engage students in conversations about disabilities, difference, and stereotypes” (Jocius & Shealy, 2017, p.693). The books were intentionally chosen to center on the thematic concepts of disability and difference.

Jocius and Shealy (2017) believed the book clubs successfully “supported students in moving beyond personal responses to texts, allowing them to consider alternate perspectives, question stereotypes, and challenge the status quo” (p.693) because they were very intentional about the process of the book clubs, which included four phases: development (introducing reading and discussing strategies), practice (trying out the strategies through activities with whole class or in small groups), independence (student led-book clubs), and refinement (another round of book clubs after reflecting on the first round). The strategies taught through the first three phases included “using metacognitive reading strategies, using textual evidence to support assertions, critiquing texts, and engaging in constant reflection and self-evaluation” (Jocius & Shealy, 2017, p. 696). Jocius and Shealy acknowledge that one challenge with the book club structure is providing the appropriate amount of structure to enable positive student discourse. To meet this challenge, they provided several supports: “explicit modeling, sentence starters,

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teacher monitoring and guidance, and student reflections” (Jocius & Shealy, 2017, p. 697).

Realizing that the literature circle model doesn’t “inherently [include a] critical or culturally relevant component” (Fredricks, 2012, p.495), Fredricks combined the concept of literature circles with critical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy with the result being “critical literature circles (CLCs)” (2012, p.494). In this study, the data of 33 adult learners, who participated in a year-long reading group, were analyzed in order to determine the potential of critical literature circles. The results included students realizing that reading teaches lessons about life beyond the story that can apply to their own lives. Students also gained insights about other cultures which expanded and changed their ideas about those cultures. Additionally, students gained deep understanding and appreciation for the ideas of their peers which allowed them to develop empathy. Finally, students deeply connected to characters, which sometimes brought on emotional challenges. One challenge that was revealed through this structure was that since the structure was student-focused rather than teacher-focused, there were times that usual prejudices and beliefs were maintained rather than questioned.

A third study conducted by Park (2012) sought to explore the critical and communal reading practices of adolescent girls. Park studied 7<sup>th</sup> grade girls in an afterschool book club set up to meet bi-weekly to discuss self-chosen texts. The results showed that the girls developed a sense of community, deepened their understanding of the text, and experienced multiple perspectives on the world and themselves. Park noted, however, that in order for teachers to truly utilize a critical and culturally-responsive reader-response method, they need to more directly guide students toward critical

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readings, balancing student-led discussions with whole-class discussions that prompt students to interact more deeply with a text, raising questions and issues that students may not have raised on their own. This could be accomplished by placing book clubs within a thematic unit or inquiry project, which “provides students with a larger purpose and framework for the discussion” (2012, p. 207).

Several themes emerge from this review of the literature. In order to effectively use the literature circle format to engage in critical literacy, three main modifications are suggested. First, critical literature circles must include intentional teacher guidance through the planning and the implementing of the literature circles (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Jocius & Shealy, 2017; Long & Gove, 2003; Pace, 2006; Park, 2012; Thein, Guise & Sloan, 2011). Second, critical literature circles should be placed within a thematic unit (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Jocius & Shealy, 2017; Newstreet, Sarker & Shearer, 2018; Park, 2012). Finally, critical literature circles should reimagine reader response methods that authentically engage readers deeply through emotionally responsive strategies (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Eva-Wood, 2004; Eva-Wood, 2008; Jocius & Shealy, 2017; Johnson, 2016; Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017; Long & Gove, 2003; Parsons, 2013).

**Providing Intentional Teacher Guidance.** For literature circles to become critical literature circles, there must be intentional teacher guidance and modeling throughout the entire learning process (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Long and Gove, 2003; Pace, 2006; Park, 2012; Thein, Guise & Sloan, 2011).

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The need for intentional teacher guidance when critical responses are desired is illustrated in a study, conducted by Pace (2006), in which the development of literature responses from two first-year college women who were taking part of a writing-about-literature class were analyzed. The women's responses, which focused on the short story, "The Yellow Wall Paper," included an initial post-reading written response, follow-up interactions during class discussion, and the final analytical essay (post-discussions). Pace noted that the final analytical essays of both women demonstrated backing away from their original views about the story and instead assimilating the dominate opinion expressed during class discussions, even when these views perpetuated cultural stereotypes and countered the women's original views.

Pace (2006) pointed out these results demonstrate the importance of teachers being trained to guide class conversations, especially when seeking to empower critical readings of literature. Pace suggests several ways to do so such as using small group discussions rather than whole class as well as having students code their own written responses "to identify feeling responses, thinking responses (those connected to literary elements and style), and critical responses (those that are connected to social and cultural assumptions in the text)" which would allow for students to understand "the value of personal experience, literary exegesis, and critical understandings in literary study" (Pace, 2006, p. 592).

Effective critical literature circles require "careful planning, explicit teacher support, and continuous monitoring and reflection" (Jocius & Shealy, 2017). The teacher must hear what the students are offering and be able to guide students toward critical understanding through strategies such as raising key questions or issues that students did

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not bring up on their own, encouraging seeing things from alternative perspectives, and challenging language or viewpoints that perpetuate the status quo. Through such intentional guidance, teachers will support critical meaning-making practices (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Long and Gove, 2003; Pace, 2006; Park, 2012; Thein, Guise & Sloan, 2011).

**Positioning Literature Circles within a Thematic Unit.** Critical literature circles must be positioned within the context of a thematic unit that provides context to the cultural and historical elements at work within the literature circle book (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Jocius & Shealy, 2017; Newstreet, Sarker & Shearer, 2018; Park, 2012).

Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008) illustrated the need for establishing critical literature circles within thematic units through their study which focused on adolescent girls' responses to colorism, which is defined as "inter- and intraracial discrimination based on skin color stratification" (Hunter, 2005 as cited by Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008) within the Sharon G. Flake novel, *The Skin I'm In* (2007). The study took place with 10 African-American females who participated in afterschool book club discussions followed by written responses to the book and discussions. Discussions centered around the themes of challenging negative stereotypes, specifically of African-American women as well as the impact of colorism. Student responses "revealed the complicated and multifaceted nature of reader-text identification" (Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008, p. 662). Brooks, Browne, and Hampton acknowledged multiple times that student responses display a lack of recognition of the "historical legacy of discrimination" (p.664). However, student responses clearly demonstrated connection to

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the theme of self-liberation. Suggested implications of the research include providing cultural and historical background information to allow students to view the story in the larger societal context, having discussions that encourage keeping in mind one's own racialized positioning, and modeling ways to synthesize "ideas from the text with a reader's own knowledge, experiences, and identity (Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008, p. 668).

Effective critical literature circles require placing the novel within the context of a thematic unit. One way to create a thematic unit is through the use of a thematic text set. Text sets consist of "fiction and nonfiction literature, poems, songs, historical documents and photos, charts, maps, paintings, and photographs" (Newstreet, Sarker & Shearer, 2018, p. 3).

Newstreet, Sarker, and Shearer (2018) presented a review of research that demonstrates the way thematic text sets can be used to combat islamophobia, and racism in general. The authors suggested that text sets and response activities provide opportunities for growth with social studies concepts, growth as readers, and growth as global citizens. Teachers should choose pieces based on their cultural authenticity and literary quality and should include a variety of "text types, reading levels, and media that provide differing perspectives on a selected topic" (Newstreet, Sarker, & Shearer, 2018, p.3). Newstreet, Sarker, and Shearer suggested that text sets enable students to become aware of misconceptions and develop empathy, which reduces intolerance and discrimination.

**Engaging Readers Emotionally.** Effective critical literature circles require students to be deeply engaged in the book as they reflect on their own lives, view multiple perspectives, and begin to question beyond the obvious (Long and Gove, 2003). To do this, engagement strategies should be used to help “students vest themselves in the story” (Long & Gove, 2003, p. 353). Emotional engagement while reading enables readers to become more deeply involved in a story, which helps readers form a better understanding of the text, develop their own identity as a reader, and enhance their awareness of the world and others around them (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Eva-Wood, 2004; Eva-Wood, 2008; Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017; Parsons, 2013).

Bal and Veltkamp (2013) conducted two studies to test their hypothesis that “fiction reading is positively related to empathy across time, but only when the reader is emotionally transported into the story” (p.4). Bal and Veltkamp defined transportation as “a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative” (2013, p.3). The studies involved Dutch college students who, one week after reading the story, self-reported about emotional transportation and empathy. The results showed that fiction readers became more empathetic over time if they experienced high levels of transportation. Fiction readers that experienced low levels of transportation became less empathetic over time. Bal and Veltkamp suggest that this may be because “when readers disengage from what they read, they possibly become more self-centered and selfish in order to protect the sense of self in relation to others” (2013, p. 8). Bal and Veltkamp’s research illustrated an important point about the power of emotional engagement in fiction: positive effects of emotional engagement only come when readers are transformed.

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Another study, by Parson (2013), provides clarity to the experience of emotionally engaging with a story. The purpose of this study was to document the ways “young readers create, enter, and sustain the story world” (Parson, 2013, p.8). The children in the study were co-researchers, so they worked together to understand the experience of aesthetic reading by writing about their engagement in the book and then coding their responses to look for patterns. The results of the coding were three ways of experiencing a story: “next to the character,” “interacting with the character,” and “becoming the character.” When a reader feels “next to the character,” he or she is sympathizing with the character but remaining as an observer of the story. When a reader is “interacting with the character,” he or she is sympathizing with the character and is feels like a part of the story but remains himself or herself within the story. When a reader is “becoming the character,” he or she is empathizing and has assumed the identity of the character. Students within the study experienced these different roles at different parts of the book. This study demonstrates the varied way readers emotionally experience books. It also points toward the strong connection between empathy and emotional transportation.

Developing empathy through emotional engagement is key for sharing, hearing, and appreciating stories that demonstrate diverse perspectives. Kim, Wee, and Lee (2017) conducted a study that explored how poetry writing in response to multi-cultural picture books would help Korean kindergarteners “develop their understanding of racial diversity and equality” (p.61). Prior to the poetry writing, the teacher facilitated a discussion about the multi-cultural read-aloud book using open-ended questions. During this discussion, she encouraged personal connections to the students’ experiences and background

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knowledge. Following the discussion, the students were asked to write free-form poems connected to what they had read or talked about, or other ideas that they were thinking about. The results showed that the poetry activity deepened students' "critical understanding of racial diversity and human equality at an early stage of their lives" (Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017, p. 63) by encouraging their imagination and providing the opportunity to share their ideas. The use of discussion based on open-ended, authentic questions paired with personal reflection through poetry created a deep engagement with the text and also encouraged readers to be emotionally open to their own feelings and the feelings of others, which resulted in developing a critical understanding of diversity.

These studies (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017; Parson, 2013) illustrate the importance of deep emotional engagement for students to develop connection and empathy, which will enable them to be more open and honest in conversations about race and racism.

Strategies for emotional engagement suggested by the literature include utilizing both teacher-created and student-generated open-ended, authentic questions for discussions (Johnson, 2016; Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017; Long & Gove, 2003; Parsons, 2013), using reader-response journals pre- and post-discussions to track changes in their perceptions (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Jocus & Shealy, 2017; Pace, 2006), reading and responding to poetry through think-and-feel alouds (Eva-Wood, 2004; Eva-Wood, 2008). These emotional engagement strategies offer "readers opportunities to stretch their awareness, adapt their perspective, and construct new knowledge (Eva-Wood, 2008, p. 564). As a result, critical literature circles will result in students

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“becom[ing] more understanding, informed, and tolerant of themselves, their family, and their community” (Long & Gove, 2003, p.353).

### **Methodology**

This research-based, multi-cultural literature circle unit adjusts the traditional literature circle model in order to center upon critical literacy and emotional engagement in order to have open and authentic discussions about racism in the classroom. The unit utilizes whole class discussion, small group discussion, and personal reflection.

### **Unit Design**

The unit focuses on the following thematic concepts: prejudice and bias, discrimination, racism, institutional racism, power and privilege, and social justice and equity. These themes are emphasized through class discussions and activities which center on text sets. The themes are also emphasized in the literature circle discussions through two or three teacher-provided discussion prompts and one engagement activity per discussion time. Additionally, the themes are highlighted through personal reflection pre- and post-unit as well as after each literature circle discussion.

The thematic concepts of the unit are covered in four specific text sets: (a) historical context of racism in the U.S., (b) institutional racism in the U.S., (c) power and privilege, and (d) social justice and equity through counter stories. These text sets provide historical and cultural context that will build students’ background knowledge and broaden their understanding of how others experience the world. Each text set begins with a poem by Langston Hughes, which introduces the thematic concept of the text set, and then includes nonfiction articles or an essay.

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Students respond to the text sets through intentional engagement strategies. After reading poetry, students respond through “Think-and-Feel Alouds” (Eva-Wood, 2008). After reading nonfiction articles or an essay, students fill out Two-Column Response Journals, Semantic Feature Analysis Grids, or Jot Chart of Ideas (Newstreet, Sarker & Shearer, 2018). Each text set wraps up with a reflection activity that helps students think about their developing understanding of the thematic concepts of the unit.

The literature circle discussions are designed to enable productive spaces for all voices to be heard. This was done through the establishment of discussion norms (Flynn, 2012; Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017), which include the use of sentence stems (Jocius & Shealy, 2017) to help students follow the norms. After each discussion time, students deepen their understanding of race and racism, connecting ideas from the book, the literature circle discussion, and their own experience, through writing a free-form poem (Kim, Wee & Lee, 2012). The purpose of this is to provide opportunity for emotional engagement.

The unit culminates with a counter stories project in which students write or share powerful counter stories with an authentic audience of their choosing. This project helps students become active agents of change in the world.

### **Results**

This unit is best suited for a middle school or high school classroom. It is meant to be implemented during a 4-6 week time frame. The unit includes 14 lessons, some of which take place over multiple days. It could be expanded to incorporate time for students to read their literature circle book within the classroom.

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### **Lesson 1 – Unit Introduction and Pre-Unit Reflection**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can read images critically in order to interrogate the balance of power within the photos.
- I can reflect on my current thoughts, perceptions, understandings, experiences, and questions about race and racism.

Learning Activities:

- At each table, set out the set of primary resources that represent historic racism (see Appendix A, Figures 1-4).
- Give students two minutes of silently looking and “reading” the photographs. Tell them to notice the detail within each photograph, seeking to understand the story within the photograph.
- In small groups, have students discuss the following questions about the photographs:
  - Who is in the photograph? Why are they there?
  - Who is in a position of power? How do you know?
  - Who is powerless in the photo? How do you know?
- To each small group, hand out the rest of the photographs that represent continuing racism today (see Appendix A, Figures 5-10).
- Give students two minutes to silently “read” the images.

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- On a notecard, have students write down one thought, question, or realization that they had from this second set of pictures, use the questions below to guide them.
  - What do you notice with the added details?
  - What surprised you?
  - What questions do you have?
  - What insights did you gain through the captions?
  - Which picture is most meaningful? Why?
- Have students share their thoughts, questions, or realizations with their group.
- Have several students share their thoughts, questions, or realizations with the class. Use this question to prompt further thinking, “What contrasts and contradictions did you notice within the set of images?”
- Using the pre-unit reflection sheet (see Appendix B), ask students to reflect on their current understanding of the thematic concepts of the unit.

### **Lesson 2 – Book Selection**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can preview the book choices with an open mind.
- I can determine my top three book choices for literature circles.

Learning Activities:

- Display all of the book choices (see Appendix C) for the literature circles.
- Show a digital book trailer or read aloud selections from each text.

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- Provide time for students to read reviews, look at the books, and prepare a ranking of their top 3 books.

### **Lesson 3 – Introduction to Reader Response and Discussion Norms**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can determine the qualities that make a great discussion question.
- I can follow the expectations for discussions in our first group meeting.

Learning Activities:

- Have students sort sample questions that are a mix of closed and open-ended questions into two categories (see Appendix D). Ask them to come up with a name and description for each category they created. Then ask groups to share how they sorted the questions and why.
- Discuss which category makes for the best discussion and why. Make sure students understand how open-ended questions enable more discussion because they invite thinkers to reflect, make connections, and consider alternative points of view.
- Hand out the Reading Journal Guide (see Appendix E). Go over discussion dates, the reader response method that students will be expected to use, and the discussion norms.
  - Reader response method
    - Students are expected to bring thoughts, open-ended questions, and realizations to the discussion.

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- After each discussion, students are expected to reflect on and synthesize the reading, discussion, and their own experiences into a free-form poem.
- Group norms (adapted from Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017)
  - We will strive to quietly and actively listen to others.
  - We will add to the conversation by coming prepared to discussions and by sharing our own ideas.
  - We will be open to the ideas of others, showing respect for different opinions.
- Hand out books and have students meet with their groups to create a reading schedule for the book. They should divide the book roughly into three sections. One section should be completed for each discussion date.

### **Lesson 4 – Thematic Text Set about Historical Context of Racism in the U.S.**

Time Frame: Three 40-minute periods

Learning Targets:

- I can practice the think-and-feel aloud method of responding to poetry.
- I can explain the historical context of race and racism in the United States.

Learning Activities:

- Share the instructions for “Think-and-Feel Aloud,” as taken from Eva-Wood (p. 184, 2008)
  - Poetry is about the head and the heart. It isn’t simply a fact-finding mission, but an experience with language that involves feelings and

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

associations. Share everything that you are thinking *and* feeling as you read this poem aloud. Pay special attention to feelings you have as they connect to words, phrases, and lines. Turn up the volume on all these feelings as you explore meanings in this poem.

- Read the poem “I, Too” by Langston Hughes (see Appendix F), to introduce our weekly thematic topic.
- Have students share aloud what they think and feel. Use prompts below as needed to help students elaborate.
  - What feelings do you have when you read this line or this word?
  - What types of feelings do you experience as you reflect on the poem as a whole?
  - What are you visualizing when you read this line, or the whole poem?
  - Who is the speaker or character in the poem? What is this person thinking and feeling? Can you identify with this person?
- Explain how the importance of knowing historical context, as taken from Park (p. 207, 2012)
  - “Characters are not free-floating, autonomous beings, acting or speaking in idiosyncratic ways; rather, they are part of families, communities, cultures, and institutions, each “system” shaping the way they make decisions, relate to one another, and understand the self and the world”
  - Understanding historical context is important so that we understand characters’ [and people’s actions] as reflective of a larger framework of cultural and ideological forces.

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- Have students choose 6 of the 8 articles that provide historical context (see Appendix G) to read. As they read, they should fill out a two-column response journals (see Appendix H).
- Working in small groups, have student use what they learned to create a written timeline that summarizes the historical moments from the articles.
- Have students go back through their timeline, viewing it through the lens of who has power and who is powerless. Students should add a paragraph to each historical moment using concepts from our thematic words.
  - Prejudice and Bias
  - Discrimination
  - Racism
  - Institutional Racism
  - Power and Privilege
  - Social justice and Equity

### **Lesson 5 – 1<sup>st</sup> Literature Circle Discussion**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can listen carefully, ask meaningful questions, share my thoughts, and be open to new ideas.
- I can relate to the characters to deepen your emotional connection to the story.
- I can become vested in the story in order to gain a deeper understanding of complicated character history and motivation.

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### Learning Activities:

- Go over discussion norms (adapted from Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017).
  - We will strive to quietly and actively listen to others.
  - We will add to the conversation by coming prepared to discussions and by sharing our own ideas.
  - We will be open to the ideas of others, showing respect for different opinions
- Share sentence stems (adapted from Jocius & Shealy, 2017) to use to help students follow the group norms.
  - “I wonder...”
  - “I want to add to what \_\_\_\_\_ said....”
  - “Can you explain....”
  - “I agree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
  - “I disagree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
  - “Based on the text, I think...”
- Have students follow the guide for the 1<sup>st</sup> literature circle discussion (see Appendix I).

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### **Lesson 6 – Post-Discussion Journaling**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can write a free-form poem that shows how race and racism are represented in the reading, my group’s discussion, and my own thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Learning Activities:

- As a whole class, create a mind map of ideas about what poetry is, how poetry communicates, and the purpose of poetry.
- Provide time for students to write their post-discussion free-form poem in their Reading Journal Guide (see Appendix E).

### **Lesson 7 – Thematic Text Set about Institutional Racism in the U.S.**

Time Frame: Three 40-minute periods

Learning Targets:

- I can practice the think-and-feel aloud method of responding to poetry.
- I can describe the meaning and impact of institutional racism.

Learning Activities:

- Remind students of the instructions for “Think-and-Feel Aloud,” as taken from Eva-Wood (p. 184, 2008)
  - Poetry is about the head and the heart. It isn’t simply a fact-finding mission, but an experience with language that involves feelings and

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associations. Share everything that you are thinking *and* feeling as you read this poem aloud. Pay special attention to feelings you have as they connect to words, phrases, and lines. Turn up the volume on all these feelings as you explore meanings in this poem.

- Read the poem “The Ballad of the Landlord” by Langston Hughes (see Appendix J), to introduce our weekly thematic topic.
- Have students share aloud what they think and feel. Use prompts below as needed to help students elaborate.
  - What feelings do you have when you read this line or this word?
  - What types of feelings do you experience as you reflect on the poem as a whole?
  - What are you visualizing when you read this line, or the whole poem?
  - Who is the speaker or character in the poem? What is this person thinking and feeling? Can you identify with this person?
- Explain how the articles we read for historical context show racism in a form that is more obvious. However, racism exists in many forms, some that are more sub, such as social practices that end up excluding and discriminating people on the basis of race. The thematic texts today will help us gain a better understanding of the less overt ways racism is still a central piece of our society.
- Have students choose 8 of the 11 news articles that focus on institutional racism to read (see Appendix K). As they read, they should fill out the Semantic Features Analysis Grid (see Appendix L), which helps them connect with the thematic concepts of the unit.

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

- As a class, do a think-and-feel aloud about the nonfiction articles. Instruct students to share their thoughts and feelings about an article or all of the articles as a whole.
- Have students write a free-form poem in response to this question, “What is racism?”

### **Lesson 8 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Literature Circle Discussion**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can listen carefully, ask meaningful questions, share my thoughts, and be open to new ideas.
- I can analyze the current and historical/cultural context of the character’s life.

Learning Activities:

- Go over discussion norms (adapted from Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017).
  - We will strive to quietly and actively listen to others.
  - We will add to the conversation by coming prepared to discussions and by sharing our own ideas.
  - We will be open to the ideas of others, showing respect for different opinions
- Share sentence stems (adapted from Jocius & Shealy, 2017) to use to help students follow the group norms.
  - “I wonder...”
  - “I want to add to what \_\_\_\_\_ said....”

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- “Can you explain....”
  - “I agree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
  - “I disagree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
  - “Based on the text, I think...”
- Have students follow the guide for 2<sup>nd</sup> literature circle discussion (see Appendix M).

### **Lesson 9 – Post-Discussion Journaling**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can write a free-form poem that shows how race and racism are represented in the reading, my group’s discussion, and my own thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Learning Activities:

- Provide time for students to write their post-discussion free-form poem in their Reading Journal Guide (see Appendix E).

### **Lesson 10 – Text Set about White Privilege**

Time Frame: Two 40-minute periods

Learning Targets:

- I can explain concepts of power and privilege in the context of racism.

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### Learning Activities:

- Have students take the survey “Because of My Race or Color” (see Appendix N).
- Remind students of the instructions for “Think-and-Feel Aloud,” as taken from Eva-Wood (p. 184, 2008)
  - Poetry is about the head and the heart. It isn’t simply a fact-finding mission, but an experience with language that involves feelings and associations. Share everything that you are thinking *and* feeling as you read this poem aloud. Pay special attention to feelings you have as they connect to words, phrases, and lines. Turn up the volume on all these feelings as you explore meanings in this poem.
- Read the poem “Let America Be America Again” by Langston Hughes (see Appendix O), to introduce our weekly thematic topic.
- Have students share aloud what they think and feel. Use prompts below as needed to help students elaborate.
  - What feelings do you have when you read this line or this word?
  - What types of feelings do you experience as you reflect on the poem as a whole?
  - What are you visualizing when you read this line, or the whole poem?
  - Who is the speaker or character in the poem? What is this person thinking and feeling? Can you identify with this person?
- Have students compare and contrast the poem with the following quote by George Yancy: "There are times when you must quiet your own voice to hear from or about those who suffer in ways that you do not."

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- Ask students to create a circle according to the scores of their “Because of My Race or Color” survey. Discuss as a whole class what they see in the circle.
- As a whole class, read aloud the article, “White Privilege with White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh (1989). While reading, ask students to highlight key quotes that represent key points McIntosh is making.
- After reading, discuss the following questions as a whole class.
  - What would McIntosh say is the reason for white privilege? What are the consequences of white privilege?
  - What is Peggy McIntosh saying about “the myth of meritocracy, the myth that all democratic choice is equally available to all” (p.3)?
  - On p.3, Peggy McIntosh says, “One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms which we can see and embedded forms which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see.” How does this quote connect with the nonfiction articles we have read?
- Have students respond to the text by creating a visual on one side of a notecard that uses images as well as quotes from the text to represent the concept of white privilege.
- Have students share their images.
- Have students pick one thematic word to represent what they learned today. On the back of the notecard that has their image that represents white privilege, students should write the word, how it ties to what we talked about, and how their understanding deepened today.

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- Prejudice and Bias
  - Discrimination
  - Racism
  - Institutional Racism
  - Power and Privilege
  - Social justice and equity
- Have students share their reflections and post them on the white board next to the word, creating a jot chart of ideas learned by the whole class (adapted from Newstreet, Sarker & Shearer, 2018).

### **Lesson 11 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Literature Circle Discussion**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can listen carefully, ask meaningful questions, share my thoughts, and be open to new ideas.
- I can demonstrate the shift in power dynamics within the story.
- I can track the development of the theme of the story.

Learning Activities:

- Go over discussion norms (adapted from Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017).
  - We will strive to quietly and actively listen to others.
  - We will add to the conversation by coming prepared to discussions and by sharing our own ideas.

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- We will be open to the ideas of others, showing respect for different opinions
- Share sentence stems (adapted from Jocius & Shealy, 2017) to use to help students follow the group norms.
  - “I wonder...”
  - “I want to add to what \_\_\_\_\_ said....”
  - “Can you explain....”
  - “I agree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
  - “I disagree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
  - “Based on the text, I think...”
- Have students follow the guide for the 3<sup>rd</sup> literature circle discussion (see Appendix P).

### **Lesson 12 – Post-Discussion Journaling**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can write a free-form poem that shows how race and racism are represented in the reading, my group’s discussion, and my own thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Learning Activities:

- Provide time for students to write their post-discussion free-form poem in their Reading Journal Guide (see Appendix E).

**Lesson 13 – Text Set about Seeking Equity through Counter Stories**

Time Frame: Five 40-minute periods

Learning Targets:

- I can describe the importance of counter stories as a form of cultural critique that can help break the dominant narrative about race.

Learning Activities:

- Remind students of the instructions for “Think-and-Feel Aloud,” as taken from Eva-Wood (p. 184, 2008)
  - Poetry is about the head and the heart. It isn’t simply a fact-finding mission, but an experience with language that involves feelings and associations. Share everything that you are thinking *and* feeling as you read this poem aloud. Pay special attention to feelings you have as they connect to words, phrases, and lines. Turn up the volume on all these feelings as you explore meanings in this poem.
- Read the poem “Harlem” by Langston Hughes (see Appendix Q), to introduce our weekly thematic topic.
- Have students share aloud what they think and feel. Use prompts below as needed to help students elaborate.
  - What feelings do you have when you read this line or this word?
  - What types of feelings do you experience as you reflect on the poem as a whole?
  - What are you visualizing when you read this line, or the whole poem?

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- Who is the speaker or character in the poem? What is this person thinking and feeling? Can you identify with this person?
- Ask students to identify examples from our news articles and their novels to fit with each simile in the poem.
  - Which stories are examples of dreams that “dry up like a raisin in the sun”?
  - Which stories are examples of dreams that “fester like a sore and then run”?
  - Which stories are examples of dreams that “stink like rotten meat”?
  - Which stories are examples of dreams that “crust and sugar over like a syrupy sweet”?
  - Which stories are examples of dreams that “just sag like a heavy load”?
  - Which stories are examples of dreams that “explode”?
- Watch “The Danger of A Single Story” TED talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009). As kids watch, have them answer the following questions.
  - Why do single stories develop?
  - What is the danger of having a single story about a group of people?
  - How do we counter that danger?
- After, discuss with the whole class how stories have power. They can lead to perpetuating racism (such as when single stories continue), or they can lead to racial equity (such as when counter stories are shared).
- Introduce Counter Story Project

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- Share that counter stories help us seek the truth and hear the stories of voices that have been marginalized by society. “Counter storytelling provides us with the opportunity to challenge the dominant narratives about race. “If we listen to the narratives outside the dominant culture, not only for what they tell us about individuals but also for how they help us understand different conceptions of our culture and its institutions, they can help us develop an understanding of race that reaches beyond individual morality” (Williams, 2004, p. 167).
- Have students read examples of counter stories (see Appendix R). While reading, fill out a Semantic Feature Analysis Grid (see Appendix L).
- After, have students discuss what each of these stories adds to the narratives that they typically hear in the news. How do these stories help counter the single story in dominant culture?
- Have students curate a collection of counter stories to share or write their own counter story to share. For this project, students need to choose an authentic audience to share with. Then they need to consider which counter stories to share with that audience. Next, they need to write the counter stories or curate a collection of them. Finally, they need to share them with the audience.

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### **Lesson 14- Post-Unit Reflection**

Time Frame: One 40-minute period

Learning Targets:

- I can reflect on how my thoughts, perceptions, and understandings about race and racism have changed throughout this unit.
- I can pick out specific ideas from the unit that have most impacted me.

Learning Activities:

- Using the Post-Unit Reflection Sheet (see Appendix S), have students reflect on their growth from the beginning of the unit by writing a 1-2 page reflection paper about how their thoughts, perceptions, and understandings about the thematic concepts changed throughout the unit.

### **Discussion**

Through the creation of this unit, I have gained many valuable insights into how to create space within the classroom for critical conversations about difficult topics. I have learned that when desiring conversations about critical topics such as conversations about racism, it is essential to balance student-driven discussion with teacher input to enable the teacher to guide learning toward the questioning of dominant cultural narratives, rather than the blind embracing of them (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Jocius & Shealy, 2017; Long & Gove, 2003; Pace, 2006; Park, 2012; Thein, Guise & Sloan, 2011).

One way this intentional guidance can be accomplished is through the utilization of text sets which provide the historical and cultural background students need in order to

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see beyond their own experiences (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Jocius & Shealy, 2017; Newstreet, Sarker & Shearer, 2018; Park, 2012). As I created text sets for the unit, I discovered the importance of providing time for reflection upon the importance of the ideas within the texts and the connections between the texts. The research studies (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Eva-Wood, 2004; Eva-Wood, 2008; Jocius & Shealy, 2017; Johnson, 2016; Kim, Wee & Lee, 2017; Long & Gove, 2003; Parsons, 2013) provided many different strategies for reflecting upon and processing ideas that I found to be very helpful. One specific type of engagement that is an essential component of enabling critical conversations in the classroom is connecting thinking with feeling (Eva-Wood, 2004; Eva-Wood, 2008). Through emotional engagement strategies, students become more vested in the learning which allows them to become more open to new ideas from texts and from other students, creating a positive, safe environment in which to talk about topics that are avoided by many.

### **Recommendations for Implementation**

This unit was created for my specific student population, which is 92.5% white. This percentage translates to each classroom having very minimal representation of students of color. Because of this, I limited my incorporation of students sharing their own stories, so as to not put the students of color in a position of being asked to speak for their entire race. If this unit is taught in a setting with more diversity, it would be very beneficial to expand the opportunities for students to share their own experiences because there is much to gain from students sharing their own personal experiences with racism as pointed out by Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008), Flynn (2012), Fredricks (2012), Johnson (2016), and Park (2012).

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Through the creation of this unit, I centered on the thematic concepts that were brought up repeatedly in the research: prejudice and bias, discrimination, racism, institutional racism, power and privilege, and social justice and equity (Brooks, Browne & Hampton, 2008; Brooks & Browne, 2012; Fredricks, 2012; Jocius & Shealy, 2017; Long & Gove, 2003; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004; Newstreet, Sarker & Shearer, 2018; Pace, 2006; Park, 2012; Thein, Guise & Sloan, 2011). As a result of the heavy thematic text set focus of the unit, there is a lot of flexibility within the unit that allows for updating to stay current. I suggest updating the nonfiction articles centered on institutional racism and the ones centered on counter storytelling, as needed each year. I also recommend staying open to updating the multi-cultural novels used for the literature circles, choosing recent titles that still center on the thematic concepts, to bring about the highest level of engagement in students.

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Appendix A

Photographs about Race, Historical and Today



*Figure 1. Delano, J. (1940, May) At a bus station in Durham, North Carolina. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c25806/>*



*Figure 2. Lee, R. (1939, July). Negro drinking at "Colored" water cooler in streetcar terminal, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Retrieved from <http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8a26761/>*



*Figure 3. Delano, J. (1940, May) A cafe near the tobacco market, Durham, North*

*Carolina. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3c29840/>*



*Figure 4.* National Archives and Records Administration. (1928). *Ku Klux Klan members march down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. in 1928.* Retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=63190>



*Figure 5.* The Decatur Herald (1908, August 19). *Billy Sunday views*. Retrieved from.

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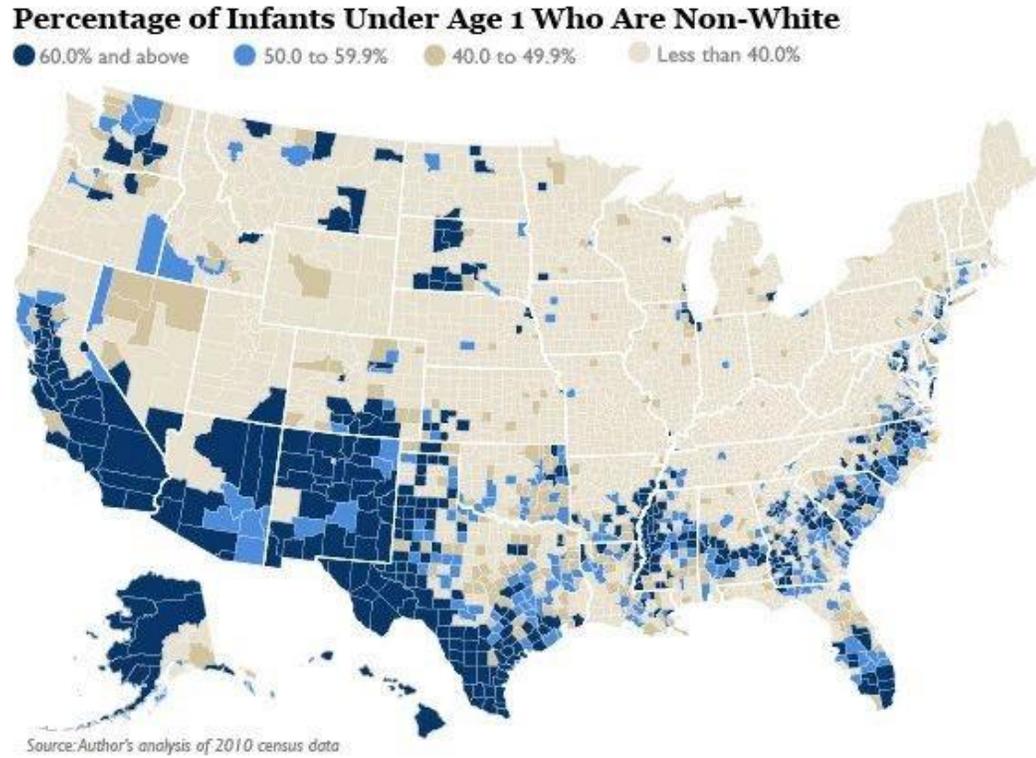
www.shutterstock.com • 1079201489

*Figure 6. Kelley-Wagner. (2017, August 12). White nationalists and counter protesters clash in a rally that turned violent resulting in the death of one and multiple injuries. Retrieved from <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/charlottesville-va-august-12-2017-white-1079201489>*



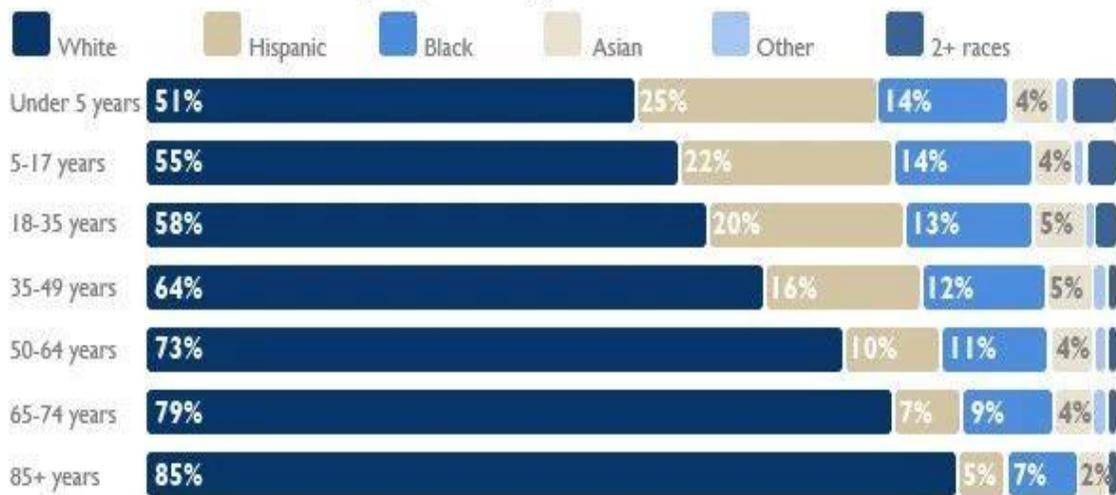
*Figure 7. David Zalubows. (2014). Zamir Almazbek, a student at the School of Arts in Denver, Colorado, puts the finishing touches on a chalk message referring to the words of Eric Garner, who died in July 2014 after a New York City police officer placed the man in a choke hold while trying to make an arrest. More than 150 young people took part in a march on December 12, 2014, in Denver, to protest what they called systemic racism and police brutality across the United States. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/lib-systemic-racism/id/39534/>*

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*Figure 8.* Frey, W. (2011, August 26). *Author's analysis of 2010 census data.* Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2011/08/26/america-reaches-its-demographic-tipping-point/>

### Race-Ethnic Profiles by Age Group, 2010



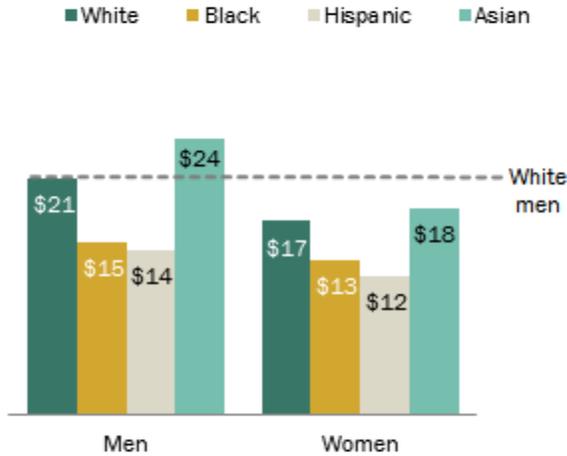
Source: Author's analysis of 2010 census data

Figure 9. Frey, W. (2011, August 26). *Author's analysis of 2010 census data*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2011/08/26/america-reaches-its-demographic-tipping-point/>

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**White men had higher hourly earnings than all except Asian men in 2015**

*Median hourly earnings of men and women from each race/ethnicity*



Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest dollar. Based on civilian, non-institutionalized, full- or part-time workers with positive earnings. Self-employed workers are excluded. Hispanics are of any race. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Asians include Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders.  
Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2015 Current Population Survey data.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

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*Figure 10. Pew Research Center (2016). White men had higher hourly earnings than all except Asian men in 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/01/racial-gender-wage-gaps-persist-in-u-s-despite-some-progress/>*

# DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

## Appendix B

### Pre-Unit Reflection

Learning Targets:

- I can reflect on my current thoughts, perceptions, understandings, questions, and experiences about race and racism.

Our literature circle unit will be centered on the thematic concepts below. For each word, please reflect on your current understanding, view, and experience with the concept. Also, add any questions that the word makes you wonder.

Prejudice and Bias
Discrimination
Racism
Institutional Racism
Power and Privilege
Social justice and equity

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

### Appendix C

#### Possible Books for Literature Circles

*These books are multi-cultural books that would be appropriate for this literature circle unit, if taught at the middle school or high school level.. They are a mix of historical fiction and realistic fiction.*

Burg, A. E. (2009). *All the Broken Pieces*. New York, New York: Scholastic Inc.

Craft, Jerry. (2019). *New Kid*. New York, New York: HarperCollins.

Crowe, C. (2002). *Mississippi Trial, 1955*. New York, New York: Penguin Group.

Curtis, C. P. (1999). *Bud, Not Buddy*. New York, New York: Random House, Inc.

Draper, S. M. (2018). *Blended*. New York, New York: Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books

Draper, S. M. (2006). *Copper Sun*. New York, New York: Atheneum Books for Young

Readers.

Draper, S. M. (2007). *Fire From the Rock*. New York, New York: Speak.

Draper, S. M. (2007). *The Skin I'm In*. New York, New York: Hyperion Book CH.

Gonzalez, C. (2011). *The Red Umbrella*. New York, New York: Yearling.

Hilton, M. (2015). *Full Cicada Moon*. New York, New York: Puffin House.

Johnson, V. (2018). *The Parker Inheritance*. New York, New York: Arthur A. Levine

Books.

Marsh, K. (2018). *Nowhere Boy*. New York, New York: Roaring Book Press.

Messner, K. (2018). *Breakout*. New York, New York: Bloomsbury Children's Books.

Meyers, W. (1999). *Monster*. New York, New York: HarperCollins.

Rhodes, J. P. (2018). *Ghost Boys*. New York, New York: Little, Brown and Company.

Ryan, P. M. (2000). *Esperanza Rising*. New York, New York: Scholastic Inc.

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

Smith, S. L. (2008). *Flygirl*. New York, New York: Speak.

Williams, A. (2019). *Genesis Begins Again*. New York, New York: Simon & Schuster.

Woodson, J. (2018). *Harbor Me*. New York, New York: Nancy Paulsen Books.

Woodson, J. (2000). *Miracle Boys*. New York, New York: Puffin Books.

Wright, B. (2013). *Crow*. New York, New York: Yearling.

### **Books for More Mature Readers**

Ahmed, S. (2018). *Love, Hate & Other Filters*. New York, New York: Soho Teen.

Reynolds, J. (2015). *All American Boys*. New York, New York: Atheneum/Caitlyn  
Dlouhy Books.

Stone, N. (2017). *Dear Martin*. New York, New York: Crown Books for Young Readers.

Thomas, A. (2017). *The Hate U Give*. New York, New York: Balzer + Bray

Watson, R. (2017). *Piecing Me Together*. New York, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing  
Inc.

DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

Appendix D

The Power of Great Questions

- Sort the following questions into two categories based on the traits that you notice.

Type A	Questions	Type B
	How old is Roger?	
	What did Roger try to steal?	
	Did Roger notice the open door at Mrs. Jones's apartment?	
	Why doesn't Roger run away when he has the chance?	
	What color shoes did Roger want to buy?	
	How does Mrs. Jones's actions influence Roger?	
	What do you think might influence Mrs. Jones to show Roger kindness?	
	Do you think Mrs. Jones made the right choice to let Roger go?	
	How do you think Mrs. Jones's actions will impact Roger's future?	

- Now please come up with a name for each category that represents the type of question in that category.

Name for Type A Questions:	Name for Type B Questions:
Why is this a good name for type A questions?	Why is this a good name for type B questions?

- Which type of question would make for a better discussion? Why?

Appendix E

Reading Journal Guide

Discussion Reading Schedule

1<sup>st</sup> Discussion takes place on \_\_\_\_\_ We will read pg. \_\_\_\_\_ to pg.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2<sup>nd</sup> Discussion takes place on \_\_\_\_\_ We will read pg. \_\_\_\_\_ to pg.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3<sup>rd</sup> Discussion takes place on \_\_\_\_\_ We will read pg. \_\_\_\_\_ to pg.

\_\_\_\_\_

Pre-Discussion Response

To prepare for each discussion, you should complete the reading that your group determined. You should also be ready to add to the discussion by sharing your thoughts, open-ended questions, and realizations. You need **at least four** recorded in this reading journal or on sticky notes. Make sure you include the page number of the section that inspired the thought, question, or realization.

Discussion Norms

For group discussions to be most enjoyable and impactful, it will be important that everyone follows these discussion norms.

- We will strive to quietly and actively listen to others.
- We will add to the conversation by coming prepared to discussions and by sharing our own ideas.
- We will be open to the ideas of others, showing respect for different opinions

Post-Discussion Response

After each discussion, deepen your understanding about race and racism by reflecting upon the reading, discussion, and your own experiences. Consider how the ideas of your reading or of your group members connects with or challenges your own thoughts.

Share your reflections by writing a free-form poem connected to what you had read and/or discussed with your literature circle, the nonfiction articles or class discussion, or any related thoughts or experiences that came to mind. You are encouraged to draw pictures in the background that represent the poem

You may use these questions to prompt your thinking

- What themes did you notice in the reading and/or literature circle discussion?
- What surprised you about the reading and/or your discussion?
- What changed, challenged, or confirmed what you previously thought?

Group norms and Post-Discussion Response adapted from Kim, Wee, and Lee (2017)

## Pre-Discussion 1 – Thoughts, Questions, and Realizations

\*\*Be sure to include the page number(s) that inspired the thought, question, or realization.

1.

2.

3.

4.

## Post Discussion Reflection Poem



## Pre-Discussion 2 – Thoughts, Questions, and Realizations

\*\*Be sure to include the page number(s) that inspired the thought, question, or realization.

1.

2.

3.

4.

## Post Discussion Reflection Poem



### Pre-Discussion 3 – Thoughts, Questions, and Realizations

\*\*Be sure to include the page number(s) that inspired the thought, question, or realization.

5.

6.

7.

8.

### Post Discussion Reflection Poem



Appendix F

## I, Too

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

Langston Hughes, "I, Too" from *Collected Poems*. Copyright © 1994 by The Estate of Langston Hughes. Reprinted with the permission of Harold Ober Associates Incorporated.  
Source: *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (Vintage Books, 2004)

DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

Appendix G

Two-Column Response Journal

<b>“Note-Taking” – Factual details and quotes</b>	<b>“Note-making” – inferences, personal reactions, and interpretative comments</b>

*Adapted from Newstreet, Sarker, and Shearer, 2018*

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

### Appendix H

#### Nonfiction Articles about Historical Context of Racism in the U.S.

Brown v. Board of Education.(1954, May 17). Retrieved from

<https://newsela.com/read/primary-source-brown-vs-board/id/18484/>

Civil Rights Act. (1964, July 2) *U.S. Congress*. Retrieved from

<https://newsela.com/read/primary-source-civil-rights-act/id/18338/>.

Green Book Helped African-American Tourists Navigate a Segregated Nation. (2017,

April 24). *Smithsonian.com*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/smi-green-book-african-americans/id/29651/>

Horton, J. O. (2017, April 17). Race and the American Constitution: A struggle toward

national ideals. *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/gl-history-Race-American-Constitution>

King, M.L. (1963). I have a Dream. Retrieved from [https://newsela.com/read/speeches-](https://newsela.com/read/speeches-mlk-dream/id/18161/)

[mlk-dream/id/18161/](https://newsela.com/read/speeches-mlk-dream/id/18161/).

Overview of Ending School Segregation. (2017, April 24). *USHistory.org*. Retrieved

from <https://newsela.com/read/lib-ushistory-racial-segregation/id/29575/>

Reconstruction in the South. (2017, April 19). *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved from

<https://newsela.com/read/lib-south-reconstruction-period/id/29408/>

The Little Rock Nine students are a permanent part of U.S. history. (2019, January 24).

*Smithsonian.com*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/minnijean-brown-trickey-school-items/id/48876/>

Appendix I

Guide for 1<sup>st</sup> Literature Circle Discussion

**Group Norms Reminder:**

- We will strive to quietly and actively listen to others.
- We will add to the conversation by coming prepared to discussions and by sharing our own ideas.
- We will be open to the ideas of others, showing respect for different opinions

**Sentence Stems that Provides a Safe Discussion Space:**

- “I wonder...”
- “I want to add to what \_\_\_\_\_ said....”
- “Can you explain....”
- “I agree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
- “I disagree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
- “Based on the text, I think...”

**Discussion Order:**

- Please begin your discussion by sharing your thoughts, open-ended questions, and realizations about the section that you read for today.
- Now move on to discussing the following questions:
  - Do the characters seem real and believable? Why or why not?
  - Can you related to the characters’ predicaments? Explain.
  - To what extent do the characters remind you of yourself or someone you know?
- Finally, work together on the “Investigate and Find Out” activity to help you deepen your ability to understand multiple perspectives.

**Activity: Investigate and Find Out**

- Pick a character and describe the character’s good and bad qualities.
- Now consider what made that character the way he or she is. Share what you already know from the story.
- Finally, use your imagination to pretend you are someone who knew that character earlier in life. Write a story from your perspective that shows what happened to him or her to make him or her the way he or she is.

Group norms adapted from Kim, Wee, and Lee (2017)  
Sentence Stems adapted from Jocius and Shealy (2017)  
Engagement Strategy adapted from Long and Gove, 2003

Appendix J

**The Ballad of the Landlord**

by Langston Hughes

Landlord, landlord,  
My roof has sprung a leak.  
Don't you 'member I told you about it  
Way last week?  
Landlord, landlord,  
These steps is broken down.  
When you come up yourself  
It's a wonder you don't fall down.  
Ten Bucks you say I owe you?  
Ten Bucks you say is due?  
Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you  
Till you flx this house up new.  
What? You gonna get eviction orders?  
You gonna cut off my heat?  
You gonna take my furniture and  
Throw it in the street?  
Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.  
Talk on-till you get through.  
You ain't gonn a be able to say a word  
If I land my fist on you.  
*Police! Police!*  
*Come and get this man!*  
*He's trying to ruin the government*  
*And overturn the land!*  
Copper's whistle!  
Patrol bell!  
Arrest.  
Precinct Station.  
Iron cell.  
Headlines in press:  
MAN THREATENS LANDLORD  
TENANT HELD NO BAIL  
JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL!

Hughes, L. (1940). Ballad of the landlord. Retrieved from  
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/protest/text11/hugheslandlord.pdf>.

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

### Appendix K

#### Nonfiction Articles about Institutional Racism in the U.S.

Black teenager says he was arrested just for buying an expensive belt. (2013, October 29). *Associated Press*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/shopping-discrimination/id/1631/>

Definition of systemic racism in sociology. (2018, January 17). *Thoughtco.com*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/lib-systemic-racism/id/39534/>

Ferguson's police and courts targeted African-Americans, report says. (2015, March 5). *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/ferguson-report/id/7824/>

Issue overview: Racial profiling. (2016, September 19). *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/overview-racial-profiling/id/21199/>

More barriers to equality in U.S. now than 50 years ago, new study finds. (2018, March 29). *Associated Press*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/us-inequality-study/id/40888/>

New segregation research studies white flight patterns in the early 1900s. (2017, July 30). *Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/white-flight-segregation/id/33219/>

Police killing of unarmed black man gains national attention as questions swirl. (2018, March 28). *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/stephon-clark-police-shooting>

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

Recalling an era when the color of your skin meant you paid to vote. (2017, April 24).

*Smithsonian.com*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/smi-poll-taxes-and-voter-id-laws>

Redlining prevents minority families from becoming homeowners. (2017, May 7).

*Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/lib-redlining-housing-discrimination/id/30150/>

Worsening, unchecked segregation in K-12 public schools. (2016, May 23) *Washington*

*Post*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/schools-resegregation/id/17848/>

Young, Y. (2016, October 6). Implicit racial bias often begins as early as preschool, a

study finds. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/implicit-bias-preschool/id/22521/>

DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

Appendix L

Semantic Analysis Features Grid

For each article you read, record how the thematic concept is apparent.

	Article title: _____	Article title: _____
Prejudice and Bias		
Discrimination		
Racism		
Institutional Racism		
Power and Privilege		
Social Justice and Equity		

Adapted from Newstreet, Sarker, and Shearer (2018)

Appendix M

Guide for 2<sup>nd</sup> Literature Circle Discussion

**Group Norms Reminder:**

- We will strive to quietly and actively listen to others.
- We will add to the conversation by coming prepared to discussions and by sharing our own ideas.
- We will be open to the ideas of others, showing respect for different opinions

**Sentence Stems that Provides a Safe Discussion Space:**

- “I wonder...”
- “I want to add to what \_\_\_\_\_ said....”
- “Can you explain....”
- “I agree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
- “I disagree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
- “Based on the text, I think...”

**Discussion Order:**

- Please begin your discussion by sharing your thoughts, open-ended questions, and realizations about the section that you read for today.
- Now move on to discussing the following question:
  - What ties can you make between the nonfiction articles we have been reading and the events/ feelings within the story?
- Finally, work together on the “Systems that Shape the Character” activity to help you understand how characters exist within the context of many different influences that shape the choices that they make.

**Activity: “Systems that Shape the Character”**

Characters are not free-floating, autonomous beings, acting or speaking in unexplainable ways; rather, they are part of **families, communicates, cultures, and institutions**, each “system” shaping the way they make decisions, relate to one another, and understand the self and the world.

Create a character web for each main character that shows what influences the characters’ actions. What enables the character as well as what constrains the character?

Group norms adapted from Kim, Wee, and Lee (2017)  
Sentence Stems adapted from Jocius and Shealy (2017)  
“Systems that Shape the Character” adapted from Park (2012)

DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

Appendix N

“Because of My Race or Color” Survey

- Score 5 if the statement is often true for you.
- Score 3 if the statement is sometimes true for you.
- Score 0 if the statement is seldom true for you.

<i>Because of My Race or Color...</i>	<i>My Score</i>
1. I can easily choose to be in the company of people of my race most of the time (in school, shopping, in a park, or other public place).	
2. If my family needs to move to a different city or state, we can be pretty sure of hassle-free renting or buying in a safe, desirable neighborhood where we would want to live.	
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.	
4. I can go shopping by myself most of the time without being followed or harassed.	
5. I can turn on the television or open the front page of the paper and see many people of my race represented in a positive way.	
6. When I learn about our national heritage or about “civilization,” in school and in the media, I am shown that people of my race made it what it is.	
7. I can go into most supermarkets and find staple foods which fit with my racial/ethnic traditions; I can go into any hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can cut my hair.	
8. I can count on my skin color not to work against me when I shop, whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash; store clerks assume that I have enough money to pay for my purchases.	
9. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race. (or example,, if I earn a school award, I am not identified as especially good or talented for a person of my race.)	
10. I can criticize our government or talk about fearing or opposing its policies without being seen as a racial outsider.	
11. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the “person in charge” in a school, business, restaurant, or other location, I will be facing a person of my race.	
12. I can conveniently buy posters, picture books, cards, and magazines featuring people of my race.	
13. I can take a scholarship without having others suspect I got it because of my race.	
14. If my family goes on vacation, we can choose a hotel without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated or mistrusted there.	
15. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.	
16. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I don’t need to wonder if each negative situation is due somewhat to my race.	
17. I can comfortably avoid, ignore, or minimize the impact of racism on my life.	
18. I can speak in public to a powerful group without my race being an issue.	
19. Most dolls, crayons, band-aids, makeup, and any other item that comes in “flesh” color is more or less a match for my skin.	
Total	

Adapted from Flynn (2012)

Appendix O

## Let America Be America Again

Langston Hughes, 1902 - 1967

Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—  
Let it be that great strong land of love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?  
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,  
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.  
I am the red man driven from the land,  
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—  
And finding only the same old stupid plan  
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,  
Tangled in that ancient endless chain  
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!  
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!  
Of work the men! Of take the pay!  
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.  
I am the worker sold to the machine.

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

I am the Negro, servant to you all.  
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—  
Hungry yet today despite the dream.  
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!  
I am the man who never got ahead,  
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream  
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,  
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,  
That even yet its mighty daring sings  
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned  
That's made America the land it has become.  
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas  
In search of what I meant to be my home—  
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,  
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,  
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came  
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?  
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?  
The millions shot down when we strike?  
The millions who have nothing for our pay?  
For all the dreams we've dreamed  
And all the songs we've sung  
And all the hopes we've held  
And all the flags we've hung,  
The millions who have nothing for our pay—  
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—  
The land that never has been yet—  
And yet must be—the land where *every* man is free.  
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—  
Who made America,  
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,  
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,  
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—  
The steel of freedom does not stain.  
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,  
We must take back our land again,

DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

America!

O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
America never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath—  
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
We, the people, must redeem  
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain—  
All, all the stretch of these great green states—  
And make America again!

From *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, published by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.  
Copyright © 1994 the Estate of Langston Hughes. Used with permission.

Appendix P

Guide for 3rd Literature Circle Discussion

**Group Norms Reminder:**

- We will strive to quietly and actively listen to others.
- We will add to the conversation by coming prepared to discussions and by sharing our own ideas.
- We will be open to the ideas of others, showing respect for different opinions

**Sentence Stems that Provides a Safe Discussion Space:**

- “I wonder...”
- “I want to add to what \_\_\_\_\_ said...”
- “Can you explain....”
- “I agree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
- “I disagree with \_\_\_\_\_ because...”
- “Based on the text, I think...”

**Discussion Order:**

- Please begin your discussion by sharing your thoughts, open-ended questions, and realizations about the section that you read for today.
- Now move on to discussing the following questions:
  - Who as the power within the story? How does this change throughout the story? What causes those changes?
  - What types of attitudes/actions/situations force people to be powerless? What types of attitudes/actions/situations help people regain their power?
- Finally, work together on the “Visualizing the Theme” activity to help you deepen your understanding of the way the theme transformed throughout the story.

**Activity: “Visualizing the Theme”**

- Choose one of the thematic unit concepts to focus on. Consider how that thematic concept changed throughout the story.
  - Prejudice and Bias
  - Discrimination
  - Racism
  - Institutional Racism
  - Power and Privilege
  - Social justice and Equity
- Create a visual diagram that shows how the thematic concept transformed through the story, from beginning to end. Make sure to include at least 6 key moments of the story in your visual diagram.

Group norms adapted from Kim, Wee, and Lee (2017)

Sentence Stems adapted from Jocius and Shealy (2017)

Appendix Q

**Harlem**

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

Langston Hughes, "Harlem" from *Collected Poems*. Copyright © 1994 by The Estate of Langston Hughes. Reprinted with the permission of Harold Ober Associates Incorporated.  
Source: *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes* (Random House Inc., 1990)

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

### Appendix R

#### Nonfiction Articles as Examples of Counter Stories

A forgotten story: Black women helped land a man on the moon. (2016, September 18).

*Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/black-women-nasa-history/id/21627/>

Dobson, F. (2013, December 17). What Kwanza means to the black community. *The*

*Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/kwanzaa-meaning-black-americans/id/48192/>

Latinos step up drive to preserve heritage, want more historic sites (2018, October 22).

*Associated Press*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/latino-historical-sites/id/46876/>

The Mexican holiday Day of the Dead has a starring role in ‘Coco.’ (2017, November

26). *PRI*. Retrieved from <https://newsela.com/read/coco-movie-mexico-USA/id/38085/>

## DISCUSSING RACISM IN A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT

### Appendix S

#### Post-Unit Reflection

**Learning Targets:**

- I can reflect on how my thoughts, perceptions, and understandings about the thematic concepts have changed throughout this unit.
- I can pick out specific ideas from the unit that have most impacted me.

Our literature circle unit centered on the thematic concepts below.

- Prejudice and Bias
- Discrimination
- Racism
- Institutional Racism
- Power and Privilege
- Social justice and equity

To wrap up our unit, write a 1-2 page reflection about how your thoughts, perceptions, and understandings of these concepts changed throughout the unit.

Please incorporate at least **three specific ideas** from the unit that really stuck with you. You may use pieces from the novel, your group discussions, the nonfiction articles, the poems, our whole class discussions, or the counter stories project.