



INSTITUTE FOR
HUMANE EDUCATION

RACISM ALPHABET

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PURPOSE

Students explore examples of racism, consider perspectives about racism by writing a story, and discuss ways to eradicate racism in our society.

GRADES

8-12

TIME

a few class periods

MATERIALS

- white board and markers
- racism alphabet (see below) on recycled cards and an opaque container
- research resources (Internet, encyclopedias, etc.)
- paper and writing utensils (or computers)

SUBJECT AREAS

Language Arts and Social Studies/History

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Forthcoming

PERTINENT INFORMATION

The sample alphabet listed in this activity is from the book "Faces of Racism" by Josef Szwarc. You may wish to choose different words for your racism alphabet.

Put each word in the alphabet on a card and put them in an opaque container.



PROCEDURE

1. Ask students the question: "What does racism mean to you?" Give them a moment to reflect and then write their responses on the white board.
2. Let them know that Josef Szwarc, author of "Faces of Racism" and Research and Policy Manager of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture says race "is used as an umbrella term for various population groups of which people think themselves to be members, or to which they think other people belong."

Ask students "Why do you think that Szwarc defines race (and thus racism) in such broad terms?" (This question is designed to encourage students to understand that any one group oppressing another group is basically racism because the oppression is all caused by the same mentality.)

3. Let students know that they're going to explore a new alphabet -- a racism alphabet. Have each student pick a card from the container. The cards

each have a letter and a word starting with that letter on them. (A for Apartheid, B for Biology, C for Caste, ... Y for Yellow Peril, and Z for ZOG -- see below for the sample alphabet.) Let students know that they have 20 minutes to research the meaning of their word and to write down an example of their word from the past or present. Let them know that they can use their own knowledge, the internet, encyclopedias, and any other sources they have access to.

4. Once they have done their research ask students to write a story about a person living in the situation related to their alphabet word. What is their life like? What are they thinking and feeling? What's happening?

The students can write it from the point of view of whomever they choose. For example, if the word was D – "Driving while black," they could write from the point of view of the African-American or they could write the story from the point of view of the police officer, or they could write it from the point of view of a bystander, etc. -- anyone who might be experiencing the racist situation. Tell them they have 30 minutes (or however much time you choose) to write the story.

5. Pair the students up A and B, C and D, E and F, and so on. Have the students share their stories with their partners. Ask them to discuss with each other, based on their stories, how the other characters might be feeling, or what they might be thinking. What causes them to behave the way they do?
6. Gather back as a class and invite students to share a brief summary of their story (and/or excerpts) and of their pair discussion about the thoughts and motivations of the other characters.
7. Give each student an opportunity to share their word and its meaning with the whole class. (You may wish to post these around the room or on a bulletin board.)
8. Lead students in a discussion, exploring questions such as:
 - What would need to change in the story so the example of racism did not occur?
 - What would we need to do differently in our world to eradicate racism from society?
9. Invite each student to make a promise that they can keep to prevent/address racism. Invite volunteers to share theirs. Encourage

students to write down their promise and keep it with them. Schedule a time to revisit and discuss their promises.

SAMPLE RACISM ALPHABET

Taken from Josef Szwarc's book "Faces of Racism."

- A. Apartheid
- B. Biology
- C. Caste
- D. "Driving While Black"
- E. Ethnic cleansing
- F. Faith
- G. Genocide
- H. Hate speech
- I. Imperialism
- J. J'accuse
- K. Ku Klux Klan
- L. Language
- M. Miscegenation
- N. Non-violence
- O. On the Origin of Species
- P. Porraimos
- Q. 'Queers"
- R. Rape
- S. Slavery
- T. Truth
- U. Underground railroad
- V. Volk
- W. White man's burden
- X. Xenophobia
- Y. Yellow peril
- Z. ZOG