
Addressing Racism

Videos:

“Ibram X. Kendi on teaching values of antiracism”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eY4jK_2GsE (5:47 minutes)

“Author John McWhorter: ‘Wokeness’ hurts Black communities and our society”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1G8z7gognol> (7:12 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. John McWhorter said that even before 2020, Americans discussed racism all the time. Do you agree? What was your experience before 2020? Do you think the generation before yours discussed and confronted racism?
3. Ibram X. Kendi said that the abolitionists’ message was that the more people do nothing, the more slavery spreads, “and in many ways that’s what’s happening right now; if we don’t actively seek to be anti-racist, then racism will persist.” Do you think this is a fair comparison? Why/Why not?
4. John McWhorter said, “[T]here do need to be more Black doctors, without a doubt. But is the reason that there aren’t Black doctors a racism that we can fight, as opposed to something that went on the past, where fixing it now is going to be something other than battling racism?” What did he mean by this?
5. Ibram X. Kendi said, “No one is inherently racist or anti-racist, it’s about what we’re doing.” What did he mean by this?
6. John McWhorter said he has no problem with teaching kids about the role of racism in society, but that he thinks it can go overboard when the whole curriculum is centered on racism. Do you agree? Why/Why not? What has been your experience with being taught about racism in school? Has it been positive or negative?

7. Ibram X. Kendi said that racist ideas are very simple, which can make it easy for very young children to be influenced by them. Do you think this is true? Why/Why not?
8. John McWhorter said he doesn't think schools should be teaching politics. Is teaching about racism the same as teaching politics? Why/Why not?
9. Ibram X. Kendi said children need to be taught about racism for the same reason that they need to be taught to look both ways before crossing the street. What did he mean by this?
10. John McWhorter said, "We're being taught that all of it is very simple, and that it's all about just teaching White people that they're bad. I'm not sure how that helps poor Black people, who need help with their real lives." What did he mean by this?
11. Throughout the CBS video, clips were shown of politicians and political pundits harshly criticizing Ibram X. Kendi's work. Why do you think Kendi's work has inspired such strong negative reactions from certain public figures?
12. What does the term "woke" mean to you? What are the different ways this word has been used in recent years? Do you think it has a positive connotation or a negative connotation? Why?
13. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
14. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
15. What else would you like to learn about this topic?