

Dear colleagues,

Like many of you, we are devastated and saddened by the ongoing injustices and violence perpetrated against Black people, as well as other racialized groups. Racism is an undeniable part of the history and the present of our country, not just a phenomenon we witness south of the border. As educators, we believe we must play an active role in tackling hatred and ignorance. As our colleague Rajdeep Gill says, “we teach because of the world we wish to create.”

Many instructors are interested in discussing the ongoing protests against police brutality and racism in the classroom, but don't know where to start. Here are three strategies to help you frame the discussion in an effective way. This list is by no means exhaustive.

Look to the Headlines

According to educator [Benjamin Doxtator](#): “If I can humbly offer one tip for facilitating classroom discussions about the #BlackLivesMatter protests against police violence - especially when you're unsure how students will react - it is to focus the conversation on concrete news stories rather than student opinions.

It's much easier to then ask questions like: whose voice is left out of this story? Can we fact-check specific details? Can we find other stories? I use this strategy knowing some students are exposed primarily to media that labels protestors as 'rioters' and 'looters'.”

Do the Reading

Many educators feel that they don't have enough knowledge to discuss racism in the classroom effectively, but you do not have to know everything in order to open space in your class for critical reflection. As Paulo Freire wrote, “read the words in order to read the world.” The following list contains resources and book recommendations to get you started:

- [How to Not Be An Ally](#)
- [A list of resources and book recommendations](#) from a Canadian perspective.
- [A Google doc](#) full of anti-racist books, articles, podcasts and other educational resources.
- [Showing Up for Racial Justice](#).

- [A syllabus from a critical race theory course](#) with discussion questions from Dr. Adrienne Keen
- [Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education](#)

Scaffold the Discussion

Sometimes, even well-intentioned classroom discussions can backfire, harming BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) students and entrenching racist viewpoints. The following resources contain some strategies for scaffolding and framing the discussion to set students up for a rich learning experience, keeping in mind our students' diverse positionality, lived-experiences, and perspectives. If you're having a discussion in an asynchronous format, you'll also want to play an active role as a moderator.

- This [Teaching Tolerance Guide](#) has a lot of recommendations for having difficult conversations about race in the classroom.
- [From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces](#) also offers some strategies to move students beyond defensiveness.
- [This slide deck from a session about Brave Spaces](#) offers some ideas for reflection.

We hope you find these strategies helpful. But, of course, these strategies are offered as merely a start. Dismantling systemic racism is work that requires courage, persistence, and collective action. The Teaching and Learning Commons team will stand beside you in this struggle.

“When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.” - Audre Lorde