

So You Want to Talk About Race

Introduction

“These are very stressful times for people of color who have been fighting and yelling and trying to protect themselves from a world that doesn’t care, to suddenly be asked by those who’ve ignored them for so long, ‘What has been happening your entire life? Can you educate me? Now that we’re all in the room, how do we start this discussion” (Pg. 5)

How often are you talking about race? Were you talking about it before or is it more frequent now?

“I hope that if parts of this book make you uncomfortable, you can sit with that discomfort for a while, to see if it has anything else to offer you.” (Pg. 7)

Why is talking about race uncomfortable? Should it be?

Is it really about race?

Have you ever had an awkward conversation or interaction about race? What did that look like? What about it made it awkward?

Oluo makes an analogy about the disadvantages of white people and people of color being compared to cancer and that race is not a universal experience.

What are some issues currently that our society thinks are not issues related to race? Where do you see Oluo’s statement reflected?

What is racism?

“Systemic racism is a machine that runs whether we pull the levers or not, and by letting it be, we are responsible for what it produces. We have to actually dismantle the machine if we want to make change.” (Pg. 30)

What are some ways that you have gone about ‘dismantling the machine’? Why did you decide to read this book?

Oluo states that the “more practice you have at tying individual racism to the system that gives it power, the more you can make a difference”(Pg. 35)

Thinking back on your experience, what's one example of racism you have witnessed that you can rephrase in your mind and tie the individual racism to the system?

What if I talk about race wrong?

Oluo writes out some tips for having conversations about race. Looking through the tips, where do you recognize having trouble in the past talking about race? Which ones would you need more practice in?

Why am I always being told to “check my privilege?”

“If we are truly dedicated to addressing the systemic oppression and inequality, we must understand the full impact these advantages and disadvantages in order to move toward real change in our society and ourselves” (Pg. 60)

What are some of your privileges that you recognize, whether earned or unearned? How has this privilege influenced not only your status but your experience of the world?

Why can't I say the “N” word?

“All oppression in race, class, gender, ability, religion- it all began with words” (pg. 138)
How can we go about the responsibility of educating ourselves and our youths about the power of words to heal or to harm?

What should teachers keep in mind as they teach about the n-word?

What is cultural appropriation?

“One of the trickiest conversations you're bound to have regarding race in America will likely be about cultural appropriation.” (pg. 145)

What conditions do you think need to be met to be considered cultural appreciation instead of cultural appropriation?

Oluo mentions rap music and it's African roots. Are there other 'popular' examples of cultural appropriation that come to mind?

Why can't I touch your hair?

"Is that your real hair?" (pg. 154)

In what other ways does society ask Black people to "touch their hair"? Other examples in other cultures?

"It is a continuation of the lack of respect for the basic humanity and bodily autonomy of Black Americans that is endemic throughout White Supremacy" (pg. 159)

Our world is centered around white culture and we expect people of color to adhere to expectations such as hairstyles that are appropriate for the workplace. Is it important or necessary to set standards for the way people look in the workplace? Why or why not?

What are microaggressions?

What are some of the racial microaggressions that you have encountered or witnessed? What are some that you may have perpetrated on others?

Oluo included some tips on if you get called out for a racist microaggression. If you have delivered a microaggression, what tip(s) do you think is important to reflect on? How will you be better?

Why are our students so angry?

"Our kids are fighting for a world more just and more righteous than we had ever dared to dream of." (Pg. 186)

Are you seeing the youth you work with taking part in their communities and fighting for social justice? Are you having conversations about these topics in the classroom? Why is it important for them to engage in these movements?

What is the Model Minority Myth?

"If you want to fight racism in America, you have to fight the model minority myth." (pg. 200)
Did you have your own biases and predispositions about Asian Americans? What are ways to combat the model minority myth? How does model minority myth affect other people of color?

But what if I hate Al Sharpton?

What burdens of “respectability” and “tone” do you see placed on different populations of color in our society?

I just got called racist, what do I do now?

Oluo writes a list of tips to confront your own racism and how to do the work. If you have been called or implied racist, which tips will be helpful moving forward? How will you take the opportunities to do better?

Talking is great, but what else can I do?

What are some actions you can take in your community, your schools, your workplace, and your local government? What are some local anti-racism efforts in your community that you can join or support?