

# America to me *real talk*

## ORGANIZER GUIDE

Talking About Race, Identity  
& Education



# Organizer Guide

## INTRODUCTION

### Talking About Race, Identity & Education

Reflecting on Langston Hughes’s prophetic poem, “Let America Be America Again,” *America to Me* looks at the complexities of race, identity, privilege, and education through the eyes of a diverse group of young people.

This guide is designed to help you use *America to Me* as a catalyst for group discussions about race, racism, and racial equity in America today.

If you’re here, it means you believe in the promise of America and know we can do better. Thank you for playing a role in expanding and deepening this crucial dialogue.

We welcome you.



## ORGANIZING A GROUP DISCUSSION



Start with either a trained facilitator or a group organizer (e.g. teacher, administrator, family member, student) who can moderate the discussion using this guide.



Schedule at least one hour for a group discussion, two hours if you’re watching the episode as a group.



Look for a safe, inclusive space that’s wheelchair accessible, near public transportation, and that has media capabilities if you want to watch the episode as a group.



Participants should watch at least one episode of *America to Me* before the discussion and be willing to follow the discussion guidelines.



Ideal group size: 10 people or fewer. If your class or group is larger, break into smaller groups for discussion.



Helpful handouts: Print-outs of the Langston Hughes poem “Let America Be America Again” and the discussion guidelines, paper and pens for the exercises.

## PREPARING FOR DISCUSSION

**To keep your discussion respectful and productive, here is a suggested set of guidelines that all participants should follow:**

### ORGANIZER GUIDELINES

Your role is to organize the gathering, read through all of the materials, kick off the conversation with the guidelines, and ensure that everyone follows them.

You have the same voice and authority as everyone else in the group. You are the group organizer, not the group leader.

Be prepared. These are sensitive topics, so it's crucial that you read this entire guide and the entire Episode Guide you'll be covering, including the resources under EXPAND.

Stay aware of who is speaking and who is not. Ensure that no one dominates the conversation, and welcome (but don't demand) input from quieter participants.

If someone violates a guideline, respectfully remind them of it.

If your conversation becomes a fight, quiet the group and ask everyone to spend two minutes silently writing down what they're feeling and thinking. Use your judgment to either move on to a different topic or share what everyone wrote.

### GROUP GUIDELINES

Appreciate that everyone in the room has good intentions and also biases. Everyone is doing the best they can from their current state of awareness.

Speak for yourself ("I feel..." "I think..."), not on behalf of your identity ("we feel..." "we are...") or other identities ("they think..." "they act like...").

Listen to understand and not to respond. Take the time to process what you've heard.

Avoid negative judgments, language, and name calling.

Be open to feeling uncomfortable - all growth comes with some discomfort.

Understand that groups of a single race can have multiple perspectives and even the most diverse groups will have missing perspectives.

Stay engaged. Take a moment if you feel frustrated or misunderstood, but don't drop out.

Don't dominate the conversation. Everyone gets a chance to speak and be heard.

Don't expect resolution, complete agreement, or definite answers. This is a discussion, not a debate or a lesson.



**Set the stage for a good discussion by welcoming everyone and arranging your group so everyone can see each other, ideally in a circle.**

### STARTING THE DISCUSSION

Introduce yourself and your role. Hand out print-outs of the discussion guidelines and (if using) the poem by Langston Hughes.

Read aloud the discussion guidelines and monitor the conversation to ensure everyone follows them.

Have each person introduce themselves by name and self identify their race, ethnicity, and gender pronouns.

Read aloud the definition of “Race” as it pertains to this discussion:

**Race is a social construct based on perceptions of a person’s skin color, hair texture and other physical characteristics.**

**In the words of historian Nell Irvin Painter, “race is an idea, not a fact.” Race is different from a person’s nationality (e.g. Irish, Italian) and their ethnicity (e.g. Jewish, Latinx).**

### EXPANDING THE DISCUSSION

Read and familiarize yourself with the Langston Hughes poem, and ask everyone “What is America to you?”

Ask your group some of the Essential Questions About Race.

Pass out paper and pens. Ask everyone to put their anonymous questions about the series or other race-related topics in a box. Read them aloud for the group to discuss.

Introduce the Racial Autobiography (below) and encourage participants to think about their first entry.




**Use the *America to Me* Episode Guides to frame your discussion.**

### WRAPPING UP THE DISCUSSION

When your time is up or you feel the discussion has reached a natural stopping point, thank everyone for their time and contributions.

Invite everyone to continue watching the series, thinking about what they heard, and engaging in conversations about race and racial equity.

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT RACE

-  What is America to me?
-  Why do we need to talk about Race? Why does Race matter?
-  Which person from the episode / series strikes a chord with you and why?
-  Who benefits from an environment of equity and inclusion?
-  In what ways is Oak Park and River Forest High School a microcosm of communities around America?
-  Where have you found resources that are inclusive of many racial backgrounds?
-  How are experiences around race different for white people and people of color?
-  Why is it important to understand the cycle of oppression with regard to race?
-  Where and when in society do you see that the color of your skin is valued?
-  Who should be at the table to create communities of Equity and Inclusion? And who should be at the table to ensure systemic change? Are they the same people?

## RACIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY DEVELOPMENT AND JOURNALING

### From Glenn E. Singleton's **COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION™**

Race is something that impacts all of our lives, whether we're conscious of it all of the time or not. Reflecting on your own racial journey is important for understanding your identity, your relationship with others, and your positioning in the world. An understanding of your personal journey with race can also lead to a heightening of your racial consciousness.

As you watch each episode of America to Me and engage with the Episode Guides, you'll see prompts to add entries into your own racial autobiography.

As you complete your journal, please describe your experiences, thoughts, and feelings, and, be mindful of what comes up for you as you engage.

Remember, race is personal and professional. It includes positive and negative experiences. Race is many things. Do not limit yourself in what you choose to share.

**Before you watch the docu-series, start your journal with this entry:**

### **STARTING YOUR RACIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

**What was your earliest experience with race? What was your most recent experience with race? (These are called the “bookends” of your racial autobiography.)**

## GLOSSARY

For the purpose of this guide, we are using the following definitions for each term (in regards to race):

### Agency

The ability to feel empowered to take control of your own choices and actions, and advocate for yourself. Race can have a strong impact on a person's agency.

### Bias

The belief that some people, races, ideas, etc., are valued more than others; a prejudice for or against something.

### Biracial

A person who self-identifies as having parents of two different races. Some individuals use the terms "biracial," and "multiracial" and "mixed race" interchangeably.

### Code Switching (race)

When a person of color consciously or unconsciously changes their speech, behaviors, or other traits in order to conform to or fit in with Eurocentric society. Read NPR's "Five Reasons Why People Code-Switch."

### Collective Responsibility (education)

Teachers, administrators, families, and members of the community work together systemically to ensure higher quality instruction in all classrooms and better results for all students.

### Color blindness (race)

The idealistic notion that the solution to racial inequity is simply to treat people as equals, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity. At best, this ideology naively ignores the complexities of systemic racism, whiteness, and the effects of centuries of racism and inequity. At worst, it is a form of racism and privilege. White people do not experience the disadvantage of racism and therefore can ignore racism, deny the negative experiences of people of color, and reject their cultural heritage and perspectives. Read "Colorblind Ideology is a Form of Racism"

### Colorism

Prejudice and discrimination against individuals based on the darkness or lightness of their skin tone. This prejudice and discrimination can come from within or outside of the racial group. See "What's Colorism?" from Teaching Tolerance.

### Competing Victimization

Tactics used to remove responsibility for behaviors that are centered around white privilege.

### Desegregation

The ending of a federal policy of racial segregation in the school systems and military. The focus of the Civil Rights Movement before Brown vs. the Board of Education. See "BROWN V. BOARD: Timeline of School Integration in the U.S." from Teaching Tolerance.

### Equity

Equity is learning and working to understand people's life experiences and how various structural and institutional practices have created barriers to all people living in a just, fair society. Equity prioritizes and focuses on the just and fair distribution of resources and access to eliminate barriers, so a person's full humanity can be realized and recognized. Equity is not the same as equality. Equality is treating everyone the same and attempts to promote fairness. Things can only be fair if everyone begins at the same starting point.

### Eurocentric

Focusing on European culture and/or history to the exclusion of a wider view of the world; implicitly regarding European culture as the gold or default standard which American society should adhere to. One example is American classrooms, which teach European history, but rarely African history outside of the slave trade.

## **Implicit Bias (aka social cognition)**

Unconscious judgments or prejudices formed through our upbringings and exposure to certain societal values, the media, etc. See POV's "Implicit Bias: Peanut Butter, Jelly, and Racism."

## **Institutionalized/Systemic Racism**

A systemic mistreatment that occurs when established laws, customs and practices create inequities solely due to an individual's race.

## **Integration**

More than just the act of desegregation, integration involves leveling barriers, creating equal opportunities regardless of race, and developing a culture that values diverse people and traditions, rather than merely allowing a racially marginalized group into the mainstream white culture.

## **Internalized Oppression**

A person who is victim to racism over a period of time who begins to believe that they are inferior and the problem. Eventually they will internalize these negative thoughts and exemplifies the lies of inferiority and inadequacy. When they believe this they have internalized the oppression. Read "Yeah, But They're White" from Teaching Tolerance.

## **Multiracial**

A person who self identifies as being a part of multiple racial groups. How a multiracial person self identifies may differ from how society or other racial groups perceive them. See "Multiracial in America" from the Pew Research Center.

## **Race**

Race is a social construct based on perceptions of a person's skin color, hair texture and other physical characteristics. In the words of historian Nell Irvin Painter, "race is an idea, not a fact." Race is different from a person's nationality (e.g. German, Cuban) and their ethnicity (e.g. Jewish, Latinx).

## **Racial Identity**

A person's identification with a particular race that shares common characteristics with that person. Multiracial individuals identify as being a part of multiple racial groups.

## **Racism**

A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.

## **White Privilege**

Rights, immunities or social advantages afforded to those who are or are perceived to be racially white. White privilege is different than economic privilege. Read "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh.

## **White Supremacy (as it relates to race and power)**

A belief that the white race is inherently superior to other races and that white people should have power over people of other races.

## **Whiteness (culture)**

Whiteness is a social construct based on White cultural norms (habits, practices and ways of being). These norms are valued and privileged as the standard that all individuals and institutions are expected to embody. Whiteness as a "standard" is embedded in institutions and structures and is largely based on Eurocentric norms. Read "I Sometimes Don't Want to Be White Either" on Huffington Post / Read "Whiteness and White Identity Development" from Culture and Youth Studies.