

Best Practices for Discussing Race & Racism in the Classroom

Indigenous Realities Livestream for Grades 6 - 8 — November 2022

A note from REEL CANADA

The stories we tell about Canada are important. They shape and reflect our cultural identities and self-perception. When we hear stories that challenge or contradict the ways we see ourselves, it's uncomfortable. Often it feels easier to ignore those stories rather than to meaningfully engage with their implications. In Canada we have a tendency to compare ourselves favourably to our American cousins. We tout our multiculturalism policies and pride ourselves on being a mosaic, not a melting pot. When we see evidence of racism and violence to the south, we tend to think, '*we're not THAT bad.*'

Yet, Indigenous people, Black people and People of Colour within Canada have always spoken out about the harmful ways racism affects their lived experiences, drawing attention to the ways Canada has failed to address our own problems with anti-Indigenous racism and other forms of racism, both on an individual and a systemic level. These are stories Canadians need to know.

We share stories from Indigenous creators because we believe in the power of authentic, self-determined cultural expression. Our intention with the livestream series is to provide students a platform to engage with filmmakers on the ways being Indigenous in Canada has shaped their identities, their work and their experiences, and to open dialogue between students of all backgrounds on the topics of race, racism and colonialism in Canada.

However, we recognize that our intentions are influenced by the particular perspectives and biases of those who make up the organization and our partners, and the broader apparatus of predominantly white educational, political, corporate and artistic institutions of which we are part. Good intentions don't prevent our complicity in maintaining the status quo. To work toward dismantling institutional and systemic racism, our journey must be one of ongoing learning and reevaluation of the ways we can leverage our positions of privilege to address inequities, both in our own work and in our broader society.

For us, the issue of *whose* stories get told and who gets to decide is crucial. The mission of REEL CANADA from day one has been to make students more familiar with "the power and diversity of Canadian film." That is only possible when we are actively seeking out creators, partners, collaborators and consultants from the margins of these institutions, and when we not just hear their stories but listen to them.

The platform and national reach that REEL CANADA has developed is an immense privilege and honour. But we also have a responsibility to use that platform in a meaningful way towards amplifying and empowering the voices of Canadian filmmakers and youth to share their realities of life in Canada, especially when those realities are the stories that make us uncomfortable.

Your interest in this livestream series tells us that you are already having or preparing to have courageous and difficult conversations with your students about colonialism, racism, violence, white supremacy and other sensitive but important issues.

We know these conversations can be difficult, so we hope these resources will help you create a safe environment in your class that will allow different perspectives to be heard, and allow students who have lived experiences with racism and intergenerational trauma to feel empowered to contribute.

We want to encourage all participants to share and to listen in a respectful way, in order to strive for greater understanding and cultural exchange. For that reason, it is important to allow for the honest expression of difficult experiences, but also to establish safety protocols that prioritize care for the well-being of students and staff, as personal narratives relating to traumatic issues and events can be very sensitive and even retraumatizing to listen to or talk about. A fulsome understanding of race and racism in the Canadian context is a nuanced and ongoing process.

Considerations for teachers

We hope you will keep the following in mind when participating in our livestreams and screening the related films:

- Please approach discussions with sensitivity and from a trauma-centred and decolonial perspective, prioritizing the needs of any viewers who may have personal experience with trauma and racism, but without putting the burden on trauma survivors to make themselves known, or to speak on behalf of their communities.
- Let your students know they have the right to opt out of the screening, the livestream or class discussion/activities if they feel the subject matter is triggering. Make arrangements for those students to participate in alternative activities so that they do not feel punished for opting out.
- Due to the sensitive subject matter, any counselling services normally provided by your school should be made available, if required.
- Ensure that students who are learning remotely are able to participate in meaningful ways, with remote supports available when necessary.
- Before screening the film(s), share the student handout: [Classroom Agreements for Anti-Racism Conversations](#), and ensure students are aware they can access the external public support resources and services provided. You may want to post the guidelines in the classroom and/or have students circle or rank the commitments that are most important to them.

- Because viewing the film may lead to disclosures by youth in your classroom or group, it may be prudent to familiarize yourself with the mandatory and legal steps within your province, organization or school regarding your **duty to report**.
- In the spirit of respect and reconciliation, it is important to ensure a safe viewing experience for Indigenous and racially marginalized students, who may be personally affected by intergenerational trauma, experiences of racism, or other subjects discussed in the films and livestreams. In addition to the guidelines mentioned above and the regular supports your school may have in place, you should offer, whenever possible, culturally competent counselling and supports.
- In the spirit of reconciliation, consider familiarising yourself with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC's) guiding principles, Pp. 15-17, TRC Final Report, Volume 6. Numbers 3 & 6 are particularly relevant for students:
 - 3. Reconciliation is a process of healing relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.
 - 6. All Canadians, as Treaty People, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.