


Racial Identity Development Tool Kit





We are researchers from the Culture and Family Life Lab in the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota. We collaborated with Minneapolis Public Schools to evaluate the new ethnic studies curriculum (Learn more: <https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/project-unite/>).

We heard from ethnic studies teachers and found in our own research that students' had diverse, emotional reactions to the course content. Understanding students' **racial schema** - the lens through which they view race and racism - can help you anticipate and respond to their different emotions and reactions in your classroom. This toolkit provides *information* and *activities* for teachers to use with students.

We made this toolkit at teachers' request!



Table of contents

Chapter 1. What are common racial schema?

Chapter 2. Racial schema in your classroom

Chapter 3. Activities you can use!

Glossary

Chapter 1

What are common racial schema?

In this chapter, you will learn about common racial schema that affect how people respond to topics of race and identity.

Let's imagine: Students are reacting to this topic

"Even though I'm White I've worked for everything I have."

"Poverty isn't a racial issue. Some people just work harder than others"

"That's why my family and I marched at the capital last week."

Unit 4 : Systemic Oppression
How are poverty and race intertwined?

"I understand that poverty affects many people, but this issue disproportionately affects people of color."

"This is why I hate White people. I can't believe something hasn't been done about this issue."

"Racism used to be a problem, but we're all equal now"

"I think I'm more privileged because I'm White. That is unjust"

Have you seen similar emotions/reactions in your classroom?

What explains this diverse range of reactions & emotions?



Racial Schema

- Racial **schema** are like different lenses through which we see racial events and people in the world, including ourselves. Do we see our own race? Do we see racism?
- Based on their schema, two people can look at the ***same situation*** and understand it in ***different ways***, which influences how they respond emotionally.
- **No one is stuck in a certain phase or schema.** Change comes from having our worldview challenged (see Chapter 2!)
- You can become aware of the schema students are using and understand how to support their learning.


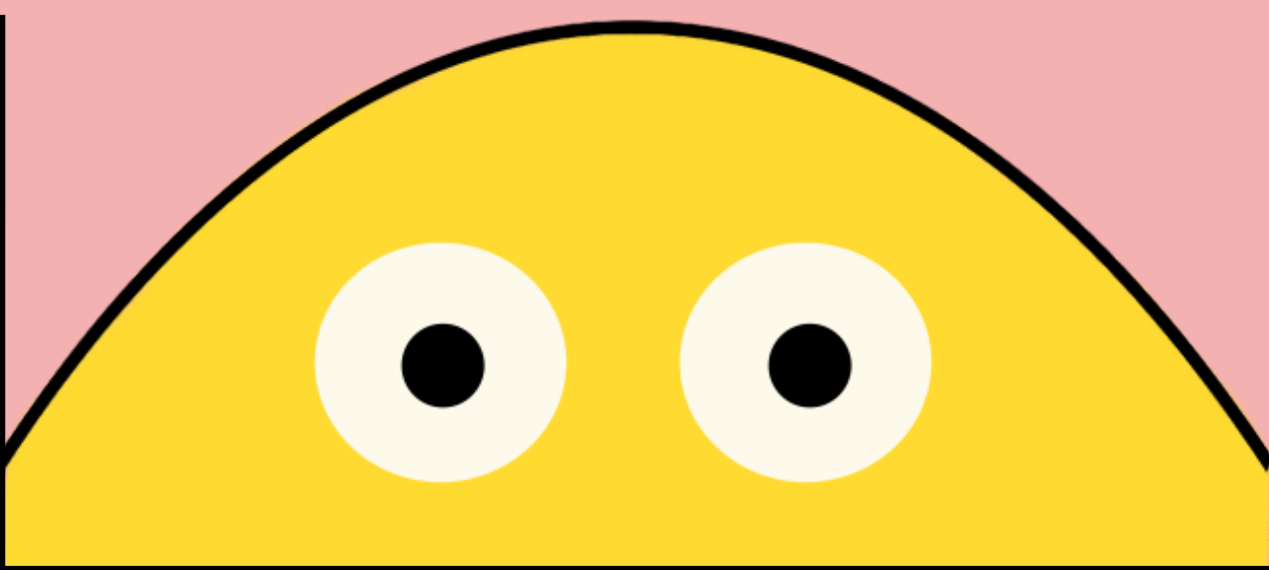
Why doesn't everyone use the same racial schema?

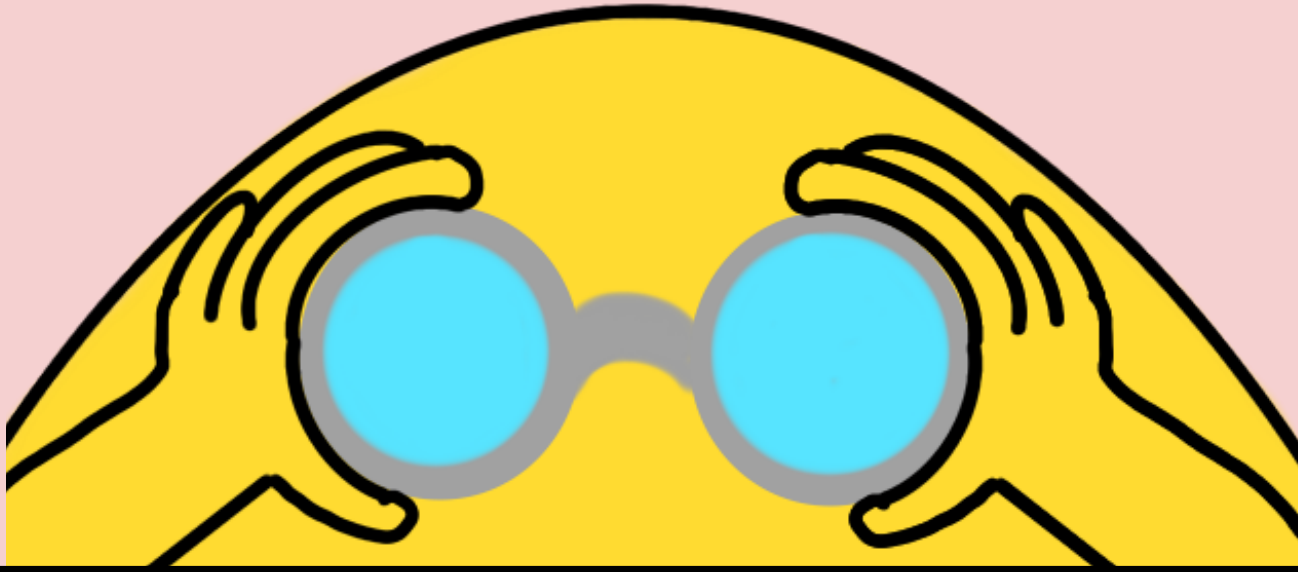
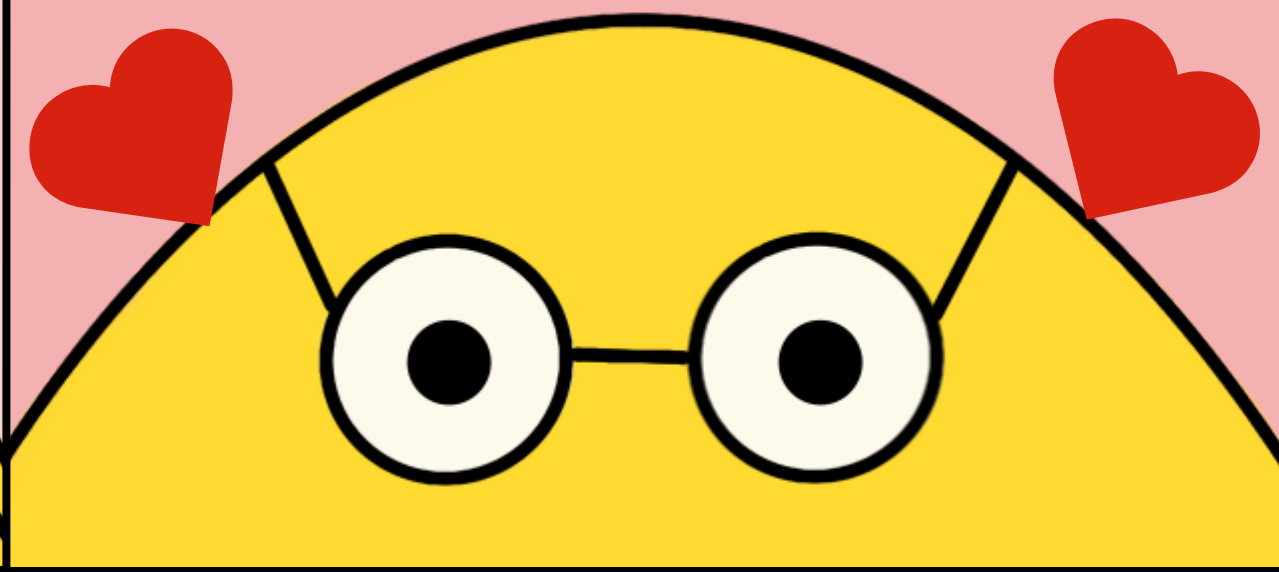
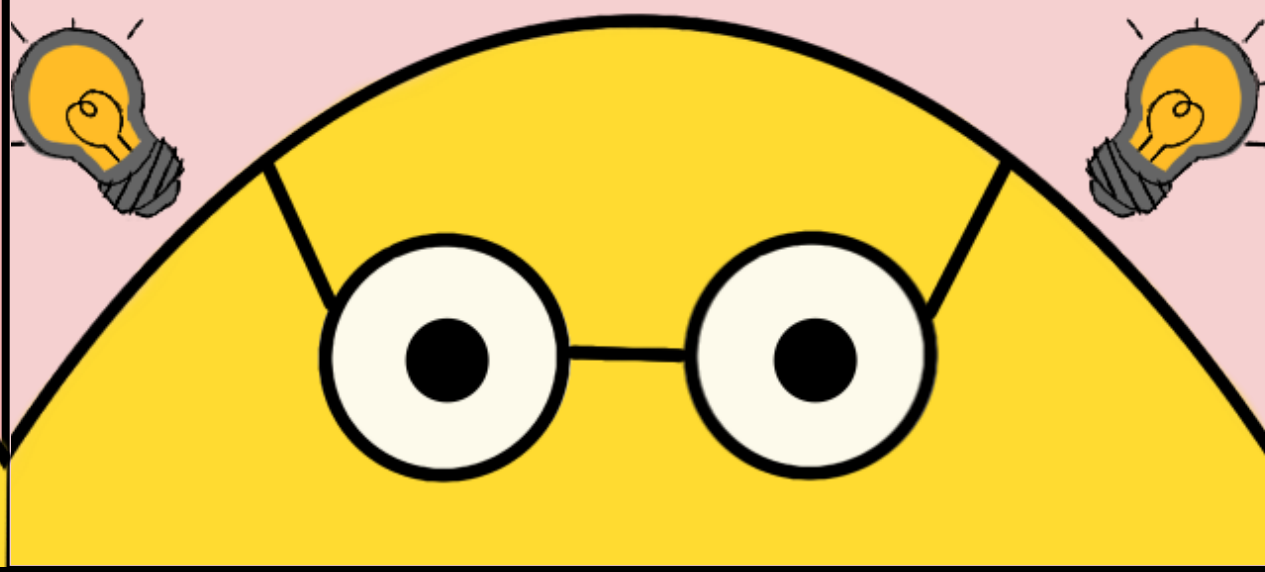


Individual Differences

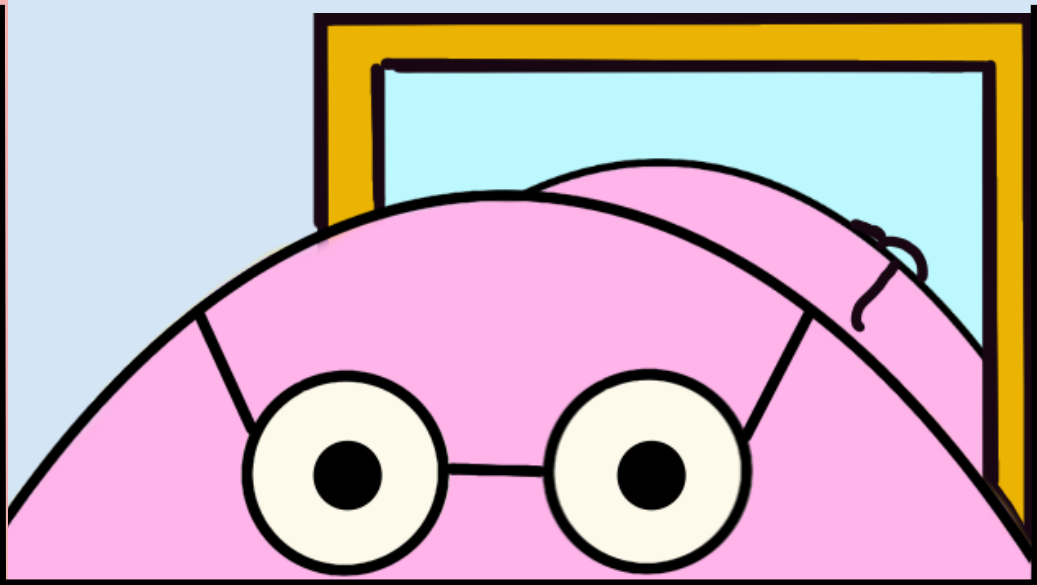
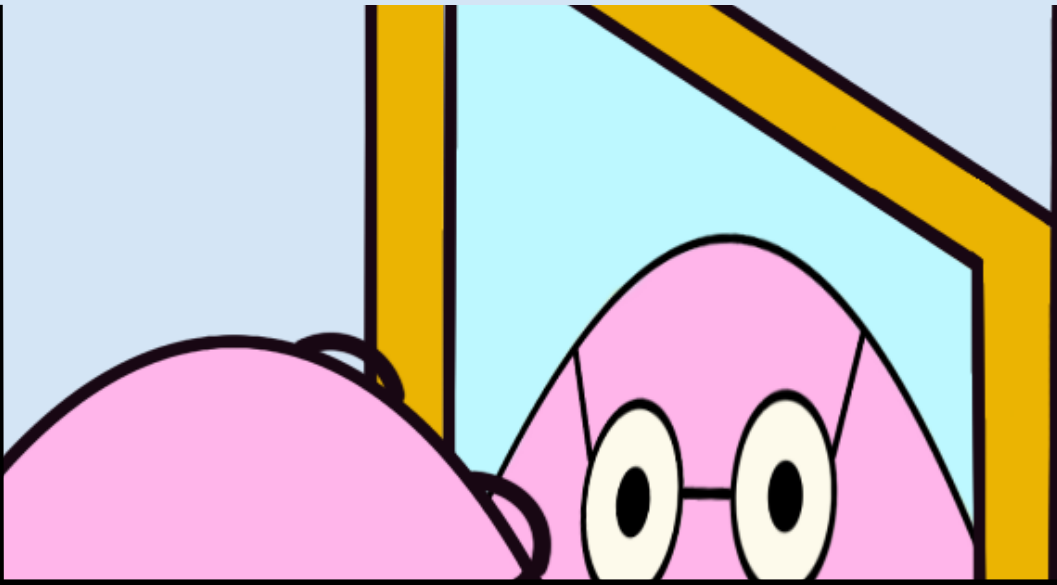
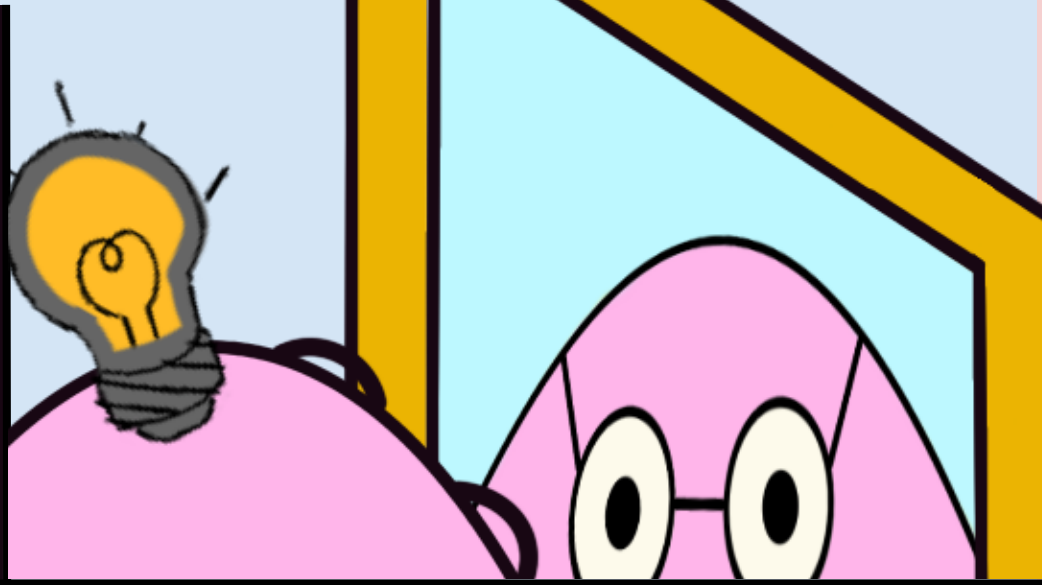
- A person's schema is determined by their own experiences and backgrounds, which have shaped their worldview to date. However, a schema is ***not permanent*** and students continue to grow.
- For students of color, development includes increasing pride in their racial identity and resisting systems of oppression through action. Moving to more advanced schema is supported by family and bolsters their resilience in the face of discrimination. There are 5 common schema.
- In U.S. society, White individuals can go through life without thinking about White identity or racism. Research shows that racial identity development can stall in less advanced schema. Ethnic studies can be the push to keep growing! There are 6 common schema in 2 phases.

What do different racial schemas look like? The next section will help you identify **common schema** for students of color and White students in your classes.

<div>Common Racial Schema for Students of Color</div>		
<div>Schema Name</div>	<div>Preecounter</div>	<div>Encounter</div>
<div>Description</div>	<div>The individual accepts the majority culture (White) as superior.</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internalizes negative stereotypes about one's own culture. Distances themselves from symbols of one's own culture. Associates self with symbols of the majority culture. 	<div>The individual experiences an <i>event</i> (personal experiences, observations, education, or activism) that forces them to acknowledge themes of race.</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begins to explore the topic of race. Realizes that they may never be accepted as part of the majority.
<div>Possible Emotions*</div> <div>*Many are possible in any schema</div>	<div>Denial, Ignorance, Low self-esteem.</div>	<div>Hurt, Anger, Sadness</div>
<div>Response to the topic of racism</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "It's not a race issue. Some people work harder than others." "I don't really identify with XYZ culture. I think everyone is the same." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "This is so unfair." "I can't deny the way racism impacts me and my people."

		
Immersion/Emmersion	Internalization	Internalization-Commitment
<p>The individual seeks to learn about their cultural identity and immerse themself in it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surround oneself with people / clothing / symbols from that racial group • Withdraw from racial others 	<p>The individual finds security and pride in their racial identity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel connected to their racial group and pride in belonging • Increased motivation to work with allies from other groups who share their racial justice goals 	<p>Building on their inner security, the individual takes action for social justice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joining social justice movements • Positively engaging with their culture
<p>Anger at injustice, Thirst for knowledge, Defensiveness to identity threats</p>	<p>Self-confidence, Pride, Motivation, Joy with community, Anger at injustice</p>	<p>Inner-Security, Motivation, Hope, Joy, Anger at injustice</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I have to figure out what it means to be XYZ race, since there are so many negative stereotypes out there." • "I could never date a person from another race." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I know what being XYZ race means to me, and no one can take that away from me." • "My group has made America what it is today!" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I am going to teach others about my culture by starting a club at school". • "I know that my activism makes a difference for my community."

Common Racial Schema for White Students Phase 1			
Schema	Contact	Disintegration	Reintegration
Description	Unaware of or neutral about race/racism, including one's own White identity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Denial of race/racism Denial of being White 	Moral conflict between fear of losing racial privilege and moral wrong of keeping privilege. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belief in racial equality (denial of racism) Blames victims of racism 	Implicitly/explicitly embraces White supremacy/racial superiority. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Believes in racial superiority. Justifies racism.
Possible Emotions*	Naivete, timidity in racial situations, evasive about identity, unemotional	Confusion, internal conflict, shame, blames others	Superiority; denial or anger toward discussion of racism; fear/avoidance of racial others
Response to topics of racism	Avoidance of talking about race/racism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I don't see race. I treat everyone the same." "Race doesn't have anything to do with that situation." 	Conflicting views about race/racism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Racism used to be a problem, but now we are all equal." "Sexism is the real issue here." "I earned everything I have through hard work." 	Explicitly expresses racial stereotypes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "People get what they deserve, there must be a reason why some groups are on top". "This class is a waste of time."

<div>Common Schema for White Students</div> <div>Phase 2</div>			
<div>Schema</div>	<div>Pseudo-Independence</div>	<div>Immersion/Emmersion</div>	<div>Autonomy</div>
<div>Description</div>	<div>Recognizes racism without seeing one's own role in solving racism; Belief in "good"/"bad" White people and desire to be seen as good.</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intellectualize racism and deny one's personal responsibility. Efforts to appear "not racist". 	<div>Awareness of White identity and privilege within a systemically racist society.</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active attempts to understand moral ways to be White. Building racial stamina by seeking experiences to understand Whiteness 	<div>Commitment to a lifelong journey of self-reflection and action to build a positive White identity</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-racist action Building an inclusive community with shared values
<div>Possible Emotions*</div> <div>*Many are possible in any schema</div>	<div>Emotional distance, pity towards people of color, anger towards "bad" White people, passivity.</div>	<div>Empathic, responsible, motivated to learn. Anger towards other White people. Embarrassed /ashamed at past beliefs or actions.</div>	<div>Empathy, authenticity/joy in relationships with people of color and with other White allies, motivated for lifelong action.</div>
<div>Response to topics of racism</div>	<div>Emotion without action or defensive reactions:</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Racism is bad, just be a good person.” “How dare you call me racist?” “I already know all this stuff. I’m not learning anything new.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I think I do get special treatment because I’m White, that is unjust.” “I just can’t even talk to anyone about race anymore. I get too upset.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Inaction on my part is a choice to let inequity continue to be the norm.” “I’m never going to have this all figured out, but I can keep learning and trying to take action.”



PAUSE TO REFLECT

Which schema do you think ***you*** use most often? Remember that we can "put on" and "take off" different lenses depending on the situation and day.

Which schema seem most common among the students in your classroom? Have you seen students change schema over time?

Pick two different common schema and imagine students with these schema engaging in small group discussions (or imagine conversations you've had with friends/family). What might happen? Pick two more schema and see if you'd expect the conversation to be different.

Chapter 2

Racial schema in your classroom

In this chapter, you will learn about racial schema development in the classroom and how you as a teacher can help students with this important process.

We can promote racial schema development through dissonance

What exactly is *Dissonance*?

Dissonance occurs when something challenges our worldview or schema for thinking about race and racism.

- Ethnic studies classes can cause many moments of ***dissonance*** and also ***epiphanies*** as students learn more (Helms, 1984; Neville et al., 2017).
 - Common emotions after receiving new information include anger, shock, or guilt. It can feel like the rug was pulled out from under you!
 - Students of color can develop new racial pride and self-understanding through racial epiphanies that help them embrace their identity.
- **Strong emotions are part of this process!** Noticing our own emotions and processing them with others gives us the opportunity to question our assumptions and learn more.

Let's see what this process can look like in the classroom!

Dissonance and epiphanies advances identity development

Initial schema

Students in early schemas may be unaware of racial issues/concepts.

"Racism used to be an issue, but now we're all treated equally."

New Experience

The student then encounters a situation that forces them to think about topics of race.

"Poverty is an issue that disproportionately affects certain racial groups."

Dissonance

The student realizes the new information doesn't align with their schema.

"I was always told that poor people don't work as hard as the rest of us, but actually discrimination keeps people from the American Dream."

New Schema

The student resolves dissonance, allowing them to progress to the next schema.

"Now that I understand these issues, I refuse to be a bystander. I will continue to learn and take action."

Maintaining Safety = Promoting Learning

When students with different racial schema experience dissonance together in one classroom, several dynamics can arise. These dynamics can be helpful or harmful to each other's progress in identity development. **It is vital to protect students of color who regularly experience racial trauma in school and community settings.**

Allowing your students to react will help you understand what your students are thinking. Learning from each other's experiences is powerful!

Recognizing how some comments may be harmful can help determine how you should approach a situation.

Intervening allows you to spark dissonance and maintain the safety/wellbeing of students, especially students of color.

"My family has experienced housing discrimination."

Hearing an experience from another individual can build empathy and trigger dissonance or an epiphany about identity.

"Slavery ended years ago, so how could you even say racism exists?"

These are harmful dynamics because they outright deny the daily experiences of students of color. Seeing a teacher or other students intervene can protect students of color.

"Poverty isn't a racial issue. Some people just work harder than others"

"This is why I hate White people. I can't believe something hasn't been done about this issue."

A White individual may react defensively, which can close them off to further learning.

What are some ways you can intervene?

Use strategies of calling in and calling out
(see hyperlink for further information!)

"Slavery ended years ago,
so racism doesn't even
exist."

Call out when harm
needs to be disrupted
in the moment.

"Wait hold on. I don't think
you realize the impact of
that statement."

Call in when further
discussion can lead to
growth.

"How did you decide that
slavery is the only thing
that defines racism?"

Empower students to support each other

Show their **support** while another student
is sharing: snaps, light taps on the table,
short affirmations ("Yes!")

Silence can be daunting - is it respectful like in math
class, or are other people judging or rejecting my
experience? Support can help!

Give students ways to quickly
mark hurtful statements

"Ouch" - quickly signal harm and indicate that the
teacher should call out/in
"Oops" - signals that "I don't think you meant harm,
but we should talk about"

Assessing Students Emotions

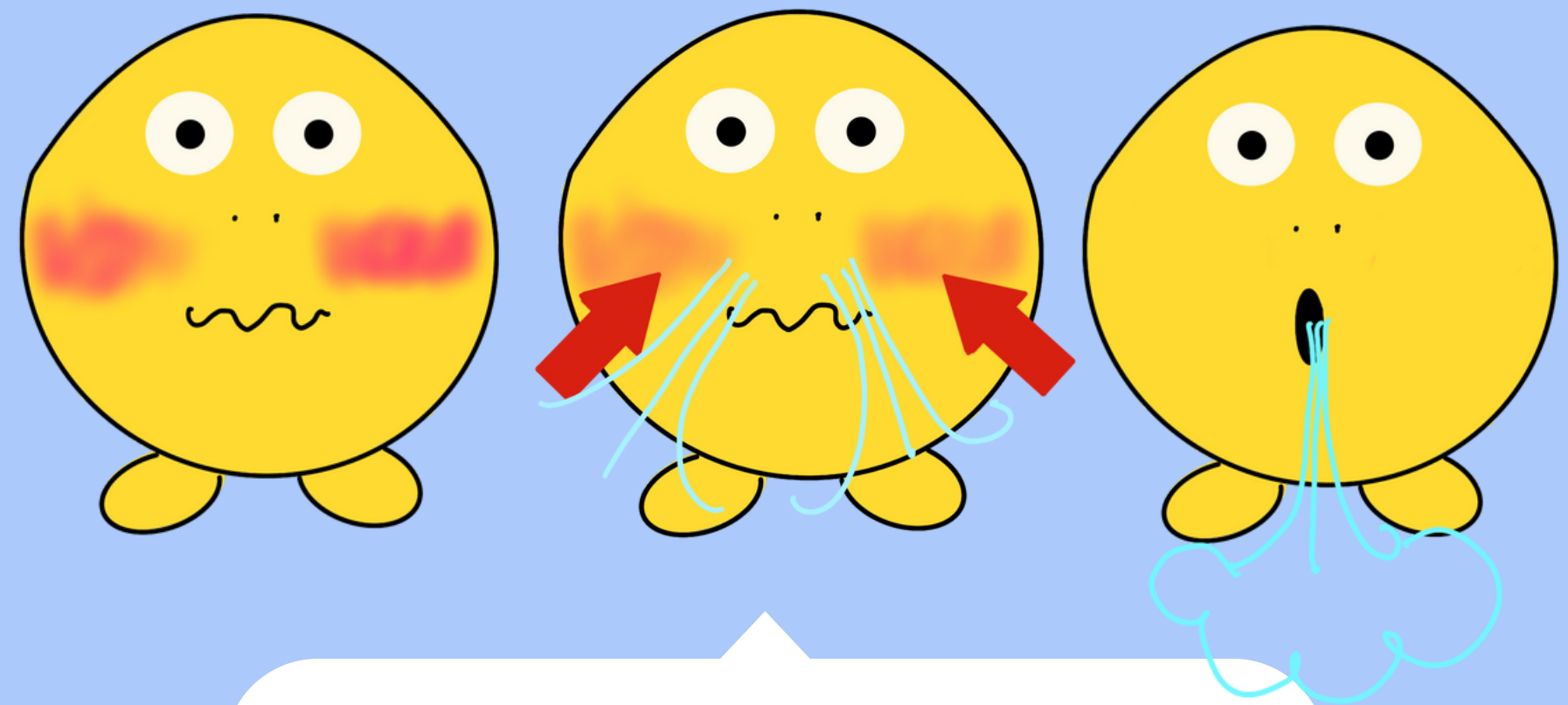
You can use a quick check-in to help students connect with how they are feeling and use their coping skills (breathing, drink of water, make contact with a trusted friend, and more)

Our research with students found that their attitudes and comfort shifted over the course of ethnic studies classes as they developed their racial stamina.

[Follow this link](#) for printable self-assessment tools. Students can use these for self-reflection and should not feel like they are being graded!

Regulate emotions

Students have to return to their daily life after vulnerable and difficult discussions.



Provide time at the end of class to take 10 deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth or end on a high note.

Seek Feedback and Model Humility

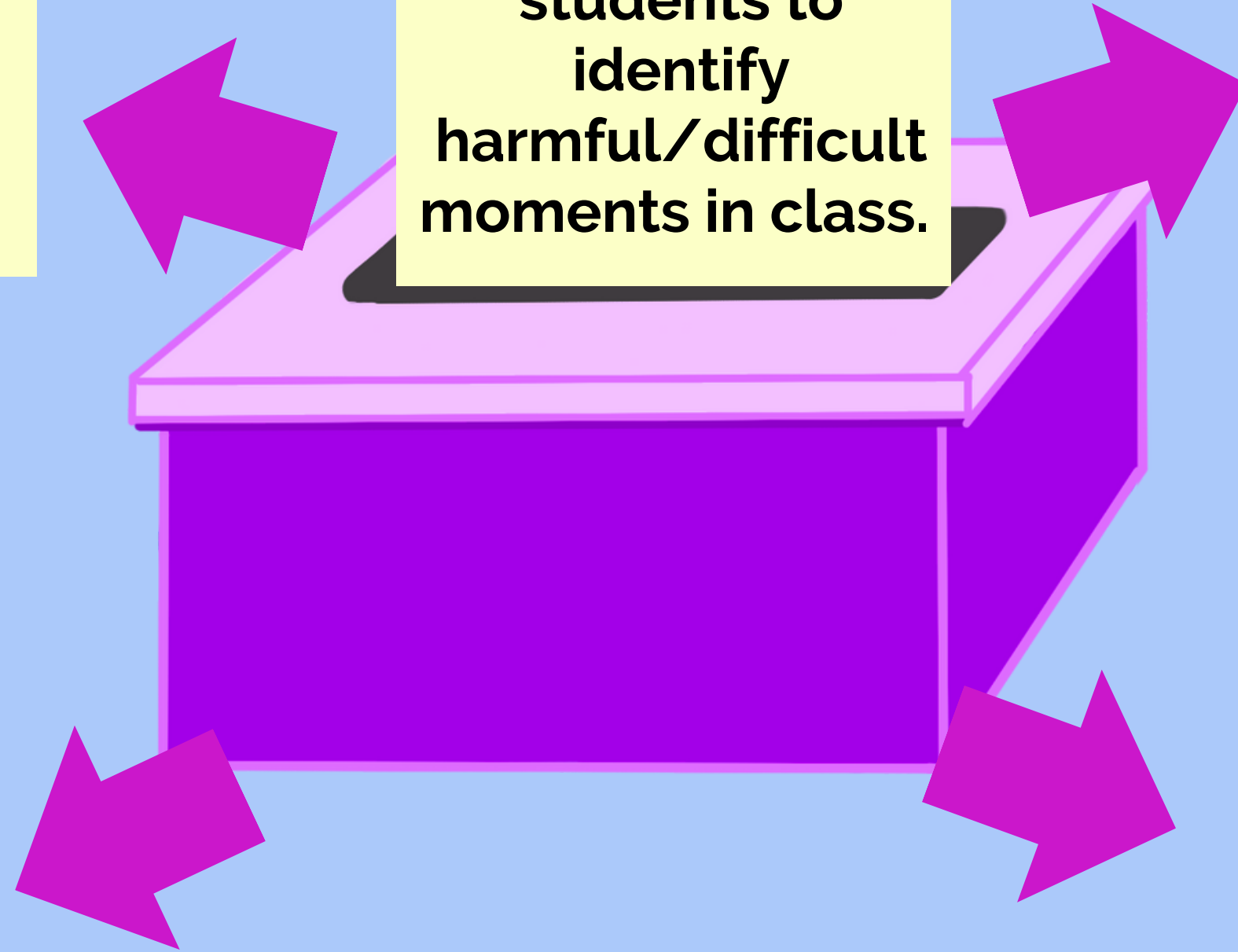
Anonymous boxes or offering time during/after class to check-in with the teacher can empower your students to give this feedback.

Providing ways for students to identify harmful/difficult moments in class.

Teachers should acknowledge their own identities and model the ongoing process of self-discovery and reflection.

Showing commitment to listen and respond will show students that feedback is valued, and that this is a collaborative process!

Teachers who receive feedback and model humility/growth will provide an invaluable example for students.



Chapter 3

Identity Activities for your Class

In this chapter, you will find discussion and journaling prompts that can help students challenge their initial schema and develop healthy identities.

Activities for Guiding Identity Development

Providing a time where students can answer journal prompts or discuss questions can address core processes in identity development.

Prompts are divided into two different categories.

Category A

These are prompts that help students begin to observe how their racial identity shapes their daily life and to reflect on past experiences.

Students in any schema can benefit from this category of prompt. Students who haven't thought deeply about race will benefit the most from category A prompts, which prepare them to think about category B prompts in the future. Therefore, it may be best to introduce these prompts earlier in the course.

Category B

These prompts help students identify ways to apply their awareness of race and identity to take action.

This prompt category may be better suited towards the end of the course after students understand their identities and have learned more about privilege and racism. Students will be encouraged to bring big concepts learned in class into their daily lives and notice places to take action.

Prompts in both categories are shown in the next two slides.

Category A Prompts: Self Reflection in Encountering Identity/Racism.

Observe

Do you see race as a part of your identity? Why or why not?

Do you think other students see race as a part of their identity? How does this differ from the role racial identity takes in your own life?

What is the overall attitude about topics of race in your school? Do people discuss race?

Remember

What did your parents tell you about race when you were growing up?

When was the first time you remember thinking about your own race? What did you think and how has it changed?

What is a racial stereotype that you used to believe that you now realize is not accurate? How did you come to better understand this?

Feel

How do you feel about taking a class focused on race and ethnicity? What would you like to learn more about?

What emotions do you feel/expect when openly talking about race and why? How do these emotions affect you or others outside of class?

Category B Prompts: Commitment to Disrupting Racism and Privilege.

Key Moments	Find Role Models	What You See	Take Action
<p>What key moments in your life helped you understand yourself as a person of your ethnic/racial group?</p> <p>How has your understanding of your identity changed over time? Why do you think it's important for people to develop a greater understanding for their racial identity?</p>	<p>Learn about an ally or activist you know. (Help students pick someone from their own background); What was your chosen activist's journey of self-discovery? What can you learn from them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>White students often struggle to find examples of healthy White identity, so they should be encouraged to look closely for a White role model.</i>	<p>Where do you see effects of racism or privilege in your daily life? Think about your family, your school, or your neighborhood.</p> <p>How does racism affect communities of color and White communities?</p> <p>How are racial issues portrayed in the media? Which media do you choose to learn more about race?</p>	<p>After gaining the understanding racial topics/racial identity, do you think there were moments where you acted as a bystander? How do you think you should have acted?</p> <p>What will you do in the future to disrupt racism/privilege?</p> <p>How can people be allies to other groups in different situations?</p> <p>How can you support others who are interested in learning about their racial identity?</p>

Glossary

Schema: The racial worldview that determines how a person recognizes and understands events involving race. Schema are like different glasses or lenses that affect how an individual sees a situation and themselves.

Dissonance and Epiphanies: Experiences that challenge our racial worldview, and which can lead to growth in our racial identity development.

Antiracism: the "process of actively identifying and opposing racism" (Boston University Community Service Center). In a structurally inequitable society, failing to challenge racism allows it to persist.

Link to other [helpful terms to know!](#)



Congratulations, you have completed the toolkit!

You should now be able to...

- Understand the different perspectives students have when approaching topics of identity and inequality.
- Anticipate students' emotional reactions
- Connect with students at different stages of identity development
- Recognize and work towards dissolving barriers in student discussions

*Thank you for walking alongside students
as they develop their identities.*

Questions about this toolkit?

Reach out to Sarah Gillespie (cfl-lab@umn.edu)

or

Learn more about Project UNITE at

<https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/project-unite/>

Works Cited

- Janet E. Helms (2019). A race is a nice thing to have: A guide to being a White person or understanding the White persons in your life. (Hyperlink to bookstore.org)
- Tatum, B. (1992). Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard educational review*, 62(1), 1-25.
- Parham, T. A. (1989). Cycles of psychological nigrescence. *The counseling psychologist*, 17(2), 187-226.
- Neville, H. A., & Cross, W. E., Jr. (2017). Racial awakening: Epiphanies and encounters in Black racial identity. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 23(1), 102–108.
- Cross, W. E., Jr. (1991). *Shades of black: Diversity in African-American identity*. Temple University Press.