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15 Classroom Resources for Discussing Racism, Policing, and Protest

By Sarah Schwartz on June 2, 2020 7:17 PM

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By Sarah Schwartz and Madeline Will

As nationwide protests against police brutality continue, teachers in their virtual classrooms are **once again** searching for ways to help their students process the killings of black people in police custody in the United States.

Speaking with Education Week on Monday, teachers said that they and their colleagues have a responsibility to address these protests, which erupted when George Floyd, an unarmed black man, died after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for almost nine minutes.

"Teachers cannot be silent during this time," said Patrick Harris, a 6th and 7th grade English and social studies teacher at the Detroit Achievement Academy. "Teachers have to take a stand. Students are absorbing this, [and] they're going to ask themselves later on in life or even now, 'What was my teacher doing during this time?'"

Talking with students about these events, as they experience them, is top priority right now, said Abdul Wright, who teaches 8th grade language arts in North Minneapolis. "I have to find a way to make meaning of this in a way that creates a better society for them," he said.

Some teachers whose classes have already ended for the school year are reaching back out to students, particularly their black students, giving them space to talk about their emotions and ask questions.

Other teachers in schools still in session are seeking materials and resources to teach about this moment, such as lesson plans that engage students in conversations about racism, policing, and protest.

On Monday, Chicago Public Schools released "**Say Their Names**," a collection of lessons and materials designed "to help foster productive conversations about race and civil disobedience."

The toolkit links to other organizations' resources on supporting black students' mental and emotional health, discussing the Black Lives Matter movement, and talking about anti-black racism with non-black students. And it encourages teachers to educate themselves on racism in the U.S. before broaching these topics with students.

In California, the Los Angeles Unified School District posted a **collection of resources for teachers**, for talking about race with children and addressing trauma. The superintendent of education in the state, Tony Thurmond, said the California Department of Education **will also be releasing online materials and trainings**.

For teachers looking for more classroom resources—for themselves and their students—Education Week has compiled the following list:

Resources about George Floyd's death and the current protests:

- PBS NewsHour Extra **released a lesson plan** for grades 6-12 about the death of George Floyd. The plan includes a news video (that omits the footage of Floyd's death) and discussion questions about the protests, police brutality, and media literacy.
- The New York Times' Learning Network shared an article about the protests, along with discussion questions, and **opened comments for students to share their opinion**.

- The Anti-Defamation League has created a **short lesson** on Floyd's death and police killings of black people, which includes a reading, discussion questions, and action steps for students aged 11 and up.

Resources for talking about race, racism, and Black Lives Matter:

- Black Lives Matter at School, a national coalition, created an anti-racist **curriculum guide** with English/language arts, math, social studies, and arts materials. The guide has lessons for early childhood through high school students that align with the principles of the Black Lives Matter movement.
- **D.C. Area Educators For Social Justice**, an initiative of Teaching for Change, has a collection of lessons, videos, readings, books, and general teaching guides for students in early childhood through high school.
- The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture launched an online portal called **Talking About Race** that's designed to help steer conversations about racism, racial identity, and the way these forces shape every aspect of society.
- The Pulitzer Center partnered with the New York Times to turn the 1619 Project, a collection of essays and literary works observing the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery, **into a curriculum for teachers of all grade levels**. The curriculum includes reading guides, activities, and other resources about the history of race in America.
- Teaching Tolerance, a project by the Southern Poverty Law Center, periodically updates **its package on teaching about race, racism, and police violence**.
- Ian Lawrence, a teacher in Toronto, **shared on Twitter** a Google drive **filled with resources for teachers of all grade levels** on anti-racism and the Black Lives Matter movement. The resources include relevant articles, discussion questions, coloring pages, and Spanish-language materials.

In addition to addressing race and racism in lesson plans, experts and advocates have urged teachers to build a diverse classroom library with protagonists who look like their students.

The group Embrace Race compiled a list of **31 children's books** that address race, racism, and activism. And the nonprofit Teaching for Change put together **a list of social justice books for teens**.

Joe Truss, the principal of Visitacion Middle School in San Francisco Unified and a consultant on racial equity in schools, has **curated a list of books for teachers** who want to engage in anti-racist work.

Starting these classroom conversations can be uncomfortable and challenging. But for black teachers, talking about police brutality and anti-black racism can be particularly emotionally draining. The Practice Freedom Project, founded by Atlanta educator Tamara Pearson, is hosting **virtual meditations and reflections for black educators**.

Image: Hundreds of people gather in downtown Benton Harbor, Mich., on May 31 during a peaceful protest march held concerning police brutality and the death of black men, including George Floyd. —Don Campbell/The Herald-Palladium via AP

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