

## Modern Racism in Canada

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## Tips for Teaching Controversial Issues

The teaching of value-laden issues has generated much controversy. There is some basic consensus on the fundamental moral and ethical values in our society and that these values can be taught in a meaningful way.

It is assumed in Canadian Studies that there are fundamental values on which there is agreement. It is also assumed that there are many disagreements and that students need to learn to deal with controversy. The social studies and history curricula provide students with learning experiences that will help them identify some of the fundamental value positions of society and how these arose. This curriculum deals with controversy, even invites it. However, it does not suggest that any belief is as good as any other belief. Therefore, this curriculum makes no attempt to be objective in the sense of being value free.

Canadian Studies gives students opportunities to examine controversial issues. Debating these issues will provide students with the opportunity to apply concepts and higher order thinking skills in organizing, interpreting and communicating information meaningfully. In this process, students can begin to understand the role of values as the basis for making inferences, that values provide us with evaluative criteria, and that we depend upon the traditions of Canadian society to provide us with guidelines. These criteria include: human dignity, basic rights and responsibilities as defined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and respect of, and tolerance for, individual differences.

There are many methods to teach controversial issues in the classroom. As these issues touch personal beliefs and trigger emotional reactions, these methods are sometimes difficult to conduct in an orderly fashion.

The following ideas may assist teachers:

- Recognize the general legitimacy of controversy as a part of society, and that students must learn to discuss the issues and problems presented.
- Establish ordered ways of proceeding: discussions, debates, take a stand, continuum, mediation, etc. Create and agree on effective rules.
- Concentrate on evidence and valid information.
- Represent the opposing positions accurately and fairly.
- Make sure to clarify the issue, so that everyone understands where there is a disagreement and where there is agreement (to avoid simultaneous monologues).
- Identify core issues.
- Avoid the use of slogans.
- Talk about concrete issues before raising the discussion to a level of abstraction.
- Allow the students to question your position.
- Admit doubts, difficulties, and weaknesses in your position.
- Teach understanding by re-stating the perspective of others. Have participants paraphrase what they hear to gain this skill.
- Demonstrate respect for all opinions.
- Establish means of closure: examine consequences and consider alternatives.

## Modern Racism in Canada

### Ontario Ministry of Education Guidelines:

#### **HSP 3M - Grade 11 Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology**

- describe some of the social institutions of at least three diverse cultures (e.g., First Nations communities in Canada, Masai communities in Africa, Tamil communities in Asia) pg. 102
- demonstrate an understanding of discrimination and exclusion in social relationships, from the perspectives of anthropology, psychology, and sociology; pg.103
- analyze examples of social or institutional practices in earlier historical periods that formed the basis for social relationships involving discrimination or exclusion in contemporary society (e.g., apartheid, segregation, ghettoization, ostracism, gender discrimination) pg. 103
- identify and assess the major influences that contribute to an individual's personal and social development (e.g., heredity, environment, race, gender) pg. 101
- analyze the role of the mass media in influencing individual and group behaviour; pg. 101

### Main Idea

Racism, among other things, is a contest over meanings. Canada's cherished images as a tolerant society leads even progressive Canadians to the view that racism means only overt acts by some nasty individuals against other individuals. No Aboriginal person in Canada sees it that way. What we see, experience, and understand on a daily basis, is racism interwoven in the very fabric of the social systems in Canada.

### Learning Outcomes

*Students will:*

1. Gain sensitivity around the subject of Aboriginal racism in Canada.
2. Gain an understanding of racism in Canada as seen through the eyes of an Aboriginal Political Leader.
3. Gain an understanding of the obstacles many Aboriginal people need to overcome in Canada today.
4. Gain an understanding of the future of racism as far as Aboriginal people are concerned.

### Tips and Resources

- **Racism and Aboriginal People:** most Canadians are aware of the powerful fight that Aboriginal people in Canada are presently facing. The complex multiplicity of issues with which they are grappling are usually drowned in a web of stereotyping and overgeneralizations employed by the media and reinforced in everyday culture (Henry et al. 2000:300).

- Text: *The Human Way* (Colin M. Bain and Jill S. Colyer, 2001).
- **Video: *For Angela***, National Film Board of Canada, 1993, 21:29 minutes  
**Available for the Lakehead School Board – V011595**  
*For Angela* is a story about racism inspired by Rhonda Gordon and her daughter Angela. On a trip to a bus stop three boys racially harass Rhonda and Angela. Their experience could have been devastating but instead it was empowering. Rhonda has the courage to take a stand against ignorance and prejudice, for herself and for her daughter. Produced by the National Film Board of Canada, it comes with a print guide and is recommended especially for students of all ages.
- Images of Aboriginal People in Contemporary Media  
<http://www.schoolnet.ca/Aboriginal/issues/media-e.html>
- TVO Person two person show where Paula Todd interviews Dr. Cornila Wiemen, the first Aboriginal Psychiatrist. This video is not currently available through the *Lakehead School Board IMC*, but could possibly be available in the future. Contact TVO Sales Department [www.tvontario.org/sales](http://www.tvontario.org/sales).
- Public service announcements regarding racism by various artists  
<http://artistsagainstracism.com/tv.html>

What Teachers Do	What Students Do
<p><b>Before:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get two different colour pieces of paper for each student.</li> <li>• Rent <i>For Angela</i> from Lakehead Public Schools IMC.</li> <li>• Preview <i>For Angela</i> video and develop questions.</li> <li>• Get the movie or pictures from Pocohontas.</li> <li>• Copy Assignment - <i>Racism in the Media: Songs, Movies, and the News.</i></li> <li>• Book computer room for assignment.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>During:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aboriginal Myths: Provide students with two different pieces of paper of different colours. One piece represents “true” and one represents “false.” Read out Aboriginal myths and have them indicate whether they feel the statement is true or false by holding up the appropriate piece of paper. After each statement explain key points of each myth.</li> <li>2. Use quote by Celine Dion to illustrate that racism does exist in Canada and it is harmful. Discuss how it relates to Canada.                       What happens when people are racist? “For Angela” gives insight into the life of an Aboriginal girl in Winnipeg who experienced the devastating effects of racism...                       Have students complete questions while watching video.                       After viewing video take up questions.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reflect on Aboriginal myth and indicate whether they feel it is true or false by holding up the appropriate piece of paper. Take part in the discussion.</li> <li>2. Discuss how racism exists in Canada and the harm it causes.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Images of Aboriginal people in the Media: There are hundreds of different Aboriginal nations across Canada, yet the most common image of Aboriginal people is that of the nineteenth-century Sioux warrior. Refer to <i>Images of Aboriginal People in Contemporary Media</i>  <a href="http://www.schoolnet.ca/Aboriginal/issues/media-e.html">http://www.schoolnet.ca/Aboriginal/issues/media-e.html</a>                       Teacher to show a clip or picture from the Disney production of <i>Pocahontas</i> and discuss</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. View video and complete questions.</li> </ol>

What Teachers Do	What Students Do
<p>how Aboriginal people are portrayed in the media.</p> <p>Possible questions for discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are Aboriginal people portrayed in the media?</li> <li>• Why do you think that Aboriginal people would be concerned when non-Aboriginal people tell Aboriginal stories, or perform Aboriginal ceremonies? Do you think his concern is legitimate?</li> </ul>	
<p>4. <i>Racism in the Media: Songs, Movies, and the News.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will complete the attached assignment.</li> </ul>	<p>4. After viewing video, provide answers to class and take part in the class discussion.</p> <p>5. Response to questions regarding the depiction of Aboriginals in the media.</p> <p>6. Complete Assignment - <i>Racism in the Media: Songs, Movies and the News.</i></p>
<p><b>After:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mark assignments and reflect on what went well.</li> </ul>	

## Myths & Misconceptions: Aboriginal Peoples

Have the students indicate whether the following statements are true or false.

1. The injustices done to Aboriginal peoples are a thing of the past, and are not an issue of modern times. (F)
2. First Nations children were forcibly sent to residential schools where they were forbidden to speak their mother tongue, their cultures were condemned as barbaric and their spirituality as heathen. (T)
  - *The last residential school was closed in 1996.*
3. The conditions that Aboriginal peoples face in Canada are exaggerated. They aren't that bad. (F)
  - *Aboriginal people in Canada are making many positive strides, there is still a long way to go to eliminate disparities between Aboriginal peoples and the majority of Canadians.*
4. The life expectancy of Aboriginal peoples is on average 2 years less than Canadians overall. (F)
  - *It is seven years less.*
5. Aboriginal peoples have a long and proud history that includes rich cultural and spiritual traditions. (T)
  - *Many of these were altered or taken away upon the arrival of European settlers which lead to social, spiritual and physical abuse.*
6. Non-Aboriginal Canadians are becoming more aware of the injustices that have and are occurring to Aboriginal peoples as well as to the richness of Aboriginal cultures. (T)
  - *Non-Aboriginals can further support the healing process by continuing to learn about the experience of Aboriginal people in order to promote mutual understanding and respect.*

**Racism is a condition of ignorance. Minds are easy to mould, and, with a lack of information, it is often easy to be misled. The first step in eliminating racism is shedding light on false perceptions commonly held. While people have the freedom to think what they want, there are some misguided and destructive ideas that need the truth. You can believe in these myths if you want, but you can also believe that the Earth is flat, the sun revolves around the earth...**

**What happens when people are racist? “For Angela” gives insight into the life of an Aboriginal girl in Winnipeg who experienced the devastating effects of racism...**

## Quotes on Racism

**As a singer, I've had many opportunities to travel, and one thing I've learned is that, through my music, I can be accepted by people all over the world. I often wonder, why so many of us can't accept people who are different here, in our country? It's just not fair to be prejudiced against those whose race, religion or colour isn't the same as ours.**

**- Celine Dion**

**Racism is a refuge for the ignorant. It seeks to divide and to destroy. It is the enemy of freedom and deserves to be met head-on and stamped out.**

**- Pierre Berton**

**Racism is not something we are born with, but is learned. It is based in ignorance and insecurity and limits all humanity. By speaking out against racist behaviour, we can begin to erode these learned prejudices and embrace our diversity as is our true nature.**

**- Karen Kain**

## **Racism in the Media**

***“In many respects, Pocahontas is part of the second wave of genocide – the appropriation of history and culture. Pocahontas is stealing our history and selling our images back to the world on lunchboxes, towels and hamburgers. Millions of children are eating up those messages and having them stamped on their brains as they play with their Pocahontas dolls and sleep in their Pocahontas Pj’s.”***

***- Miles Morriseau, “Disney’s Disgrace” in Aboriginal Voices***

## Racism in the Media: Songs, Movies and the News

Choose **2** of the following 3 topics and complete all parts.

**Racism in the News – choose 2 articles or photographs**

“When covering Aboriginal issues, newspaper and TV journalists often reduce the complexity of Aboriginal histories into ‘problems’ – the ‘Indian land’ problem, the ‘unemployed Indian’ problem, the ‘Indian self-government’ problem. These problems, more often than not, have little reference to Aboriginal perspectives on the issue.” (Images of Aboriginal People in Contemporary Media, 2006)

1. Search newspapers and magazines and find two news stories or photographs which provide examples of Aboriginal peoples in the media. One article will focus on negative coverage and one will cover a positive news story.
2. **For each** news article or photograph, analyze and explain how this minority group is portrayed. Which assumptions and stereotypes are made?
3. How do you think Aboriginal people would feel about how they are depicted in this news article/photo?

**Racism in Songs – 2 songs**

1. Search through music with lyrics and locate **2 examples of songs** that exemplify racism or promote a stereotypical group. Possible examples include, but are not limited to, *Beds are Burning* by Midnight Oil, *Fools Like Us* by Blue Rodeo, *Stolen Land* by Bruce Cockburn, *Pocohantas* by Neil Young.

**For each song:**

2. Write/print out the lyrics.
3. What group is being depicted in this song?
4. How are lyrics positive or negative towards this depicted group? **Explain in detail.**
5. How do you think the minority group would feel about how they are depicted in this song?

**Conflict in the Movies – choose 1 movie**

There are hundreds of different Aboriginal nations across Canada, yet the most common image of Aboriginal people is that of the nineteenth-century Sioux warrior. Hollywood movies have helped to create and perpetuate native stereotypes. Aboriginal people are often portrayed as savage and ignorant. There are other groups that have been stereotyped and received negative publicity in movies (i.e., teens, African-Americans, people with mental illnesses).

1. Choose one movie that portrays Aboriginal people or another group that has been discriminated against in the past. Possible suggests include: *Pow-wow Highway*, *Little Big Man*, *Dances With Wolves*, *Thunder Heart*, *The Mission*, *Black*, *Clear Cut*, *Ten Things I Hate About You*, *Breakfast Club*, *Beautiful Mind...*
2. Briefly describe the overall plot and the people involved.
3. How is the minority group portrayed? Compare the role of the minority group to the other characters.
4. What stereotypes and inaccuracies concerning lives, personalities, and events are portrayed?
5. How do you think the minority group would feel about how they are depicted in this movie? How does this impact other members of society?

Criteria	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
*analyze the role of the mass media in influencing individual and group behaviour	Makes connections between the media and racism with limited effectiveness. Provides limited reflection on the role of media in influencing behaviour.	Makes connections between the media and racism with moderate effectiveness. Provides some reflection on the role of media in influencing behaviour.	Makes connections between the media and racism with considerable effectiveness. Provides considerable reflection on the role of media in influencing behaviour.	Makes connections between the media and racism with high degree of effectiveness. Provides a thorough reflection on the role of media in influencing behaviour.