

People's Theater: Institutional Racism workshop

Goals:

- To have participants understand institutional racism, which causes all other forms of racism, including interpersonal and internalized racism.
- To have participants explore the impact of racism on young people and their communities in the arenas of education, law enforcement/incarceration, and immigration policies.

Agenda:

1. Icebreaker: People's Theater Warm Up
2. Defining Racism
3. People's Theater Performances
4. Final Discussion and Evaluation

Materials:

- Butcher paper (with agenda & goals)
- Blank butcher paper
- Markers
- Handout with definitions of racism
- People's Theater small group instructions & scenarios

1. Icebreaker: People's Theater Warm Up (15 minutes)

Get all the participants to stand together in a circle and introduce the activity: "Today's activity is called People's Theater! We are going to present three short plays that will help us explore different types of racism. The difference from regular theater is that you all will be the actors, the directors, and the narrators. From this exercise, we hope you will demonstrate to each other how racism continues to hold back young people of color."

Warm-up

- **Warm-up (A) Face & Body-stretching:** Have everybody go around and say their name and stretch their face muscles by making a face. Have everyone go-around and imitate the first person. After everyone is introduced, swing the arms and shake out the body.
- **Warm-up (B) Body-moving:** Trainer tells a story and everyone performs what is being said. **Sample story:** One day I went walking through the forest. ~ It was very hot, and I began to sweat. ~ After two hours, I became hungry and needed to rest. ~ I found a big, shady tree to rest against. ~ When I looked up, I saw this big, shady tree was full of apples. ~ I stretched up to reach for an apple. ~ Then I tried jumping for an apple. ~

Finally, I got one! ~ Then, I took a bite of the apple. ~ How does it taste? Is it sweet or sour? ~ Is there a worm in it?

2. Defining Racism (15 minutes)

SAY: Before we get into small groups to prepare for your performances, we need to understand some definitions. *(Start by discussing the following questions and writing down participants' answers on butcher paper.)*

ASK: What is an institution? *(An institution is an organization or system of rules and laws governing the behavior of many individuals.)*

- What are some institutions that affect the lives of young people?
- What is the difference between an institution and a person?

Ask participants the following questions. Give participants the handout and review it as you go along.

- What does **Interpersonal Racism** mean? What are some examples of this type of racism?
 - Interpersonal Racism is when an individual shows negative ideas or actions towards another race or culture not their own. All types of people have these attitudes, but these attitudes are most obvious in the White dominated society we live in.
- What does **Internalized Racism** mean? What are some examples of this type of racism?
 - Internalized Racism is when, either knowing it or not, someone has negative ideas about themselves and their race or culture. These negative images come from racist ideas and images put out in society claiming that White people are superior. Basically, this is someone who feels that their race or culture is bad or at least not as good as the White culture and race.
- What do you think **Institutional Racism** means? What are some examples of this type of racism?
 - Institutional Racism is the laws and practices that institutions create in order to benefit White people at the expense of people of color. The outcomes of these policies and practices always have negative effects on people of color. Institutional Racism is different from interpersonal or internalized racism because it does not just affect one person; it affects large groups of people at once. The flipside of Institutional Racism is White Privilege, the fact that White people have social advantages in things like getting jobs, getting into college, and running government and businesses.

3. People's Theater: Preparation and Performances (30-40 minutes)

Instructions: Break participants into 3 teams by counting off by threes. Give each team one of the following scenarios and an instruction sheet. Explain that they will be reading their scenarios, answering a few questions, and then they will prepare to perform their scenario. Each team should pick a narrator who will read the scenario and actors who will perform the roles with as little speaking as possible. After 15-20 minutes, have each group perform and discuss the questions.

4. Final Discussion (10 minutes)

To wrap up the discussion, ask the following questions:

- How is **Institutional Racism** different from other types of racism?
- How does institutional racism cause other forms of racism?
- How does institutional racism affect young people in our schools and communities?
- How does institutional racism keep different communities of color in our cities divided from each other?
- Why do people in power, especially powerful White people, want to keep communities, like the Black, Latino, and Asian communities, divided?
- What can we do to fight racism?
 - On an internal level?
 - On an interpersonal level?
 - On an institutional level?

DIFFERENT FORMS OF RACISM

Interpersonal Racism

Interpersonal Racism is when an individual shows negative ideas or actions towards another race or culture, not their own. All types of people have these attitudes, but these attitudes are most obvious in the White-dominated society we live in.

Internalized Racism

Internalized Racism is when, either knowing it or not, someone has negative ideas about themselves and their race or culture. These negative images come from racist ideas and images put out in society claiming that White people are superior. Basically, this is someone who feels that their race or culture is bad or not as good as the White culture and race.

Institutional Racism

Institutional Racism is the laws and practices that institutions create in order to benefit White people at the expense of people of color. The outcomes of these policies and practices always have negative effects on people of color. Institutional Racism is different from interpersonal or internalized racism because it does not just affect one person; it affects large groups of people at once.

The flipside of Institutional Racism is **White Privilege**, the fact that White people have social advantages in things like getting jobs, getting into college, and running government and businesses.

People's Theater Instructions

Read through your team's scenario on the other side of this sheet. After you answer the following questions, pick a narrator and several people to act out the roles in the scenario. During your performance, the narrator will read the scenario out loud while the actors perform their roles. Try to use as much body language and as little speaking in your performance.

1. What different types of racism happened in this scenario?

2. What are some examples of **Institutional Racism** in this scenario?

3. What are some examples of **Interpersonal Racism** in this scenario?

4. What are some examples of **Internalized Racism** in this scenario?

YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES TO COMPLETE THE TASKS.

GOOD LUCK AND HAVE FUN!

SCENARIO #1: Is INS (Immigration) racist?

Nayeli is 15 years old. She arrived from Mexico with her mom and brother three months ago. They paid a man named Raul \$750 to help get them into the country, but once they got here he wanted them to work for him until they could pay off another \$500. In order to pay that \$500 as quickly as possible, Nayeli is working in a sweatshop, in downtown Los Angeles sewing dresses with her mom. Raul is the supervisor in the factory. She can't go to school right now because she has to work so that her family can pay off the \$500. She thinks it is okay that she can't go to school right now, because she can't speak English. How can someone who can't even speak the language be able to go to school? When she becomes a real "American," who can speak English, and be friends with Americans, then she'll go to school.

Right now she is making about \$3 per hour. She arrives at work at 6:00 in the morning, and works until 6:00 at night, with two short 10-minute breaks. The factory Nayeli works in has twenty workers, Nayeli and her mom, and 7 other Mexican women. The other 11 employees are Asian immigrants. No one in the factory has papers yet. That is why they work for under minimum wage. Raul, the Spanish-speaking supervisor, threatens to call the police and INS whenever the women complain about their working conditions or wages. He yells at them in English and tells them that if they can't understand him, too bad, because this is America! How do they think he could have made it in America without speaking English?

Nayeli has been involved in some meetings with the other Mexican women and a few of the Asian women at the factory to talk about starting a union to fight for their rights as workers. On one Monday morning Nayeli and her mother got to work right on time. She put her things away in her locker, and sat down to work. Everyone else was already at the table starting to work. At around 9:00 a.m., there was a big noise. The doors had been broken into, and all of a sudden, the INS and police officers ran in. An immigration officer asked everyone to show their papers, but none of the women have residency or citizenship yet. Then, the officers told everyone to put their hands behind their heads. They went up to all the women involved in the workers' meeting, including Nayeli and her mom, handcuffed them, and took them away.

Scenario #2: Is the High School Exit Exam racist?

Marcos and his family moved to Long Beach from the Philippines after he was born. Even though he grew up in the U.S., his family speaks Tagalog at home. He has always been bumped around to different English Language Development programs at school. He speaks English okay, but his teachers never really taught him proper grammar. His family has never been back to the Philippines and his main sense of community comes from a click of young Asians in his neighborhood. There is a lot of tension between the Latino, Asian, African American, and white youth in his neighborhood and school. Marcos tries to keep out of trouble and he knows he has to avoid the police, because the laws since September 11th make it easy for the government to deport Filipinos and other undocumented immigrants.

During his sophomore year, Marcos finds out he has to take the High School Exit Exam. He doesn't understand why he has to take it in tenth grade, when graduation doesn't happen until twelfth grade, but his teachers tell him it's really important. A few months after the test, when he has forgotten about it and is looking forward to the summer, Marcos gets his results back. He failed the English test. In English class, his teacher is discussing how too many students failed the English part of the Exit Exam and that they need memorize more grammar so they can pass it next year.

Joe, a white classmate, says, "If people didn't come here before they learned to speak English first, maybe we wouldn't have so many students flunking out. This is America! If I moved to Asia or Mexico, they would expect me to learn Asian or Mexican, so why can't you all learn English." Marcos gives Joe a hard look and waits for school to get out to tell him how he feels.

The teacher, who is also Filipino, agrees with Joe, "I think you do need to study harder and learn English better. If my parents could learn to speak proper English when they came from the Philippines, you can learn it, too."

After school, Marcos confronts Joe, "Hey man, you don't know how hard it is, trying to speak English right, when your teachers don't give a crap about you. You couldn't even learn another language, White Boy!"

"Whatever, dude," says Joe, "You're just lazy." The harsh words get the attention of school security. Unfortunately, Marcos is suspended for a week and falls behind even further in school. The next year, he fails the Exit Exam again and decides to drop out.

SCENARIO #3:

Are the police and school security racist?

Trey is a seventeen-year-old African American. When his dad died a few years ago, he and his sisters and brothers have had to raise each other. Ever since his older brother got locked up, Trey has been the oldest boy in the house. No one except the local neighborhood crew took him in. He attends Cortes High School, a school made up of mostly Black, Latino, Asian, and Samoan students.

Sometimes fights break out during lunch when students of different races call each other out of their name. Security will break up the fights and suspend students, but won't take the time to find out what causes the fights. They just assume that Black, Latino, and Samoan students are gang members based on the way they dress. This just adds to the racial tension at school.

During a lunchtime fight, Trey and José, a Mexican student, get pushed into each other. They mad-dog each other, but no punches are thrown. Within a few seconds police on campus grab a dozen students and taken them into the office. Trey and his Samoan friend, Lonnie, sit across the office from José. "Damn, man. I can't get suspended. My moms will put me on punishment for weeks," says Trey. "I bet the principal won't even suspend José. Mexicans always get away with stuff," says Trey.

"That ain't true man. They'll probably suspend all of us," replies Lonnie. "Don't you know their plan is to have all of us, Black, Mexican, and Samoan get locked up?"

The white assistant principal walks into the office. He takes all the Latino students into one room. All the Black students, and Lonnie, are taken to a separate room. But all of the students get suspended.

As the weeks go by, Trey falls behind in credits in school and ends up transferring to home school. One day, he's hanging out with some of his boys in the neighborhood. He doesn't know it, but one of his friends is dealing.

A police car rolls up on the group. An African American cop and a white cop arrest the group and put them in handcuffs. "We know you all have been dealing from this spot for a long time," says the white cop. "Yeah, it's punks like you that make me want to lock-up all the black gang bangers in this neighborhood," says the African American officer. Because of his prior record in school, Trey spends several weeks in County jail.