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Change Starts With Me: Talking About Race in the Elementary Classroom

By Madeleine Rogin

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Change Starts With Me: Talking About Race in the Elementary Classroom* by Madeleine Rogin. *Change Starts With Me* provides a framework for K–5 educators interested in engaging their students in conversations about race.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

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Chapter 1

Racial Stress

1. What is racial stress? How does it lead to the discrepancy between how frequently White parents discuss race with their children as opposed to parents of color?
2. Consider the differences between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2017).
In what ways does supporting students' growth in cultural competency necessitate a growth mindset approach?
3. List the five steps of Howard Stevenson's (2014) racial recasting strategy and explain in your own words how they directly apply to you as an educator.
4. Contemplate your own classroom experiences and describe one scenario in which you were successful in setting the tone for how you and your students will engage with conversations on race.

Chapter 2

Diverse Environments

1. Why is exposure to diverse and inclusive environments alone not enough to break through the smog (Tatum, 2017) of racism? What is one example of smog you have encountered in the classroom? How did you handle it?
2. Define “stereotype threat” in your own words and contemplate some of the tolls that stereotypes can take on your students. What are three ways you can reduce and interrupt stereotype threat within your classroom?
3. What are the four key elements of identity-safe practice (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013)? How do these elements translate into action within the classroom?
4. Consider the classroom activity “Clearing the Smog,” found on pages 39 through 41. Brainstorm another activity you could do with your students to help you begin the process of talking about race.

Chapter 3

Not Knowing What to Say About Race

1. What is White privilege? Define it in a way that you could teach to your students.
2. Consider the author's discussion of institutional racism on pages 48 through 50. How does White supremacy operate and inform the current structures in our society's hierarchy? What is one step you could take to address these structures in your classroom?
3. How has the meaning of Whiteness changed over time? Why is it so important to interrupt false narratives of Whiteness?
4. Contemplate the histories taught in your school and classroom. Where is an area you'd like to refine the way you address White supremacy and racism? How can you improve?

Chapter 4

Desire for a Post-Racial World

1. Define color blindness in your own words and discuss how a person's color-blind approach can devalue another person's identity. Why is it so important for students to acknowledge and understand the differences among their peers? What are ways you as an educator can create an environment that celebrates differences instead of erasing them?
2. Consider a teacher who is beginning their journey on understanding racial microaggressions. What is the first step you would suggest they take to combat microaggressions in their classroom?
3. The author writes that “emphasizing ‘That’s a pattern, not a rule’ is a helpful way to disrupt the tendency young students have of applying generalizations or rules to others” (page 64). What is an activity you could do in your classroom to help students learn about their innate tendencies to group similarities and differences?
4. Consider Zaretta Hammond's (2015a) approach to culturally responsive teaching. What are three ways you can make your own lessons culturally responsive and move beyond a multicultural approach for teaching?

Chapter 5

The Importance of Speaking Up

1. What are Louise Derman-Sparks and Patricia Ramsey’s (2011) seven learning themes for White students? How can some of the suggested activities simultaneously address White students’ understanding of racism and race while also protecting and uplifting students of color and ultimately foster positive identity development in all students?
2. Consider the six questions the author asks on page 87 for investigating your teaching practice. Choose one topic and answer each of these questions, focusing on direct application within your classroom.
3. What does the author mean by “scope and sequence” regarding instructing students on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., race, and racism? Create a personal goal connected to your school’s curriculum or social-emotional learning program that can inform your instruction on race and racism.
4. Look at Table 5.2: Challenging Comments and Productive Responses. Dwell on your experiences in the classroom and write responses to each of these challenging comments in your own words.

Chapter 6

Peaceful Changemakers

1. The author writes that “[teaching] students that social movements are about individuals, rather than about diverse groups working together...reinforces myths around individuality over community efforts” (page 94). Why is it so important to ground conversations of social movements in the stories of numerous people and not simply one or two notable figures?
2. Define the term “peaceful changemaker” in your own words and list the four changemaker questions outlined by the author. Why is it important to frame changemaker questions in the present tense?
3. What literature do you provide for your students? Choose one book you regularly read in your classroom and examine it using the suggestions from Social Justice Books (2017) on page 97. How does it hold up?
4. Consider your community and briefly outline an action project you could do with your students to practice being changemakers.

Chapter 7

A Deeper Conversation About Race

1. Why is a foundational knowledge about skin color necessary when engaging students in conversations about race? Consider discussions you have had or have heard in your own classroom about skin color and reflect on an activity you could do with your students to help them learn “that we all have a race and being White is not equated with ‘normal’” (page 112).
2. The author writes that “brown, as a color, is not often celebrated in poems and songs made readily available to early childhood educators” and is sometimes “actively disparaged” (page 113). How can addressing this bias inform your students’ understanding of skin tone and race? List two ways you can help your students overcome their bias against the color brown.
3. As you would explain to a student, describe the difference between skin tone and race. What are three resources you can use to exemplify this for them?
4. Contemplate the differences between the author’s previously discussed experiences teaching about Dr. King and her experiences discussed on pages 118 through 120, after

she adopted antiracist principles in the classroom. What are two takeaways from her story you can directly apply into your own teaching practices?

Chapter 8

Parents and Caregivers Partner in the Conversation

1. On page 123, the author writes that “too often, diversity and inclusion initiatives stop at the invitation level.” What “institutional soul searching” (Adams, 2014) must occur in order for schools to ensure all children and their families are welcome?
2. What are Allyson Criner Brown’s (2019) three strategies for effective family engagement?
3. Choose one way you engage your students’ families within your classroom and answer each of the five assessment questions from page 125 based on Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp’s (2002) strategies.
4. Consider your school and larger community. Have you ever utilized projects like the family book bag in figure 8.1 (pages 128–129) or the peaceful changemaker invitation in figure 8.2 (pages 129–130)? If so, what was your experience? If not, what is the first step you could take to initiate a similar project?

Chapter 9

Common Roadblocks and a Path Through Them

1. What is “the pit” (Nottingham, 2017), and why is discomfort so important to engage with even in the midst of antiracist training in the classroom?
2. The author writes that “students don’t always do their best learning when the learning is too conceptual...young students need the opportunity to try things out, to actively engage with their learning” (page 136). What is one opportunity for active learning you could institute in your own classroom?
3. Imagine that a parent or guardian of one of your students expresses concern about teaching about race in the classroom. What are three steps you could take to address this parent or guardian’s worries and help them trust the process?
4. Why is it important to allow yourself to say, “I don’t know?” Look into some of the resources provided throughout this book and choose three to examine more closely. How can confronting your own personal roadblocks through additional learning and conversation help you better engage your students?