

Lesson 7

ANTIRACISM

“... the true opposite of racist is not not racist, it is antiracist. That historically, and even in our moment, typically people who self-identify as not racist, they do so largely after they just did or said something that was racist. It’s also the case that the term not racist is a term that’s widely used without a definition. So I actually have yet to see somebody actually define clearly what it means to be not racist. And then thirdly, the reason why antiracist is the true opposite of racist is because most people understand, for instance, that a racist idea is a notion that suggests racial hierarchy, that a particular racial group is superior to another racial group, or inferior. What’s the opposite of hierarchy? Equality. There’s a true opposite. And antiracist ideas suggest racial equality, that no racial group is superior or inferior.”

“If a racist policy is yielding racial inequity between groups, what’s the opposite of that? A policy that yields racial equity. It’s a clear opposite. And so I’ve tried to show that we should be supporting antiracist policies that lead to racial equity. We should be expressing ideas, anti racist ideas about racial equality, and ultimately we should be striving to be antiracist, which is to say we should be actively seeking to confront the structure of racism, while recognizing that if we do nothing in the face of the status quo of racial inequity, then that racial inequity and injustice will persist. And those who are seeking to conserve that status quo want the rest of us to do nothing. That’s literally the goal of racist ideas, to convince us that there is no problem other than let’s say, Black people. And so that’s why being antiracist is an action. It’s an active term, it’s an active practice, while being racist could be active or even passive. You just do nothing and allow racism to persist. “

Ibram X Kendi ([Mother Jones](#) July 23, 2025)

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SUMMARY

Within the Quaker faith lies the potential for racial equality, a goal yet to be fully realized within the Society of Friends. Nevertheless, by attempting to directly address racism within our own meetings we actively learn how to combat it in society at large. When seeking guidance on teaching our children, we can turn to resources created by individuals of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. We firmly hold that this is one of the foremost challenges facing America today and believe that any Quaker education must address this transformation.

“Oh! If Friends only knew the anguish this one common expression of theirs, *“This bench is for the black people”* – *“This bench is for the People of Color,”* inflicts on the sensitive and tender amongst us; if they knew how it shuts up the springs of life, and causes us to turn away from their Meetings, weary and unrefreshed, they would not, they could not use it so often.”

Sarah Mapps Douglas, Black Fire

Despite their commitment to principles of equality, justice, and peace, Quakers, like many religious communities, have not been immune to issues related to racism, misogyny or homophobia. Some Quaker meetings in the United States supported the Underground Railroad, helping enslaved individuals escape to freedom. Historically, a small proportion of Quakers played important roles in the abolitionist movement and the fight against slavery. But in some instances, even today, Quakers have refused or resisted People of Color or LGBTQ+ people becoming members of their society and ostracized those who did. Quakers now prominently recognize such members as Benjamin Lay, John Woolman, Isaac Hopper, and Lucretia Mott as early advocates for racial equality, but during their lifetimes they were obstructed and some even expelled from the Society of Friends.

Many Quaker organizations and individuals have actively engaged in antiracist work and have sought to address issues related to racism within their communities. They have done so by engaging in dialogues, educating themselves and others about racism, and taking concrete actions to promote racial justice and equity. But others still grapple with addressing racial and other forms of inequality and prejudice within their ranks and refuse to recognize or discuss its presence. White Fragility by Robin D’Angelo is an insightful explanation of this situation. The POC Introduction to Quakerism aims to address the current dominance of a Eurocentric cultural perspective within the practice of Quakerism in New York.

In this lesson we are guided by ideas in How to Raise a Young Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi and Raising Antiracist Children: a Practical Parenting Guide by Britt Hawthorne. Racist ideas are strikingly simple: dark skin is bad, light skin is good. Our attempt to

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shield our supposedly innocent children from racism may be more about protecting ourselves and our discomfort and insecurities around our ability to explain it all the right way. But there is no such thing as neutral; either we are actively trying to be antiracists or we are upholding the status quo which supports racism.

Learning to be an antiracist can seem quite daunting to those of us overworked parents struggling with careers, child-care, pervasive social media and a racist society, but just by the gentle commitment to:

- Critical thinking
- Compassion
- Community
- Initiating and engaging our children in conversations about race, racism and antiracism

in our everyday life we can go a long way towards raising a healthy next generation. Establish healthy relationships, sound conversational structures and honest interpersonal skills, develop warm personal relationships with your children. Encourage authenticity, curiosity, collaboration, accountability, becoming, empowerment and candor in your home. Prepare your children with the social skills such as those this curriculum has been promoting so that they can confront bias and racism when they encounter it, and teach them joy and trust in our multicultural, multiethnic society as a place where we can all appreciate each other. Explore your own standards for beauty, and cultivate your own friendships with people of different races, ethnicities, sexual and gender orientations.

When your children ask you difficult questions, here are some possible suggestions:

1. We will talk about this on Friday when I have more information.
2. What three questions do you have for me? I'll research them.
3. Can you tell me what you already know about this?

"The loveliest trick of the Devil is to persuade you he doesn't exist." Whiteness is not true, but it exists as a force and foundation of societies. White Supremacy shapes our world, we must not pretend it doesn't exist.

"The function, the very serious function of racism, is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being."

Toni Morrison

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"To understand domination, we need a theory that takes into account the dynamics of the white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy. We need a theory that acknowledges that these systems of power are linked and that one cannot be eradicated without the eradication of the others."

bell hooks

"White supremacy is a deep sickness within the social body, not just here in the United States but globally in colonialism. It runs so deep and is so interwoven in the interstitial tissues that healing the body as it exists may not be enough. That may simply create, as George Fox proposed, a more "mild and gentle" White supremacy. In order to cure it, we need deeper transmutation. Just as the revolutionary faith that we Quakers believe we inhabit may never have existed, the new social body and formation also may not have existed before. That's not to say that the faith at Quakers' beginning in the seventeenth century does not have a lot to teach us, but perhaps we are being asked to transform into a creation that has not yet existed. Just healing the body, which has been so deformed by White supremacy, is not enough. ..."

Lucy Duncan, *Benjamin Lay's Medicine*, by Lucy Duncan
and Rob Peagler, Friends Journal, August 1, 2023

"... Americans believe in the reality of "race" as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism – the need to ascribe bone – deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them – inevitably follows from this inalterable condition. In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage or the Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be case as beyond the handiwork of men."

"But race is the child of racism, not the father. And the process of naming "the People" has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy. Difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the preeminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible – this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully to believe they are white."

Ta-Nehisi Coates Between the World and Me

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LESSON: BEING AN ANTIRACIST

Think of skin colors like the covers of books – they don't tell you the story. The color of our skin and other physical features don't say anything about who we are on the inside or what we are capable of.

Our skin comes in different colors because of something called "melanin." Melanin is like a special paint that our bodies use to color our skin. It's made by cells in the outer layer of our skin called "melanocytes."

But here's the important part: Our skin color isn't what makes us unique. Things like our personalities, our interests, and our talents are much more important than the color of our skin, our height or hair texture.

It's really not fair to judge someone based on superficial physical features like their skin color. People of all types can do amazing things and make the world a better place. In Queens, where we live, there are people with all sorts of different skin colors, shapes, and sizes, and they all have something important to offer to our community. We celebrate and respect our differences because that's what makes our world interesting and beautiful; the Divine Spark in everyone.

But even today there are still many unfair laws and practices in place that treat people of color differently. It means that people of color do not get the same privileges or benefits as people of European descent.

Many people of all colors have worked hard to change these unfair laws and attitudes. Many heroes today are fighting for equal rights for all people, and they have made important changes. But racism still exists. People of all kinds still face unfair treatment or discrimination, and it's important for everyone to see clearly when this is happening and work together to make sure that everyone is treated equally and with respect.

QUERY: What is our definition of racism? Here are some examples of what other people have said:

- James Baldwin: The American novelist and essayist observed, "The root function of racism is to control the definition of reality and to create the illusion of superiority."
- Spike Lee: "Racism is when you have laws set up, systematically put in a way to keep people from advancing, to stop the advancement of a people."
- United Nations: The United Nations defines racism as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."

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- American Psychological Association (APA): The APA defines racism as "a system of advantage based on race. It occurs at both an individual and institutional level and can be both intentional and unintentional."
- Angela Davis: The activist Angela Davis has said "Racism is integrally linked to capitalism. And I think it's a mistake to assume we can eradicate racism by leaving capitalism in place. Capital doesn't just appear from nowhere. The original capital was provided by the labor of slaves. The industrial revolution which pivoted around the production of capital was enabled by slave labor in the U.S. So I am convinced that the ultimate eradication of racism is going to require us to move toward a more socialist organization of our economics and of our other institutions."

Here is the Merriam Webster Dictionary Definition of Racism:

1: a belief that **race** is a fundamental **determinant** of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race

also : behavior or attitudes that reflect and foster this belief : racial discrimination or **prejudice**

The kind of trenchant *racism* to which black people have persistently been subjected can never be defeated by making its victims more respectable. The essence of American *racism* is disrespect.

—Imani Perry

2a: the **systemic** oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another

specifically : **white supremacy sense 2**

One of the many ruses *racism* achieves is the virtual erasure of historical contributions by people of color.

—Angela Y. Davis

Discriminatory housing practices, redlining neighborhoods, underfunded education, lack of access to healthcare, racial profiling, police brutality and mass incarceration are just a few examples of cage wires that all together contribute to **structural racism**.

—Sylvia Luetmer

"People of color, low-income people, and Indigenous peoples have been made especially vulnerable through decades of **environmental racism**: policies that intentionally concentrate pollution and toxic hazards in our communities."

—Michele Roberts

see also systemic racism

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2b: a political or social system founded on racism and designed to execute its principles

In 1913 the Natives Land Act reserved 90% of the country for whites, who then made up 21% of the population. Under the formalised *racism* of apartheid 3.5m blacks were forcibly moved to isolated reservations called "homelands."

—*The Economist*

QUERY: Where have we seen racism? Racism can be seen in:

- Schools, churches, hospitals, jobs, banks, prisons, courts and police departments
- Laws and rules we all follow
- Individuals
- Social media, movies, books and music

Racism can be obvious, but it can also be hidden, not even noticed by the people doing it.

QUERY: What can white people do to be antiracist? What can people of color do to be antiracist?

To be an antiracist is to trust in humanity by celebrating our own and others cultural, ethnic, gender and sexual identities. We must be able to see what is wonderful and unique about each of us, and yet also what is universally true for all of us. We must also be prepared to see bias when we are confronted with it, to recognize where the rules are unfair and to work to change them.

To be racist is to promote distrust in others based on their skin color, ethnic or cultural origin, or because they are different in some other way, and to pretend that racism doesn't exist in our everyday lives. If we are blind to racism it continues.

ACTIVITY: BEANS

For younger children make a sensory bin of all the following kinds of beans: Black Beans, Azuki Beans, Chick Peas, Navy Beans, Red Lentils, Green Split Peas, Baby Lima Beans. Have them separate them by color and you can make tubes of skin color toned paper and tape them to the inside of the bin. Let them put the right colored beans down the same colored tubes. Talk about how these beans are like skin colors. Who has skin colors like the beans? What are our skin colors? Point out that all the beans have different characteristics but they all taste good and are healthy.

For older children, take heavy duty paper plates and have them draw their faces on them in pencil. Then they can glue the beans with the right colors and make self-portraits.

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FIELD TRIPS IN QUEENS:

The Weeksville Heritage Center is a historic site on Buffalo Avenue between St. Marks Avenue and Bergen Street in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York City. It is dedicated to the preservation of Weeksville, one of America's first free black communities during the 19th century. 158 Buffalo Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11213, (718) 756-5250. QUERY: How did Weeksville attempt to address racial inequity?

Pow Wow at the Queens County Farm: Thunderbird American Indian Dancers – local NYC Native American dance group which puts on pow wows and teaches Native American Dance workshops, etc. thunderbirdameicanindiandancers.wordpress.com. QUERY: How do Pow Wows encourage an appreciation of Native American culture?

Local Parades. Local parades are a fun way to be among people of different ethnic groups. QUERY: What did we learn to admire about other ethnic groups by being among them?

FIELD TRIPS IN NYC: There are many opportunities to learn about other cultures in New York City. It's helpful to develop specific queries for a trip to engage children's curiosity and give them perspective. Some of possible field trips are:

The African Burial Ground National Monument: Learn about African American history and the struggles for freedom and equality. Discuss the importance of tolerance and social justice.

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, one of The New York Public Library's renowned research libraries, is a world-leading cultural institution devoted to the research, preservation, and exhibition of materials focused on African American, African Diaspora, and African experiences. 515 Malcolm X Boulevard (135th St and Malcolm X Blvd), New York, NY 10037, 917-275-6975 - NYPL.org/locations/Schomburg

The Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center is a memorial to Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz located at 3940 Broadway and West 165th Street in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan, New York City. The building which once housed the Audubon Ballroom, where Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965. The center is home to documents related to Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz.[3] The center is decorated with a 63-foot (19-meter) mural depicting the life of Malcolm X and a life-size bronze statue of the human rights activist.[4] It includes six interactive kiosks that provide information about the lives of Malcolm X and Betty Shabazz.[5] The kiosks were developed by Columbia University's Digital Knowledge Ventures and Professor Manning Marable of the university's African American Studies department.[2][5]

Museum of Chinese History, 215 Centre Street, New York, NY 10013, (b/w Howard & Grand St; one block north of Canal St)

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The Hispanic Society of America operates a museum and reference library for the study of the arts and cultures of Spain and Portugal and their former colonies in Latin America, the Spanish East Indies, and Portuguese India at 613 West 155th Street, (Broadway between 155th and 156th Streets), New York, NY 10032

Japan Society, 333 East 47th Street, New York, NY 10017

The Korea Society, 350 Madison Avenue, 24th Floor, NYC

Institute of Arab and Islamic Art, 22 Christopher St, New York, NY 10014

Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

Edmond J. Safra Plaza

36 Battery Place

New York, NY 10280

National Museum of the American Indian located in the historic Alexander Hamilton US Custom House at One Bowling Green in lower Manhattan. The museum entrance is on the south side of Bowling Green, adjacent to the northeast corner of Battery Park.

Also the **Metropolitan Museum and American Museum of Natural History** have many topically appropriate cultural exhibits.

Local Libraries and performance venues quite often have exhibits and performances that celebrate ethnic diversity.

READING AND RESOURCES

For Adults:

Center for the Study of White American Culture cswac.org. Workshops and other resources increasing public understanding about the impacts of white American culture, Fostering the development of an anti-racist multiracial society and nurturing the development of new generations of anti-racist activists.

How to Raise an Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi

Raising AntiRacist Children: A Practical Parenting Guide by Britt Hawthorne

White Fragility by Robin D'Angelo

We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice by Mariame Kaba

My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies, by Resmaa Menakem

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The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together, by Heather McGhee

Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights, edited by H.D. Weaver, Jr., P. Kriese, and S.W. Angell

Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship, by D. MacDaniel and V. Julye

Teaching Kindness Isn't Enough See LearningforJustice.org

7 Things to do When Your Kid Point Out Someone's Differences See Changingperspectivesnow.org

Raising Race Conscious Children (Website)

Baby books

A is for Activist

Feminist Baby

Homemade Love

Bowwow Powwow

What the Road Said

Drawn Together

Watercress

The Bench

Picture Books (Ages 4-8):

The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson

Let's Talk About Race by Julius Lester

The Undefeated by Kwame Alexander

Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Peña

Freedom on the Menu by Carole Boston Weatherford – Make a large menu afterwards with items you think can keep freedom on the menu

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Middle Grade Books (Ages 9-12):

Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes
The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor
One Crazy Summer by Rita Williams-Garcia
We Are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom
The Proudest Blue by Ibtihaj Muhammad
Fry Bread by Kevin Noble Maillard
Festival of Colors by Surishtha Sehgal
The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson
Malcolm Lives! by Ibram X Kendi

Young Adult Books (Ages 13 and Up):

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas
Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi
Dear Martin by Nic Stone
Piecing Me Together by Renee Watson
This Book is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action and Do the Work by Tiffany Jewell