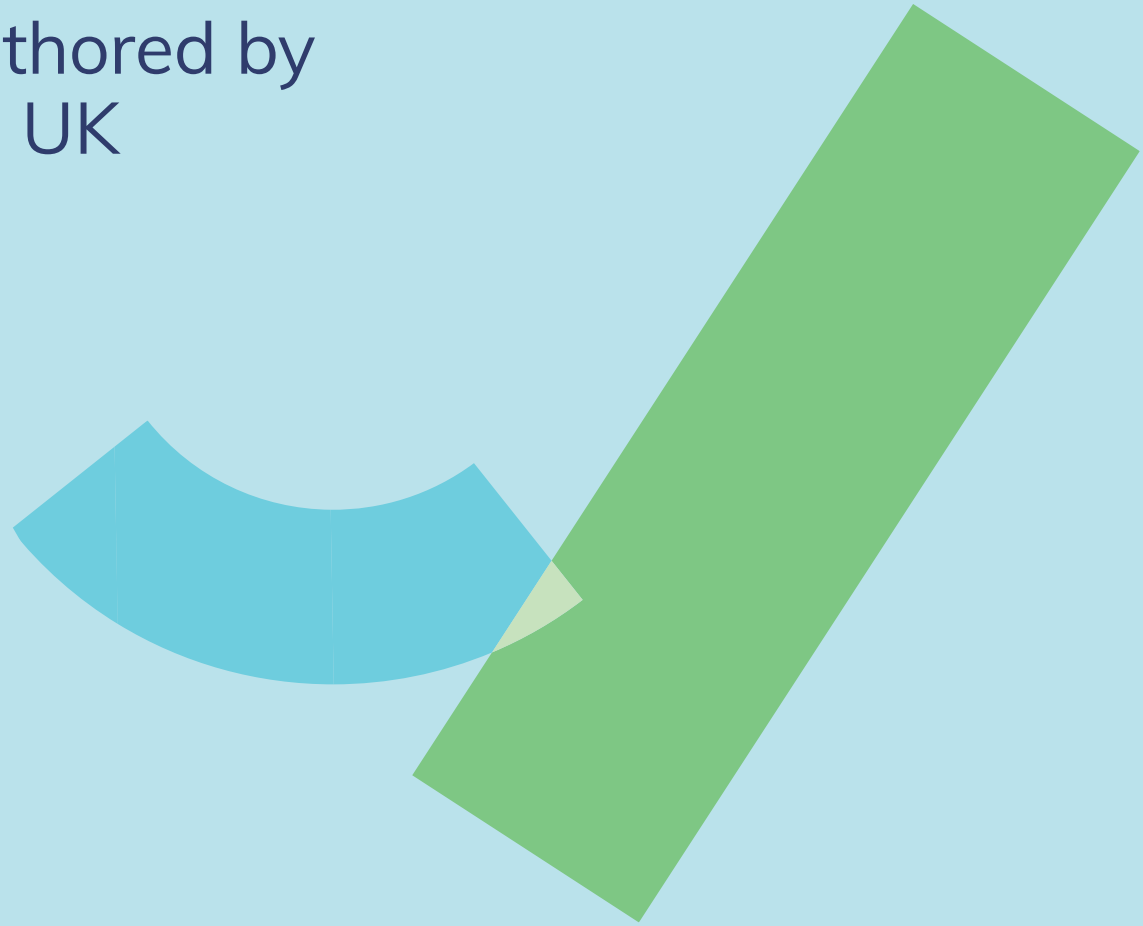
Anti racism
resource series

Teaching curriculum topics linked to racism and handling racist world events

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Introduction

The UK Trauma Council defines trauma as 'a distressing event or events that are so extreme or intense that they overwhelm a person's ability to cope, resulting in lasting negative impact.'

When this event or events are related to race, it is sometimes known as 'racial trauma'.

Experiencing overt racism – for example being a victim of a racially-motivated hate crime - could cause a trauma response in young people. However, racism can have a traumatic impact even when it isn't something that directly happens to you.

In this resource, we have created a lesson planning guide for teaching a curriculum topic that is linked to race and racism, or for when a potentially traumatic racist incident occurs in the wider world.

The UK Trauma Council have rounded up some of the most **recent research** into racism and trauma.



Why is it important to plan for this?

Racist and race-related events may occur in the wider world that may cause traumatic responses in young people; for example, the 2020 murder of George Floyd in the United States.

There may also be topics that are part of the curriculum – for example, learning about slavery or the Holocaust in history lessons – that may be painful for young people to learn about.

Teachers often have to teach these topics due to the constraints of the curriculum, but it's important to recognise that these things can be difficult for young people from racially minoritised groups for a number of reasons:

- the event may bring back painful memories of experiences from the young person's own life
- they may have family members or friends who have been affected or have experienced something similar
- they may be affected by the realisation of how their ethnic group has been oppressed over time
- this may be the only time that they see themselves reflected in the curriculum, meaning that the only stories they are taught about their culture are negative and reductive.

Identifying the signs

There can be a wide range of responses to trauma, racial or otherwise. They may include:

- physical symptoms such as sleep problems and nightmares, headaches and stomach pains
- becoming preoccupied with thoughts and memories of the event and being unable to concentrate
- issues with emotional regulation, including anger, irritability or reporting feeling emotionally 'numb'
- heightened anxiety or persistent low mood
- difficulties in sustaining relationships with peers or adults.

Lesson planning

There are actions that teachers can take to prevent or lessen the traumatic impact of some curriculum topics. Some actions may require a review of the curriculum as whole, but some can be taken at an individual lesson planning level.

Teaching a curriculum topic that is linked to race and racism

Before the lesson

Before teaching lesson content that could be traumatic, you may want to consider the following questions.

- Why am I choosing to teach this particular material, topic or text? Where does this content fit in the whole curriculum? Why is it important for students to learn about this?
- Consider whether the same learning outcomes can be achieved using different materials. What might be lost if this content is not included? Is there alternative content that might present a more balanced or less traumatising means of accessing the same learning? Is the content really well matched to the age and developmental stage of the students? Consider your students' emotional and social capabilities as well as their intellectual abilities.
- What aspects of the content could be painful or difficult for students to hear about? Don't use resources that include pictures that show harrowing events or mistreatment of people. Consider carefully before choosing texts that include racist language or activities that involve role play.
- What else can I do to be fully prepared to teach about this? Choose a colleague to act as a critical friend with whom you can discuss lesson ideas. Engage with expert organisations to find trusted resources, e.g. Facing History; The Holocaust Educational Trust; Black Cultural Archives.
- How can I plan to include the voices and perspectives of racially minoritised people, whether through written accounts, video or invited speakers?
- What else can I do to prepare my students for this topic? It can be appropriate to notify parents in advance, explaining why this content is essential and how you will be delivering it with sensitivity. Before beginning the topic, explain to students why it might make them feel upset or angry and ask the class to contribute to a contract or set of guidelines that creates a safe space for discussion.

During the lesson

- Your class contract or guidelines should include how students can signal that they need time out from the lesson.
- Take care not to communicate an expectation that racially minoritised students should have more to contribute to the discussion. Make it clear that there are many different ways to participate, including just listening.
- Look out for signs that a student is becoming upset or uncomfortable. End or defer discussion if you need to.
- If you choose to end a discussion because some students are upset or angry, be clear about when you will be able to resume.
- Plan the lesson time so that you don't have to end the lesson abruptly.

After the lesson

- Give racially minoritised students an opportunity to debrief after covering potentially traumatic topics on the curriculum. This could be a weekly session with external facilitators or it could be a space held by support staff.
- Make time to return to the topic in later lessons. Ask students, "what have you thought about this since we last discussed it?"
- Use your support networks and reflective spaces to explore how you feel about this aspect of your work.
- Share your learning with colleagues and review lesson content for subsequent teaching.
- Make sure that lesson content in the curriculum as a whole includes a wide range of representations of Black and racially minoritised people, not just as victims of racism.

> Stop reading books that use racist language e.g Of Mice and Men and allowing students to read it [aloud].
>
> **Student**[1]

[1]All quotes in this resource are from the Anna Freud Centre's survey on racism and mental health. A total of 796 respondents aged 13 to 20 completed the survey between 23rd September and 11th October 2021.

When a potentially traumatic racist incident occurs in the wider world

Much of the same advice applies to lessons where students talk about racist incidents in the wider world. These could be lessons that are part of a planned PSHE or Citizenship curriculum, or lessons where the teacher responds to a request from students.

Some form of class contracting is essential to create a safe space for these discussions. The teacher's role can become one of facilitator rather than expert, actively listening and reflecting back what students tell them.

Anti-racism curriculum working group

Before planning individual lessons using this guidance, you may want to set up an anti-racism curriculum working group.

This group should:

- include staff representatives from the full range of subject areas
- place anti-racism at the heart of the education you are providing
- plan pupil and parent voice activities and act on the feedback received
- share their work with the whole school community, through assemblies, governors' meetings and staff meetings
- if possible employ an anti-racism expert from outside your school to help you to review your curriculum.

St Bonaventure's school in East London have created a working group to review the diversity of their curriculum. Read their case study.



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