



I AM FROM HERE
DISCUSSION GUIDE

PREPARED BY
**VERMONT-NEA
RACIAL JUSTICE
TASK FORCE**



“[I Am From Here](#),” a 30-minute instructional film directed and produced by Bess O’Brien, serves as one component of Vermont-NEA’s virtual toolkit, *Advancing Racial Equity in Vermont’s Public Schools*. It is important that anyone working with Vermont students understand the experiences of Vermonters of color as they navigate through the public education system.

This film was commissioned by Vermont-NEA for use in school systems across the state. It may be shown at staff meetings, union meetings, in-service days, community gatherings, etc. Many difficult but necessary conversations will stem from viewing this film.

Educators may use the film and discussion as a starting point to gain an awareness of where their school community is situated on a spectrum of racial equity. From there, educators may then educate themselves and others using resources and training opportunities outlined in the toolkit, and finally, a long-range plan of action may be developed.

This discussion guide is merely a starting point. The questions are suggestions and we expect that you will tailor discussions to suit your needs. We encourage the school community to approach this work with an understanding that it is difficult, but necessary, if we truly want to provide every student with a safe and nurturing learning environment. We recommend that trained facilitators be brought in for more in-depth conversations as the work moves forward.

Divide into small groups and designate a discussion leader (to pose the questions) and a scribe (to document ideas for next steps). Names need not be attributed to the comments. These notes can be used for a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis in your district. Choose one or two questions from each section, as time allows.

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GROUND RULES

1. Listen actively -- respect others when they are talking.
2. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
3. Refrain from personal attacks -- focus on ideas.
4. Participate to the fullest of your ability.
5. Share your own story and experience, not someone else's.
6. The goal is not to agree -- it is to gain a deeper understanding.
7. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses -- they can be as disrespectful as words.

To stay engaged is a refusal to let your heart and mind “check out” of the conversation while leaving your body in place. It is a personal commitment each person makes, regardless of the engagement of others. It means remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.



FOUR + ONE AGREEMENTS FOR COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

1. Stay engaged

2. Speak your truth (knowing it's only part of the truth).

To speak your truth, you must be willing to take risks and be honest about your thoughts, feelings and opinions, and not just saying what you perceive others want to hear. Unless we can bring our authentic selves to the table the dialogue will remain limited. Honor and respect each other's' truth as their own lived experience.

3. Experience discomfort

Talking about race, racism, and inequity is often uncomfortable. Identifying and unpacking our own identity groups and the different levels of privilege associated with them is even more uncomfortable. To engage in conversations about race and inequity in honest, meaningful ways, we ask participants to agree to experience some discomfort.

4. Expect and accept non-closure

There is no "quick fix," to-do list, or solution to the complex problems posed by racism and inequity. We are not going to solve racism within our organization, or even within our group today. Therefore, we must commit to an ongoing dialogue and a journey of growth together.



FOUR + ONE AGREEMENTS FOR COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

7. If you wonder, ask

Ask the hard questions. Engaging in conversations about race, racism, and inequity is difficult, and requires all of us to keep learning as we go. Asking questions when we're unsure or need clarification is essential.

8. Disagree with the idea, not the person

It's okay, and often productive, to disagree with another person's perspective. In order to keep conversations going rather than shut them down, it is important that we frame our disagreements relative to what a person said or did, rather than the "kind of person" they are.

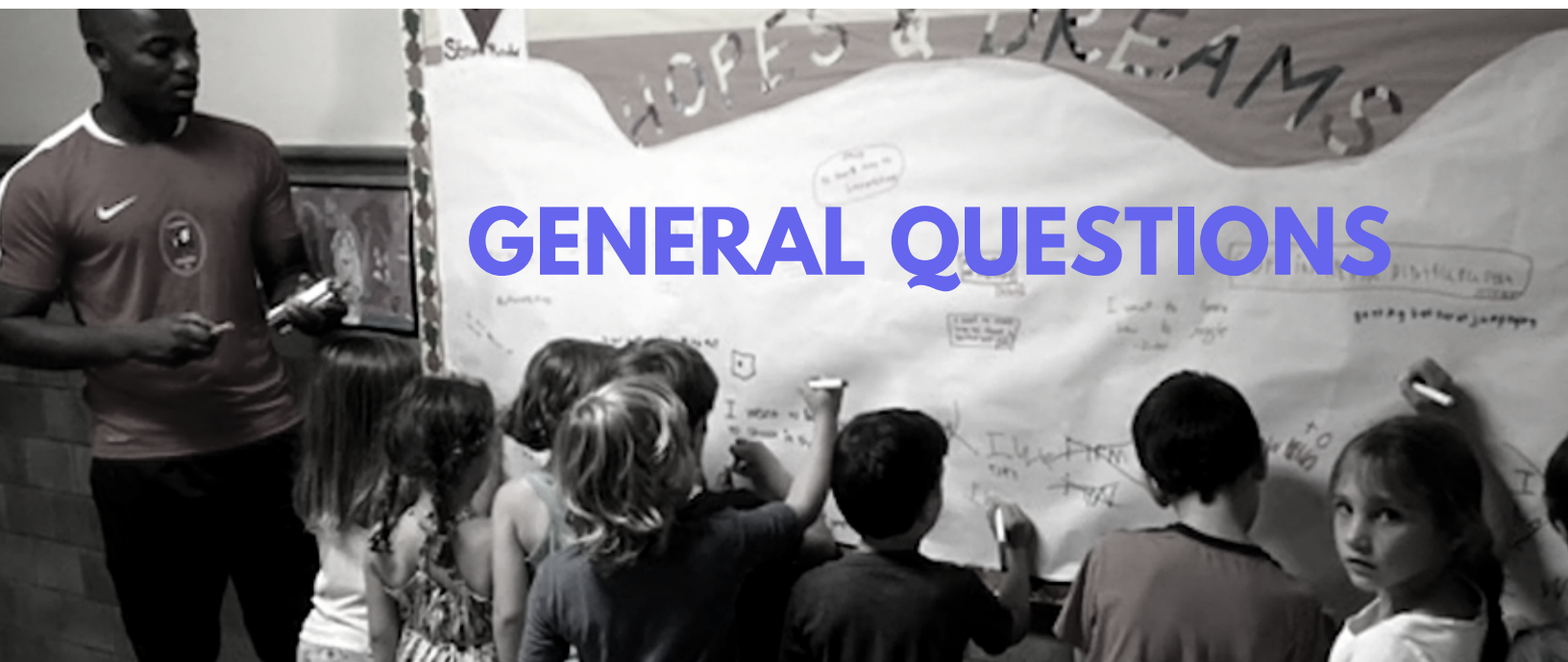
9. Share the air

Be mindful about whose voices are present in the conversation and whose aren't. Make space for those who have less dominant or more introverted personalities. Recognize the role of privilege in any conversation, whose voices and perspectives are already "amplified," and when it's time to pass the (proverbial or literal) microphone.

10. Confidentiality

To support each other in our risk-taking we agree to respect the privacy of each individual's identity and life experiences. We can share our own learning, but not the names and stories of others.

(Adapted from: Singleton, G. E., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.)



GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. What surprised you about the video?

2. What stood out for you?

3. What connected with your experiences? In school? In general?

4. Are there things you saw in the film that resonate with your school culture? What specifically, and why?



THEY CALLED ME THE 'N WORD' 5:25

1. How do you view the use of the N word?
2. Have you heard the N word used in your school? If so, was it addressed? How?
3. If you haven't heard the N word used, would you be surprised if you heard it? Why or why not?
4. How would you respond if you heard the N word in your school?



WHAT RACISM LOOKS LIKE 6:12

1. A microaggression is defined as “a brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group.”

Discuss what microaggressions might look like in your school community.

2. *Impact vs. Intent:* When someone says something hurtful to a person of color and says they didn't mean it to be taken seriously or to be hurtful, how might you react?

3. What are some actions that we can take to support people experiencing racism in the form of microaggressions or more overt actions?

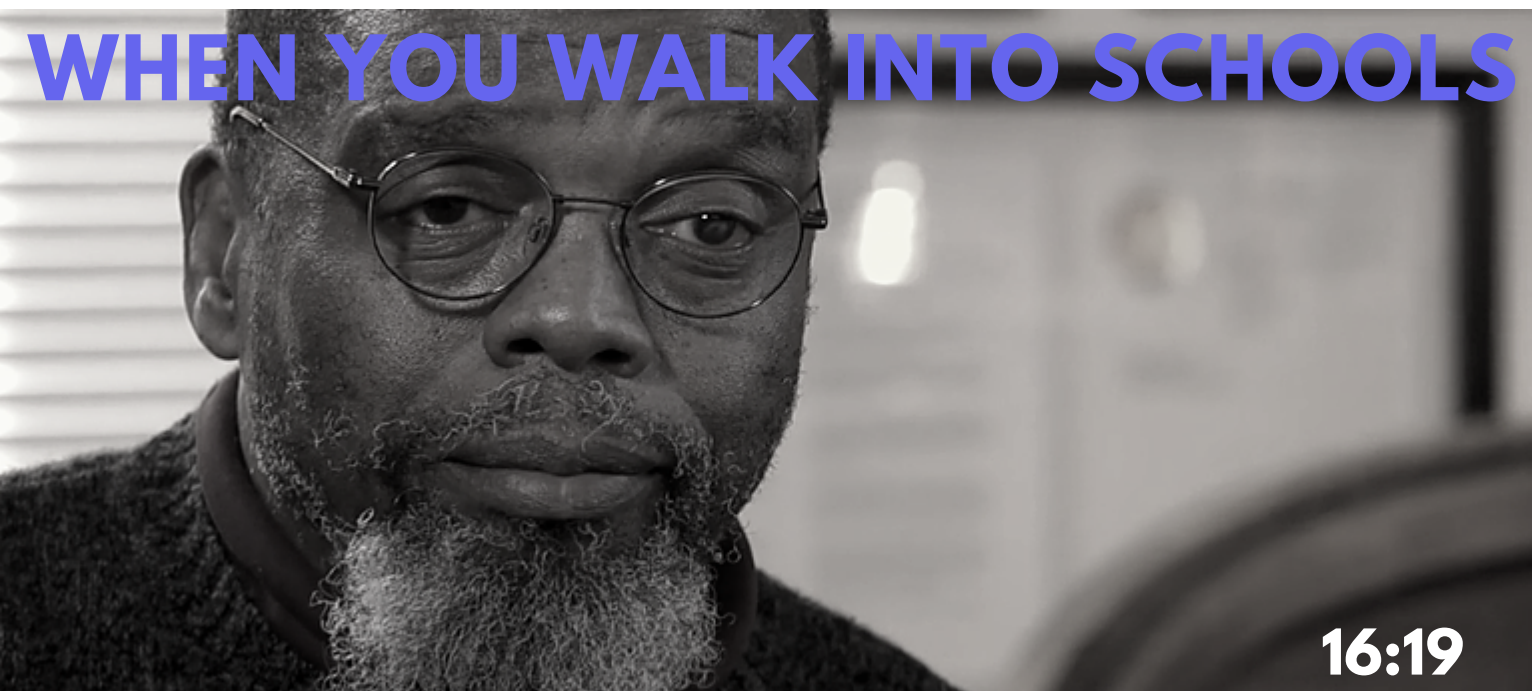
4. Discuss intent vs. impact. How do they differ? Which weighs more?



1. When someone is objectified, how might it make them feel? Have you ever been objectified before? What impact did that have on you?
2. Everyone has bias. In what ways do you see racial bias play out in your school?
3. If you are White, have you ever really thought about what it means to be White? What does privilege mean to you in a racial context?



1. Knowing that many of our students of color may feel isolated, what can Vermont educators do to support them?
2. What does it mean to you to “acknowledge whiteness?”
3. We all know that students need to feel safe in order to learn. What steps can your school take to embrace and support our students of color so that they feel safe?



1. What is one thing educators can do today to show diversity in their schools?

2. It is suggested that all educators receive ongoing, comprehensive professional development. Has your school district begun this work?

3. What *are* some barriers to comprehensive social justice work in your environment?

4. How can you make all students feel safe and welcome in your school?

HISTORY - IT AFFECTS ALL OF US



18:14

1. How do we include everyone's stories in our daily lessons?
2. Our history books have often been written through a White man's lens. How can your school take action to find other sources that view history from a different lens?
3. If you walk through your school, do you see evidence of cultural and racial diversity? If so, what do you see?
4. What actions can your school take to become more culturally aware?



TEACHERS OF COLOR

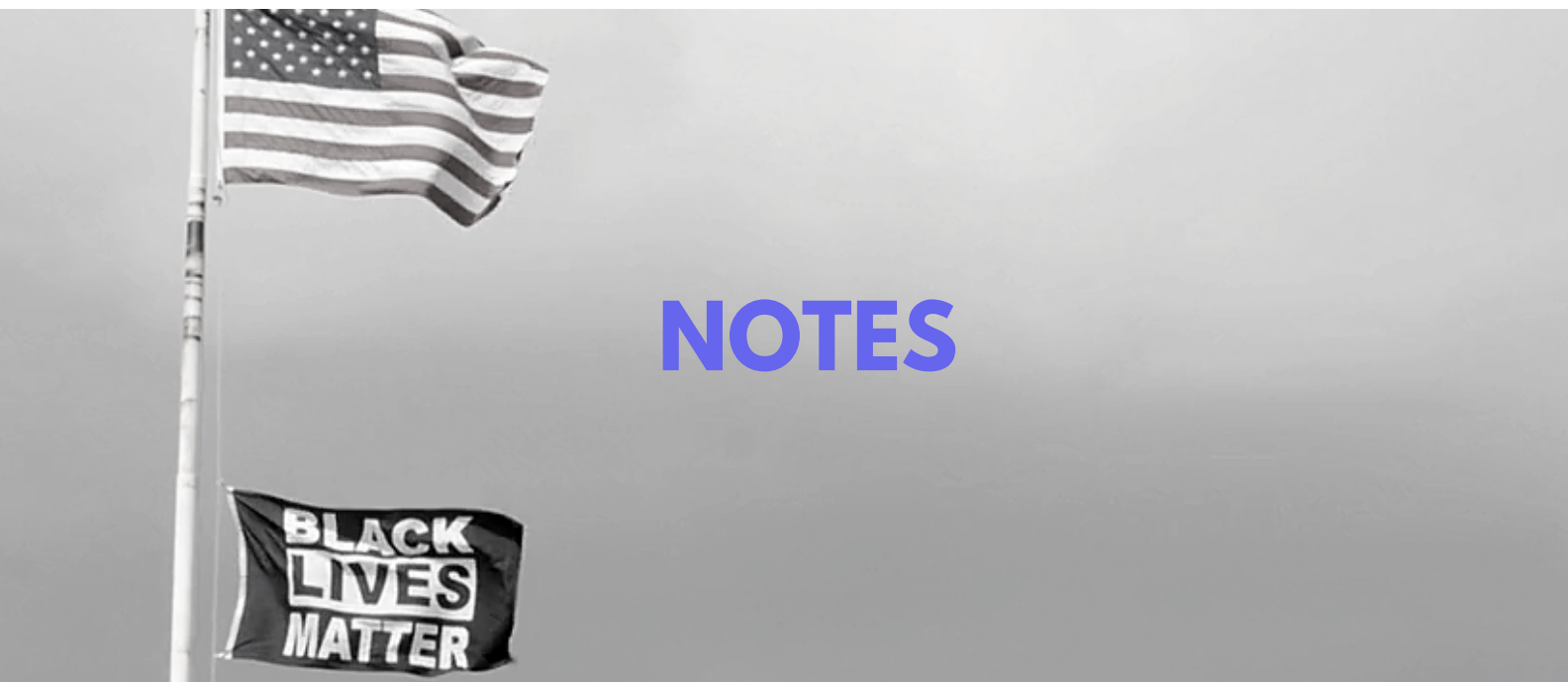
20:55

1. Is your school environment prepared to accept teachers, staff or administrators of color?
2. Does your school board make an effort to recruit and retain educators of color?
3. How can you contribute to a supportive and affirming environment for teachers, staff and administrators of color?
4. How can you encourage this?
5. How can colleagues reach out to colleagues of color to show them they are respected and valued in your school?



NEXT STEPS

1. Identify staff members who are interested in moving this work forward.
2. What steps, if any, has your district taken to address issues of racial equity?
3. Is your administration willing to set aside time during in-service and/or staff meetings to address racial bias and equity in your district?
4. Complete a SWOT analysis using the notes from the discussions.



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