



How to implement a “Racial Understanding, Social Equity, and Environmental Justice” Symposium

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Racism has played a key factor in the suffering of people of color throughout history. Individuals who are in racial minority groups are often marginalized and experience environmental injustice. They have been stripped of their environmental rights, exposed to environmental pollution, and faced hazardous health threats. The underlying cause behind environmental injustice is racial injustice, which ultimately permeates many different facets of society.

Racism is defined as the discrimination and unfair treatment that people experience due to their skin color or race. The major reason behind the development of racism is the lack of understanding of other races. It is critical to build an understanding of race and diversity, promote better race relations, and advance racial equity and inclusion at schools and communities. Although discussing race relations can be challenging, it is necessary to address and foster conversation regarding this topic. You can be a changemaker and transform racial misunderstanding and conflict into racial understanding and solutions.

To create change in your school and community, you will need courage, resilience, and commitment. Here are the important steps to developing a symposium that tackles racial understanding, social equity, and environmental justice:

Step 1: Invite people from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds to participate in the symposium. Getting a diverse audience can help participants gain more unique perspectives. At the beginning of the symposium, you should go over some important terms, including diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice. Understanding these terms will help participants have better engagement and communication during the rest of the symposium.

Here are some key words that should be defined at the start of the symposium:

1. Diversity means _____.
2. Inclusion means _____.
3. Equity means _____.
4. Justice means _____.

Step 2: Build empathy. Empathy is the ability to recognize other people's emotions and understand their situations, feelings, and challenges. You can foster empathy within participants by conducting activities that require them to ask other people questions and immerse themselves in their situations. This will allow them to become more connected to their peers and appreciate the differences between them. Participants should keep in mind to leave their judgment since the goal is to view the situation from their peers' perspectives.

The following sample questions can help participants gain more insights and a deeper understanding of their peers. You can revise these questions or create your own questions.

1. Share your racial or ethnic background.
2. At what age did you first realize your race?
3. At what age did you start to realize that there are racial differences between people? What circumstances made you aware of these differences?
4. Do you prefer to be friends with people of the same race? Why?
5. Do you have friends of different races?
6. Have you ever been marginalized because of your racial or ethnic background?
7. Have you been treated unequally by others because of your skin color? If so, when?

Here are additional discussion and follow-up questions for participants to explore:

1. What do you want to say to those who treated you unfairly or discriminated against you?
2. What emotions and feelings do you feel towards those who treat you unequally? How does their treatment of you affect you?
3. Do you often interact with people from different racial or ethnic backgrounds?
4. What do you wish you could learn more about your racial or ethnic background?
5. How do you feel when you see news regarding racial hatred? Do you have any specific examples that come to mind?
6. Can you share something valuable to your cultural heritage?
7. What prejudices or stereotypes do people hold towards people with the same racial background as you? Why do you think they hold such prejudices or stereotypes?

Step 3: Deep Discussion and Brainstorming. This session is aimed towards conducting honest and open dialogues to brainstorm creative and innovative ideas to mitigate the racial issues that occur within schools and communities.

Here are a few example questions to help participants get started:

1. How can we make people of color feel respected, included, and valued at school and in the community?
2. How can we make students comfortable and willing to discuss topics related to race?
3. How can we promote the value of cultural heritage in school and the community?

4. How can we make progress towards improving race relations in school and the community?
5. What policies or activities do you think our school and community should incorporate to improve race relations and ensure racial equity?

Step 4: The final step is to connect the previous discussions to environmental justice. Participants should identify links between racial equity and environmental justice and explain the importance of environmental justice. They can also brainstorm ideas to ensure environmental justice within their communities.

Here are some questions to help participants kickstart conversations:

1. What does environmental justice mean to you?
2. Why is environmental justice important?
3. What are environmental problems in your community? How are they linked to environmental justice?
4. Do you see any environmental justice issues in your community?
5. What can you do to support the environmental justice movement?

We're excited to see you kickstart your own "Racial Understanding, Social Equity, and Environmental Justice Symposium"! **For more resources about environmental justice and racial equity, visit Youth Environmental Power Initiative's website: www.yepinitiative.org**