

# Terms that Matter



60 - 120 Minutes



Equity Essentials

## OVERVIEW

Carried out before discussing content that is focused on racial oppression or equity, this lesson is meant to equip students for the discussions withing and beyond the classroom. Students build a glossary of terms with which to talk about racial equity. Working in teams, students choose concepts (such as model minority, white saviour, ally, solidarity...) they want to know more about and then research these terms. This research provides teachers and students with a common lexicon to work with going forward.

## USEFUL FOR

- Defining relevant concepts and terms
- Feeling more confident engaging in discussions around racial inequity

## MATERIALS

- [Racial Equity Glossary Instructions](#) (1 copy per team)

## PREPARATION

- **Class Teams** – Because language around racism and colonialism can be an extremely sensitive topic, it is vital that students have already had at least some opportunity to bond with the rest of their team before this activity occurs. Ensure that class teams have done, minimally, at least one [community-building activity](#).
- **Create a blank PowerPoint presentation** that students can edit collaboratively.
- **Make sure that you, as the teacher, are well versed in these and other related terms** – See suggested glossaries under Useful Resources

## PROCEDURE

1. **Give context for the activity.** Explain that one of the many reasons both teachers and students are reluctant to discuss racial inequity is because we are afraid to say the wrong thing. Language, or lack of language, can

become a real barrier to social change. This barrier to discussing and moving towards addressing racial inequity is something that can actually be solved.

2. **Share** the purpose of the activity: to provide language/words to all the students to help them feel comfortable talking about racial inequity.
3. **Define the term “race”** with the help of discussion. Ask students what we mean when we use the term “race.” Underline for students that “race” is a construct, largely created to justify and maintain oppression of various groups by other groups. Nonetheless, the social construct of race has had a massive impact on how we perceive and treat others, as well as on how certain groups of people are treated by societal institutions and systems.
4. **Have students move into their teams and give each team [a list of terms](#) from which they may choose.** Each team should choose **five (5)** terms that they will work together to define. Aim to have each team choose different terms – though some overlap may occur and some terms may not be chosen at all.
5. **Challenge each team to define the five terms they selected.** The terms should be defined using words but also images or other means, depending on what each team chooses. Students may ask how long the definitions should be or whether they can copy and paste from existing definitions. The idea here is to get students really thinking through what these terms mean, so they need to explain these terms in their own words. Additionally, there shouldn’t be a minimum or maximum length – they need to use as much space as they want to clarify for themselves and others what the term means.
6. **Review all terms with the whole class once teams have completed their definitions.** The professor then goes over each term or has the class teams present their terms and definitions to the rest of the class. Terms that are not chosen should be defined by the professor and still included in the presentation of terms.
7. **Invite students to reflect on the words they’ve just learned.** Either using their [dialogue journal](#) or a piece of paper and pen, have students note down 1 or 2 words that resonate with them and explain why.
8. **Share the final glossary** with all students.

## EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

The main goal of this activity is to equip students with terms and concepts that will help them feel comfortable talking about difficult subject matter. Moreover, learning these terms will help put into words, for many, the inequity that they have seen around them for years. Therefore, the activity should be empowering and provide students with critical hope as they now have words to talk about the injustices that exist around race.

That said, sometimes actually learning and thinking through these terms can be triggering, upsetting, and revelatory to some students. Go gently and always be prepared with your list of counselling and other mental health services in case students need help working through their strong feelings.

## ADAPTATIONS AND EXAMPLES

To make this activity “low-tech,” have students design posters (using posterboard and markers) for each term. Or, students can complete this assignment by creating drafts of power point slides on blank paper, which the teacher will then make into a presentation.

In addition to images, students might include links to videos that explain or provide examples of the terms being defined. For instance, this video from Teen Vogue explaining the [Model Minority Myth](#) might be used.

## USEFUL RESOURCES

Here are some links to excellent glossaries of terms for talking about race and racial equity:

- [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#)
- [Understanding Racial Terms and Difference](#) by the National Institutes of Health Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion