

## The school that tried to end racism

### Lead in: Discussion

Read the following opinions. Do any of them reflect your own ideas? Why?

‘I don’t think race matters.’

‘I believe all people should be treated equally, regardless of their race, gender or sexuality.’

‘At the moment, different groups are not treated equally in society.’

‘Most people have racist or sexist ideas, even if they think they don’t.’

### Task 1: Video

Activity 1. You are going to watch a short video clip. Before you watch, discuss these questions in small groups.

- a. Have you ever been asked where you come from?
- b. Have your parents ever warned you about racism?
- c. Is (the official language of your country) your parents’ first language?
- d. Have you ever had to be worried about your family being stopped and searched by the police?
- e. Have you ever been the only person in the room of your race?

Activity 2. As you watch the video, number the questions a-e in the order that they are asked.

Activity 3. Discuss these questions after watching the video.

- a. How did the students react to this activity?
- b. What do you think is the idea behind this activity?
- c. Do you think this activity is effective? Why (not)?

## Task 2: Reading

You are going to read about a secondary school in London which took part in a project that aimed to end racism. Before you read the text, can you match the terms below with their correct meaning?

<b>1. awareness</b>	a. having advantages in life because of your race
<b>2. bias</b>	b. connected with a group of people who share a cultural tradition
<b>3. diverse</b>	c. including many different types of people or things
<b>4. ethnic</b>	d. supporting or opposing something in an unfair way because of your personal opinions or preferences
<b>5. white privilege</b>	e. knowing about something

### Now read the text. Do you think the experiment was a success? Why (not)?

In 2017, Glenthorne High School in South London decided it wanted to **tackle racism head-on** in a different way. Glenthorne's pupils are an **ethnically diverse** group – just under 50% of students are from black or minority ethnic backgrounds, and just over 50% are white.

Students from year 7 (11- and 12-year-olds) volunteered to take part in a 3-week anti-racism project. One question the project wanted to answer was: Is it possible that we could all be racists without even knowing it?

Over the three weeks, students did various activities that would help them reflect on their own identities, biases, and experiences of race. The first activity was a test to measure the students' unconscious bias. Unconscious bias means having a preference for, or a fixed idea about a particular group of people, without even realising it.

A big problem with unconscious bias is that because we don't know we have these preferences, it can be difficult to identify them, and therefore difficult to change them. Scientists at Harvard university have developed a test to measure unconscious bias, which **is widely accepted** as an accurate way to identify our subconscious attitudes about race. The test measures how quickly someone can associate positive and negative words with black and white faces.

Pupils at Glenthorne were shocked to discover that 18 out of 24 of the group showed a significant preference towards white people. Many students felt upset by these results. but the researchers confirmed that they were predictable results in a white- majority country like the UK.

Dr Nicola Rollock from the University of London explained why a different way of addressing racism was needed. ‘The approach to race in the UK has historically been one of colour blindness – we pretend we don’t see race and that racial differences don’t matter. It’s an approach that isn’t working, and one that ignores the experiences of black and ethnic minority people in this country’.

In the next activity students were divided into two different ‘affinity groups’; one for the white pupils, and one for the black and other minority pupils. The researchers noticed a **significant difference** between the two groups. The white affinity group felt uncomfortable talking about race and what it means to be white, whereas in the black affinity group, pupils felt it was much easier to talk about their racial identities within the group, as they didn’t need to worry about offending anyone.

Other activities included a science class where students had to guess what percentage of DNA is shared by all humans, and a running race, where the pupils’ start position depended on their answers to a series of questions about their background. The idea of the race was to highlight that not everyone is born with the same advantages, so society tends to favour some groups over others.

The documentary **proved controversial**. For some people, the researchers were responsible for taking otherwise happy kids, for whom race wasn’t an issue, and dividing them into different racial groups, which caused some discomfort for a lot of pupils. Others praised the programme for raising awareness about unconscious bias and how it affects society. At the end of the three weeks, the students retook the unconscious bias test. The results? After taking part in the project, nearly all students demonstrated little to no racial bias.

As one white pupil said at the end of the three weeks – ‘Race is a bigger issue than I thought it was, and It’s not talked about enough.’

**Task 3: Find the answers to these questions in the text, and then compare with a partner:**

1. Why is Glenthorne High School described as ethnically diverse? How does it compare to your school experience?
2. Why is unconscious bias difficult to identify? How did they identify it in this programme?
3. What is ‘colour blindness’ in this context? Why does Dr Rollock think it is problematic?
4. What are affinity groups? What was the main difference between the two groups?
5. Why did some people not like the documentary?

**Task 4: Language focus: Collocations**

Look at the **highlighted collocations** in the text. What do they mean? Can you use them to complete these sentences?

1. The decision to raise taxes \_\_\_\_\_, as many people felt it was unfair, whilst others thought it was good for society.
2. Her views on climate change are \_\_\_\_\_ by the scientific community.
3. There is a \_\_\_\_\_ between what people say they want to do, and what they actually do.
4. We believe that if we \_\_\_\_\_ at a young age, we have a better chance of having a more equal society for all races in the future
5. London has always been a \_\_\_\_\_ city, with many people from all over the world living there.

**Task 5: Discussion**

Discuss these questions in pairs / small groups:

1. Do you think the same types of unconscious bias exist where you live? Why (not)?
2. At the beginning of the documentary, we are asked the question 'Could we all be racist without knowing it?' What's your opinion?
3. Some people argue that separating children into different affinity groups based on race for this project creates more problems than it solves. What do you think?
4. Have you ever been taught about racism? If so, when, and how?