

**Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild@HWDSB: Building a Community of Care  
Module 2 Understanding Identity and Intersectionality**

**Lesson # 12**

**Identity and Race- Self Portraits**

**Learning Goal:** To explore different aspects of identity and to see racial identity as an important aspect of who we are.

**Key Vocabulary**

**Race** - The idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups based on inherited physical and behavioral differences. Racial categorization schemes were invented by scientists to support worldviews that viewed some groups of people as superior and some as inferior. Genetic studies have concluded that race is a made-up social construct to uphold European and white standards, and not an actual biological fact. (Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2002, p.141).

**Racialization** - Racialization is the very complex and contradictory process through which groups come to be designated as being of a particular "race" and on that basis subjected to differential and/or unequal treatment. Put simply, "racialization [is] the process of manufacturing and utilizing the notion of race in any capacity" (Dalal, 2002, p. 27). While white people are also racialized, this process is often rendered invisible or normative to those designated as white. As a result, white people may not see themselves as part of a race but still maintain the authority to name and racialize "others" (SOURCE: [Calgary Anti-Racism Resources](#))

**Racial identity** - An individual's awareness and experience of being a member of a racial and ethnic group; the racial and ethnic categories that an individual chooses to describe him or herself based on such factors as biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization, and personal experience (*Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, editors. Routledge, 1997).

**Curriculum Connections**

Ontario Arts Curriculum, Grades 5-8:

- **Overall Expectation 2: Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing:** apply the critical analysis process (see pages 23–28) to communicate their feelings, ideas, and understandings in response to a variety of music/ art and musical/ artistic experiences.

**Tools and Materials**

- [Frida Kahlo’s Self-portrait with Thorn and Hummingbird \(1940\)](#)
- [George Littlechild "Portrait of self with Higher Cheekbones \(2008\)](#)
- [Horace Pippin “Self-Portrait II \(1944\)](#)
- Resource: drawing head and facial proportions (PDF)
- Resource: <https://thevirtualinstructor.com/facialproportions.html>
- Projector or print out of these self-portraits
- Chart paper for note taking
- Post-It notes

- Mirror or device for students to take a selfie for reference
- Art supplies for self-portraits (can be watercolour paint, or another paint, could be coloured pencils and pastels) and appropriate paper for the medium

**Modification for Remote Learning:** PowerPoint will include visuals and modifications needed for teaching this lesson remotely. Students will use whatever art supplies they have at home.

## Educator Pre-reflection

Before engaging in this lesson, consider/think about...

Racial colourblindness is an approach to reduce interracial tension which proposes that “racial categories do not matter and should not be considered when making decisions such as hiring and school admissions. The primary tenet of this approach is that social categories should be dismantled and disregarded, and everyone should be treated as an individual” (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2003; Firebaugh & Davis, 1998; Lipset, 1996; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993). This ideology posits itself on the premise of equality for all, rather than equity and thus, at its core is an insidious practice of racism in itself.

The core premise of this lesson is to negate such colourblind practice by attempting to bring race into the conversation in primary classrooms. This is an extremely necessary and important way of disrupting the development of racist beliefs and thoughts in the early years as children start internalizing racial bias by the time they are 5 years old (Baron, 2015; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008).

Furthermore, please be aware that race is a heavy burden many racialized students carry even at a very early age due to their lived experiences. If a racialized student is unwilling to share, participate, or even be present for these conversations, it may be due to personal triggers. Thus, enforcing them in a conversation about race they do not feel safe to participate in may cause added harm to such students. As the expert on your students’ background history, triggers, body language, and classroom dynamics, please make informed and empathetic decisions regarding ensuring a safe and inclusive setting to engage in these brave conversations.

## Student Pre-reflection

Before you begin, think about...

- *What do I know about the word “race”?*
- *What do I know about the word “identity”?*

## Provocation

Show students [Frida Kahlo’s Self-portrait with Thorn and Hummingbird \(1940\)](#); (repeat this discussion with these portraits as well [George Littlechild "Portrait of self with Higher Cheekbones \(2008\)](#) [Horace Pippin “Self-Portrait II \(1944\)](#))

Explain to students that self-portraits are pictures that artists make of themselves; they often use self-portraits to show how they feel about themselves and their place in society. Ask them to discuss the following prompt with an elbow partner:

- *What are these artists trying to show us about themselves in their self-portraits?*

### Learning Task/Activity

Ask students what they know about the word “*identity*”. On chart paper record their initial ideas (i.e., gender, age, grade, country of birth) in a web. Emphasize that a self-portrait is an artist’s way of thinking about and expressing details about who they are on the inside and on the outside - their identity.

Discuss that often “race” is misunderstood to only represent skin colour. However, a person’s racial identity is more than the colour of their skin; it is also about how they see themselves based on their culture, life experiences, family life, language, where they were born, etc.

Using the self-portraits as a reference, ask students to add these ideas about racial identity on the web based on their deeper understanding and using the language they use to describe them.

Explain to students that artists are a “people of colour”. Ask them what they think that may mean (i.e., Kahlo has brown skin, she looks different, she’s from a different country, etc.). Discuss that a person of colour may also be called a “racialized person”, and that although there is no real biological difference between people from different races, only non-white people are considered “racialized” or “people of colour”.

Ask students the following question:

- *What are some ways these artists show their racial identity in their self-portrait?*
- *How does the artistic style of each artist enhance their message about their identity?*

Anticipated responses/questions may include the following:

- *“She sees herself as a racialized person”*
- *“She dresses and wears her hair according to her country’s culture”*
- *“The animals are from the country she was born in”*

Introduce the art project: Students will be creating a self-portrait that display their identity. Review the attached package to support students approach drawing a self-portrait. Remind students that self-portraits do not have to be realistic (remind students of George Littlechild’s portrait.) The portrait must reflect what they see as their identity.

Have the students look at themselves in a mirror or have them take a selfie and look at the photo. on a post-it note, have student write in point-form what they see and want to make sure that they include in their self-portrait. Remind them about what we saw in the examples: race, and other cultural markers that make them who they are. They should also think about what the colours they are going to use will symbolize in their portrait. (the teacher should also make a self-portrait to share with the class.)

Have students complete their portrait for the lesson.

### Consolidation

When the portraits are completed, hang the portraits around the classroom and have the students do a [gallery walk](#) and look at the portraits keep in mind the questions that were discussed in the provocation:

- *What are these artists trying to show us about themselves in their self-portraits?*
- *What are some ways these artists show their racial identity in their self-portrait?*
- *How does the artistic style of each artist enhance their message about their identity?*

When the group comes back together to de-brief ask students to discuss the portraits in the parameters of these questions.

### **Educator/Student Post-Reflection**

- What is the main idea I want to remember or take away from this lesson?
- What do I need to learn more about?
- How is my mental wellbeing after this co-learning experience?

### **Ideas for Going Deeper/Further Resources**

For deeper understanding of racial identity and racial bias, a natural discussion may occur or may be prompted with the following question:

If each person belongs to a certain race, why is it that only non-white people are called “racialized”?

This may lead to conversations regarding the racism and may lead to further inquiries about the history of anti-black racism in Canada, the colonization and mistreatment of indigenous people in Canada, the reasons for current racial tensions and protests regarding racism in North America, the myth of white supremacy, the interconnectedness of racism and mental health, systemic inequalities due to racism, etc.