

## Activity Overview

**Title:** Seeing You, Seeing Me: Perspective-taking to Develop Cultural Empathy

**Target Virtue:** Justice: Cultural Empathy

**Target Courses or Activities / Criteria:** Social justice courses, Creative writing courses, English Literature courses, Cultural Psychology courses, History courses

**Summary:** Two multimedia activities to encourage perspective-taking on cultural differences, systemic racism, and social justice.

**Key virtue outcomes:** Burant and Rios (2010) found that this intervention enhanced cultural empathy towards people of different backgrounds. Students more clearly articulated understandings about the identities and ideologies they hold as individuals as well as members of marginalized social groups.

**Citation:** Burant, T. J. & Rios, F. A. (2010). Seeing you, seeing me: Social perspective-taking as learning. *Teacher Education Quarterly, Special Online Edition*. Retrieved from <http://teqjournal.org/rios.html>

This activity was collated by [Jesse Blaire](#) and edited by [Sean Sheveland](#).



## Seeing You, Seeing Me:

### Perspective-taking to Develop Cultural Empathy

In this 2-part series of perspective-taking activities, students are challenged to put themselves in the shoes of another, to think about their experiences, what they might be feeling, and compare the similarities and differences between their life stories. These activities can be used sequentially or individually. Activity 1 features autobiographies or memoirs featuring narratives of marginalized cultural identities.

**Before You Start:** Consider having your students complete the Defining Justice quiz and reflection before completing this activity. It may also be helpful to provide students with [this infographic](#) about what virtues are and why they matter.

**Materials:** Paper and writing utensil, or computer. Activity 1. Copies or PDFs of recommended books: Greg Michie's *Holler if you hear me* (1999); Luis Urrea's *Across the Wire* (1993); Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* (1989); and, Bell Hook's *Bone Black* (1997). Activity 2. Printed copies of the Levels of Racism, included below. Streaming access to documentary *In Whose Honor?* (1997) through [Kanopy](#), library card required.

**Implementation Suggestions:** These activities can be used before introducing the class to new cultural backgrounds to discuss the impact of white supremacy and structural racism when working with marginalized groups. The content can preface discussions about ethics, social and professional roles of interacting with underrepresented communities.



## Procedure:

**Activity 1.** Autobiography or memoir book study. Students are asked to select one book to read entirely or be assigned a book from the list: Greg Michie’s *Holler if you hear me* (1999); Luis Urrea’s *Across the Wire* (1993); Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary* (1989); and, Bell Hook’s *Bone Black* (1997). After reading, students will break into small groups to discuss their book using the prompts: Describe the person whose perspective the book was written from. Who are they? What is their cultural background? What about their culture is important to them? What barriers do they face? And lastly, what similarities and differences did you notice when comparing their life story to your own? The students are then asked to write an essay following the same prompts (recommended length: 800-1,000 words).

**Activity 2.** Introduce the class to the Four Levels of Racism (provided below) and lead the class in a discussion (or in small groups) using the question prompts provided below the Four Levels of Racism descriptions.

Students are then asked to view the film, *In Whose Honor?* (1997, 48 minutes). After viewing the film, students are asked to write an “interior monologue” – a piece of writing expressing a character's inner thoughts and feelings – highlighting the perspective of someone represented in the film (recommended length: 800 words).



## Four Levels of Racism

**Internalized racism lies *within individuals*.**

This type of racism comprises our private beliefs and biases about race and racism, influenced by our culture. This can take many different forms including: prejudice towards others of a different race; internalized oppression—the negative beliefs about oneself by people of color; or internalized privilege—beliefs about superiority or entitlement by white people.

**Interpersonal racism (personally mediated) occurs *between individuals*.**

This is the bias that occurs when individuals interact with others, and their personal racial beliefs affect their public interactions.

**Institutional racism occurs within *institutions and systems of power*.**

This refers to the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, etc.) that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they reinforce racial inequities.

**Structural racism is racial bias among *institutions* and *across society*.**

This involves the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors, including the history, culture, ideology and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color.

### **Small Group Questions**

1. How does this definition compare with your personal understanding of racism?
2. What are some of the ways that you see racism playing out around you at school and/or work?
3. Rabbi Tarfon, said "It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it either." What does that mean for you in your life as it relates to racism and other forms of oppression?

Race Forward Model. (n.d.). *Four levels of racism*.

<https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/FourLevelsOfRacism.pdf>

## Extensions:

At [CultivateCharacter.com](https://www.cultivatecharacter.com) our approach to virtue cultivation is grounded in the belief that when students encounter virtue content through multiple modalities, it is more likely to stick. Below are potential extensions of the empirically-grounded virtue activities described above to help stretch your assignments to enhance the likelihood that your classrooms cultivate character.

### Possible Extensions:

**Environmental** – Ask students to reflect on how the impact of the film and/or their selected book might change if they personally lived in environments that had more (or fewer) individuals with the marginalized identities that were highlighted in the stories. Would they be more open to taking the perspective of the characters or feel more disconnected from what the character might be feeling? For either activity, ask students to select a moral exemplar, a person they admire who embodies virtuous behavior, and list out the attributes they admire along with examples of “good”/moral/virtuous behavior.

**Cognitive** – Ask students to reflect on and list systemic and social barriers encountered by the characters featured in the stories. Ask students to identify any implicit and explicit bias at play that negatively impacted the characters and think creatively about ways to mitigate those biases. (Optional) Ask students to take the [Implicit Association Test](#) (hyperlinked) from Project Implicit to see tangible results of their social attitudes.

**Behavioral** – Encourage students to practice asking culturally sensitive questions with peers of similar cultural backgrounds and think through how they might approach someone different from them.

**Affective/Somatic** – Ask students to reflect on how they felt in their mind and body when listening/reading the stories of others from marginalized communities. Ask students to recall a time when they were acutely aware of an aspect of their identity (e.g., gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, ability) because they were in the minority. If comfortable, encourage students to seek out an environment where they would be in the minority and to pay attention to how they feel and act. For example, are they comfortable taking up space or are they inclined to try to stay small and blend in as best as possible?

**Motivations** – Prompt students to consider why it is personally important for them to reduce interpersonal and internalized racism and how such actions might connect to values or beliefs that they hold.