Movies and the Diversity Gap

Table Talk: Family Conversations About Current Events

Topic Summary

Over the past several years, the lack of diversity in the Academy Awards has prompted a public and important conversation about implicit bias and the role it plays in the movie industry—from what films get made and by whom to who plays the starring roles and the extent to which people of color and women receive awards for their roles.
When the 2016 Academy Award nominations were announced, there was criticism and accusations of bias because, similar to the year before, all of the nominees for the acting categories (Best Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor and Supporting Actress) were white. Several prominent African Americans in the film industry including Will Smith, Jada Pinkett-Smith and Spike Lee announced their boycott of the Oscars due to the lack of diversity for the awards. #OscarsSoWhite became a trending topic on social media. Chris Rock, an African American comedian, was named the host of the awards and despite people calling for him to boycott also, he hosted the show and delivered an opening monologue that focused on race in the industry and beyond.

In 2015, the Academy Awards ceremony was also aired amidst controversy and allegations of racism and sexism in the Academy and movie industry. Again, people questioned that all twenty acting nominees were white. During last year’s awards’ show, there were several political speeches by award recipients that addressed these and other issues, and there was a great deal of discussion on social media and elsewhere after the show about bias in the industry. For example, some expressed their concern that the film Selma was snubbed by the Academy, which nominated the movie for best motion picture but did not select any of the film’s cast or the director for an Oscar nomination.

In 2015, Lee and Low Books produced a Diversity Gap in the Academy Awards infographic which illustrated some of the following statistics over its eighty-eight year history (1927-2015):

- 99% of Best Actress winners have been white
- 92% of Best Actor winners have been white
- 93% of Academy voters are white and 76% are male
- 99% of Best Director winners have been male

Age
Questions to Start the Conversation

- What do you think about the lack of diversity in movies and the Academy Awards?
- Have you ever noticed the lack of diversity in movies or elsewhere?
- What do you think contributes to the lack of diversity?
- Do you think it’s important; why or why not?
- Do you know what implicit bias is? (ADL Education Glossary) How does it contribute to the lack of diversity?

Questions to Dig Deeper

- What message do you think is conveyed when there is a diversity gap in important areas of our lives?
- What do you think should be done about it?
- Are there other aspects of life (books, television, friends, etc.) that you think could or should be more diverse? How so?

(The "Related to this Resource" and Additional Resources section provide articles and information that address these questions.)

Ideas for Taking Action

Ask: What can we do to help? What actions might make a difference?

- Educate others about the topic by sharing information on social media, having individual conversations with other students or organizing an educational forum or debate in school.
- Brainstorm other forms of media (television, books, games, etc.) that also lack diversity and analyze the extent of the diversity gap.
- Write a letter to The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (contact information) or a letter to the editor of your local newspaper expressing your thoughts about the diversity gap in film (or another industry).

**Additional Resources**

- Diversity Gap in the Academy Awards (Lee and Low Books Infographic)
- Diversity in Hollywood: Failure of Inclusion Plagues the Entire Industry (*Variety*)
- Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions (*The New York Times*)