

# Coronavirus and Racial Disparities

*Compelling Question: How does Coronavirus reveal and worsen racism and racial disparities?*

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	Reading: R1, R6 Writing: W1, W7 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL4 Language: L4, L6
MS	HS		



## Web Related Connections

### Lessons

- Coronavirus and Infectious Racism
- Exploring Solutions to Address Racial Disparity Concerns
- When Perception and Reality Collide: Implicit Bias and Race

### Other Resources

- Coronavirus Highlights and Perpetuates Inequities in Our Society
- Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice
- Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism
- Teaching about Racism, Violence, Inequity and the Criminal Justice System

## LESSON OVERVIEW

Coronavirus is devastating nations and communities around the globe. New demographic data from some U.S. cities and states reveals that the disease is disproportionately impacting communities of color in the U.S. According to the data, African American people are more likely to become infected with and die from coronavirus than other racial groups. For example, in the state of Michigan, where COVID-19 hit early and intensely, African American people comprise 40% of those who have died, yet make up only 14% of the total population.

This lesson plan provides an opportunity for students to understand how and why COVID-19 disproportionately affects African American people and reflect on what can be done about it.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand how coronavirus impacts the African American community in certain cities and states.
- Students will use narrative and facts to analyze why there are racial disparities in coronavirus contraction and fatality rates for African American people.
- Students will reflect on and write about possible actions to address the disparities.

## MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- COVID-19 may not discriminate based on race — but U.S. health care does Youtube video (2020, 6:14 min., PBS News Hour, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5QdRwflM9I>)
- [Background Information on Coronavirus and Racial Disparities](#) (for teacher only)
- “Social Distancing Is a Privilege” (*The New York Times*, April 5, 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/04/05/opinion/coronavirus-social-distancing.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/05/opinion/coronavirus-social-distancing.html), make enough copies for half of students)
- “Black Americans Face Alarming Rates of Coronavirus Infection in Some States” (*The New York Times*, April 7, 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/us/coronavirus-race.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/us/coronavirus-race.html), make enough copies for half of students)
- [Persuasive Letter or Essay Graphic Organizer](#) (one copy for each student)
- [Why Covid-19 is Ravaging Black America](#) (to be projected for viewing)

## Key Words

alarming  
callous  
catastrophic  
chastise  
determinant  
devastation  
discrimination  
disparity  
disproportionately  
elitism  
entrenched  
empathize  
food desert  
immune  
intersected  
longstanding

## PROCEDURES



### Information Sharing

1. Begin the lesson by asking students: *What do you know about coronavirus? Have you read anything about how it impacts people differently? Have you heard anything about certain racial groups being more vulnerable to coronavirus?* Record notes on what they share on the board/smart board.

**Note:** If students do not live in an area with a significant African American population (or a mostly white population in general), they may not have the background info to answer the question. If students say that they heard Asian or Chinese people were more likely to carry or be infected with the virus, ask students why they think some people believe that to be true. Ensure they know that COVID-19 originated in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread to other parts of the world through travel. Let them know that experts now believe that travelers from Europe to the U.S. likely brought some of the first cases to the U.S. earlier this year.

If students say, “The virus doesn’t discriminate,” ask them what they mean. Often people say that to push back against prejudicial thinking (such as the notion that Chinese Americans are to blame for infecting the U.S. or should be avoided) or because they haven’t learned about societal factors that affect how the virus impacts people differently.

2. Show the video [COVID-19 may not discriminate based on race — but U.S. health care does](#). After watching the video, engage in a brief conversation by asking: *Does coronavirus discriminate? How do racial disparities in our health care system and racism contribute to this problem?*
3. Elicit/explain a definition of **racism** as follows:  
**Racism** is the marginalization and/or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people.
4. Explain to students that throughout the lesson, we will learn more about racial disparities in how coronavirus impacts different groups of people. Highlight the fact that there are fewer genetic differences between racial and ethnic groups than there are among the members of a racial/ethnic group. Explain that the disparities they will learn about are due to environmental and societal factors.
5. Share some or all of the [Background Information on Coronavirus and Racial Disparities](#) with students.
6. Engage students in a brief discussion by asking the following questions:
  - What was new information for you?
  - What was surprising about what you heard?
  - How does this information confirm or contradict what you have heard from friends, family, or various forms of media?
  - In what ways does systemic racism contribute to these disparities?
  - Is having this information helpful and if so, how?

### Key Words (cont.)

overrepresented  
preliminary  
privilege  
race-specific data  
segregation  
severity  
social distancing  
structural  
succumbing  
toxins  
vulnerable



### Reading Activity

1. Divide students into two groups and have each group read one of the following two articles on racial disparities and coronavirus. Explain that one is an opinion article that presents the writer’s point of view on the impact of coronavirus. The other is an article that uses data to describe the impact.

Group 1: “[Social Distancing Is a Privilege](#)”

Group 2: “[Black Americans Face Alarming Rates of Coronavirus Infection in Some States](#)”

Provide 10–15 minutes for students to read their article silently. Instruct students to underline 2–3 facts or quotes that stand out to them.

2. Have students pair up, making sure that there is one person from Group 1 and one from Group 2 in each pair. Have students discuss each article for five minutes each. Each student should briefly state a summary of their article, the article's point of view and the 2–3 facts or quotes they highlighted.
3. Reconvene the class and ask students to share information about what they read, making sure to have students from each of the two groups share. Engage students in a class discussion by asking some or all of the following questions:
  - What did you learn that you didn't know before?
  - What surprised you about what you read?
  - Why are there racial disparities in terms of who is afflicted and dies as a result of coronavirus?
  - How is racism a factor in the disproportionate rates of coronavirus contraction and fatalities among African American people?
  - Did the articles pose any solutions or ideas for addressing the disparities? While reading, did you have any other ideas?
  - What are some of the facts and quotes that you highlighted?

**Note:** As students share these facts and quotes, record on the board/smart board.

### Writing Activity

1. Explain to students that they are now going to write a persuasive letter or essay that shares their point of view on something that should be done about this situation. As a class, brainstorm some ideas by asking: *Based on what you already know and have learned, what should we do about these racial disparities?* This list may look something like this:
  - Do more testing, especially among those communities that are most vulnerable.
  - Educate the public about these racial disparities.
  - Collect and disseminate demographic information both locally and on a national scale.
  - Provide more opportunities for rapid response in certain communities.
  - Provide more protective clothing and equipment for essential workers.

**Note:** You may also want to engage in a class discussion about who the audience for these essays should be. For example, this could be a letter published in a newspaper, magazine, or online or a letter to local, state, or federal government officials. Some students may want to address this to people they know and want to persuade.
2. Have students come up with one idea for taking action and then write a persuasive essay about it, using statistics, facts, quotes, etc. With students, review the [Persuasive Letter or Essay Graphic Organizer](#) and have students begin working on it, which will provide the foundation for their essay. You can provide time in class or assign its completion as a homework assignment. Explain to students that they can use what they learned in class, articles in the additional reading section below, and conduct their own research.
3. After students have completed their essays, have them read them aloud in class or record themselves reading it and share on a class platform.

### Closing

Project the [Why Covid-19 is Ravaging Black America](#) image. Have students pick one of the branches and share how something they learned connects to what's in the branch on the tree of systemic racism. Then, have students share one action they think should be taken to address the racial disparities in coronavirus contraction and fatality.

**ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES**

- “CDC releases new data as debate grows over racial disparities in coronavirus deaths” (ABC News, April 8, 2020)
- “Communities of Color at Higher Risk for Health and Economic Challenges due to COVID-19” (KFF, April 7, 2020)
- “Doctors Want The Government To Give More Racial Data About Who Is Dying And Sick From The Coronavirus” (Buzz Feed News, April 6, 2020)
- “Early Data Shows African Americans Have Contracted and Died of Coronavirus at an Alarming Rate” (Pro Publica, April 3, 2020)
- “First 12 to Die of Coronavirus in St. Louis Were Black” (*Riverfront Times*, April 9, 2020)
- “How to reduce the racial gap in COVID-19 deaths” (Brookings, April 10, 2020)
- “Masking while black: A coronavirus story” (*The Washington Post*, April 10, 2020)
- “The coronavirus is infecting and killing black Americans at an alarmingly high rate” (*The Washington Post*, April 7, 2020)
- “The Coronavirus Is Killing Black Americans in Alarming Numbers” (*Teen Vogue*, April 7, 2020)
- “The Racial Time Bomb in the Covid-19 Crisis” (*The New York Times*, April 1, 2020)
- “‘Those numbers take your breath away’: Covid-19 is hitting Chicago’s black neighborhoods much harder than others, officials say” (*The Washington Post*, April 7, 2020)
- “Why are Blacks dying at higher rates from COVID-19?” (Brookings, April 9, 2020)

## Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
Writing
W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
W7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Language

L4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

L6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

## Background Information on Coronavirus and Racial Disparities

- Various states and cities have started to track the racial demographics of those who contract and die from coronavirus. As a result, they have uncovered deep racial disparities. For example, the following data is as of April 10, 2020 (keep in mind more data will continue to be collected):
  - In Chicago, Illinois, African American people account for more than half of those who have tested positive for coronavirus and 72% of virus-related fatalities, even though they make up a little less than a third of the population.
  - In Milwaukee County in Wisconsin, Black people have represented 81% of coronavirus-related deaths, while comprising only 26% of that county.
  - In the state of Michigan, where COVID-19 hit early and hard, African American people make up just 14% of the total population but 40% of those who have died.
  - In Louisiana, Black people account for 70% of coronavirus-related deaths in the state, while making up just 32% of the population.
  - Thus far, all twelve coronavirus-related deaths in St. Louis, MO, were African Americans.
  - In New York City, Latinx people made up 34% of deaths, despite being 29% of the city's population, and African Americans represent 28% of deaths, compared with making up 22% of the city's population.
- Black and Latinx people are at increased risk of serious illness related to coronavirus due to systemic inequities in the housing, employment, and health care systems. They also have higher rates of underlying health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, asthma and upper respiratory conditions. In addition, they likely face increased challenges in being able to access COVID-19 testing and treatment because they are more likely to be uninsured and face barriers such as racial bias in pain assessment and treatment.
- Although “social distancing” policies are encouraged (and mandated in many states) and seem to be working, these policies have led many businesses to cut hours, end operations, or close. People who work in certain industries, such as restaurant, hospitality, retail, transportation, and other service industries, are particularly at risk for loss of income and are unable to “work from home” as these social distancing policies prescribe. Those who maintain jobs amid the COVID-19 outbreak, such as grocery store workers and delivery drivers, are at increased risk of contracting coronavirus since they are constantly exposed to other individuals who could be infected. Nearly a quarter of Black and Latinx people (24%) are employed in service industries compared to 16% of White people, putting them at increased risk for job loss or loss of income or for exposure.
- The CDC recommends that people wear protective masks (either medical-type masks or homemade masks made out of bandanas and other fabric) when outside. In some cities and counties, wearing masks is now mandated. However, because of bias and stereotypes, many Black and Latinx people—particularly African American men—fear they will be seen as menacing, criminals, or gang members if they wear masks in public. In fact, two Black men wearing surgical masks recently recorded themselves being followed by a police officer as they left a Walmart.

## Persuasive Letter or Essay Graphic Organizer

**Directions:** Use this graphic organizer to outline your persuasive letter or essay before writing.

**What is your call to action? What should be done to address the racial disparities in coronavirus affliction and fatality?**

**Provide relevant background about the racial disparities that lead to your action idea.**

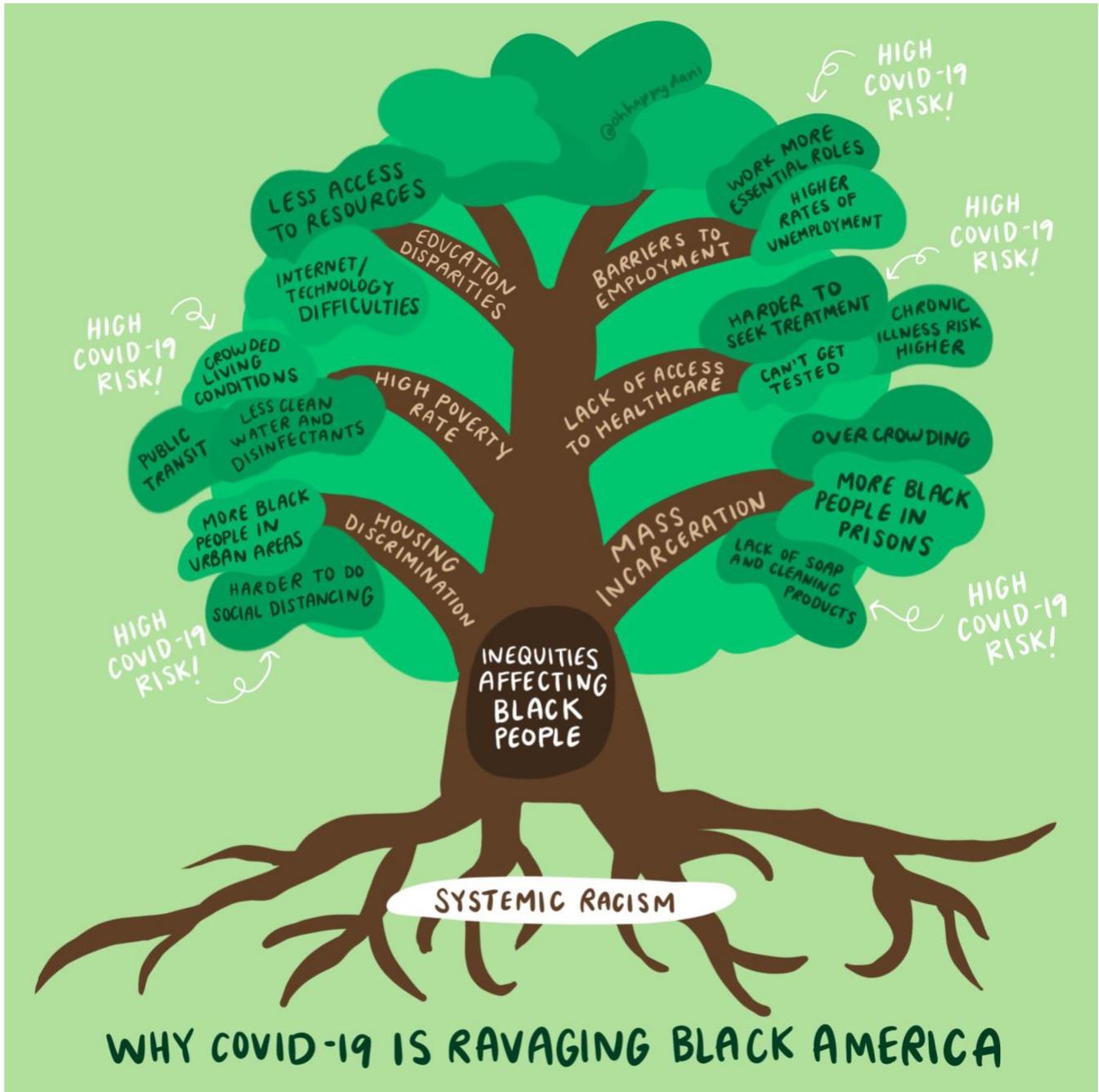
**List at least three (3) reasons that would convince someone that this is an effective action (use examples, statistics, data, quotes, etc.).**

**Indicate what those with a different point of view might say.**

**Indicate what you might say in response.**

**As a conclusion/summary, rephrase your persuasive call to action.**

# Why Covid-19 is Ravaging Black America



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