



EXPLORING SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS RACIAL DISPARITY CONCERNS

The recent officer-involved deaths of Michael Brown (Ferguson, MO), Eric Garner (Staten Island, NY) and Tamir Rice (Cleveland, OH) have brought questions, anger, protests and an important public conversation about police-community relations for people of color. According to the Associated Press' annual poll of editors and news directors, the high profile incidents between African Americans and police and the investigations and protests they inspired were the top news stories of 2014.

Following the deaths of Eric Garner in July, Michael Brown in August and the grand juries' decisions not to indict the police officers involved in both cases, there have been ongoing protests across the country and world. Along with the protests have come demands for reform in law enforcement, in the Grand Jury process and of the criminal justice system overall and demands to address the racism embedded in our society. In addition, some local as well as federal actions have been proposed and in some cases enacted, including the use of body cameras for police, special prosecutors in cases that involve police officers and increased training for police officers and more.

This lesson will help students reflect on some of the underlying problems and issues that have emerged from these recent cases, undertake research and present viable solutions. Students will learn more about some of strategies and reforms that have been circulating and will then work in small groups to investigate and present one of these ideas in more depth.

See these additional ADL resources: [Teaching About Ferguson and Beyond](#), [ADL Statement on Grand Jury Decision in Eric Garner Case](#) and [Beyond Ferguson and Staten Island: Where Do We Go From Here?](#)

Grade Level: grades 9-12

Time: 45 minutes (additional time needed for research and group presentations)

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

Learning Objectives:

- Students will reflect on the recent cases of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice and explore the reasons why so many people are calling for reform.
- Students will identify possible strategies and solutions to address the underlying causes of these and similar incidents.
- Students will work in small groups to research one of the reform strategies and develop a class presentation to share what they learned.

Material:

- Index cards (one per student)
- [Project Worksheet](#) (one per group)

Vocabulary

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL's "[Glossary of Education Terms](#).")

- community policy
- disparity
- disproportionality
- Grand Jury
- implicit bias
- indictment
- law enforcement
- legislation
- preliminary
- prosecute
- reform
- unconscious

INFORMATION SHARING

1. Ask students what they know about the recent cases of Mike Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice. Depending on their response, share some or all of the following information:
 - On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown (Ferguson, MO), an 18-year-old African-American man, was shot by the police. Eyewitnesses reported seeing different things; several reported seeing an altercation in the police car and others reported seeing Michael Brown trying to surrender with his hands in the air. A case against Darren Wilson, the police officer who shot Michael Brown, was brought to the grand jury who decided there was insufficient evidence to indict him.
 - On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner (Staten Island, NY), a 43-year-old African-American man, was stopped by the police for allegedly selling untaxed cigarettes. After briefly interrogating Garner, police officer Daniel Pantaleo placed him in an apparent chokehold, which is illegal in New York. The city medical examiner concluded that Eric Garner died as a result of compressions to the chest and "prone positioning during physical restraint by police." The grand jury decided not to indict Daniel Pantaleo.
 - On November 22, 2014, Tamir Rice (Cleveland, OH), a twelve-year-old African-American boy, who had been reported to be shooting his BB gun in an area park, was shot and killed by police officer Tim Loehmann seconds after spotting him at the park. The shooting has been ruled a homicide but no charges have been filed to date. Tamir Rice's family has requested that the prosecutor's office bypass grand jury proceedings and decide on its own whether to file charges against the officers involved.
 - A [ProPublica](#) analysis of federally collected data on fatal police shootings revealed that young black males in recent years were at a far greater risk (21 times greater) of being shot dead by police than their white counterparts.
 - Since the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson in August 2014, there have been waves of protests in Ferguson, New York, Washington, D.C. and in many parts of the country as well as worldwide. These protests have expressed collective anger as well as a strong appeal for change.

2. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What is happening?
 - Why do you think these recent cases have caused so much anger, sadness, frustration and a call for reform?
 - Have you attended any of the protests or read/seen photos or videos about them? What is your impression of what the protests are about?
 - What do you think are some of the underlying concerns people are protesting about?
 - What are some of the solutions you have heard people talk about or you have thought of yourself?
3. Explain to students that the purpose of this lesson is for them to learn more about some of the solutions and reforms that have been discussed in the news and amongst public officials.

BRAINSTORMING SOLUTIONS

1. Distribute an index card to each student. Ask students to write down one idea they personally have or have heard to address concerns raised by these deaths. Collect the cards, shuffle them and hand one card to each student so that everyone has a card written by someone else. Have students read their cards aloud, one at a time, with you writing the ideas on the board and checking off those that are stated more than once. Ideas may include:
 - Police should wear body cameras
 - Training to end racial profiling
 - Provide police with training about implicit bias
 - Appoint special prosecutors in officer-related shootings
 - Recruit more black and Latino police officers
 - Make sure people are registered to vote
2. After reading all the cards, have students turn to a person sitting next to them and based on all of the ideas they heard, share with their partner an idea they think would be best to pursue and why.
3. Engage students in a whole class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Were there any themes or patterns you noticed amongst the ideas?
 - Are there any ideas that you heard repeated over and over and if so, what are they?
 - Did you hear any new ideas?
 - Do you have any other ideas after hearing your classmates' suggestions?
 - What other questions do you have?
 - What are some of the underlying problems that each of these strategies is aiming to solve?
4. Explain to students that as a class, they are going to explore five different solutions that have been part of the public conversation about these recent events. Students will work in small groups to learn more about the idea, conduct research, talk with other people and then present what they learned to the class, using an engaging presentation strategy.

5. List the five strategies below and have students decide in which group they want to participate. You may include other ideas generated by the students but only the five below have suggested articles to read.
- a. **Policing Reform and Police-Community Relations**
(Implement reforms in policing such as body cameras for police officers, racial/cultural sensitivity training, more diverse police force that represents the community, community policing)
 - [“The Way Forward On Police Reform”](#) (Hoover Institution, December 8, 2014)
 - [“Could Police Reform In Cincinnati Provide Model For Ferguson?”](#) (St. Louis Public Radio, October 19, 2014)
 - [“7 Ideas for Serious Police Reform”](#) (Care2, November 26, 2014)
 - b. **Grand Jury/Prosecutor System Reform**
(Implement reforms in Grand Jury procedures special prosecutors in police cases)
 - [“Garner, Brown Decisions Spark Calls for Grand Jury Reform”](#) (U.S. News and World Report, December 12, 2014)
 - [“What Legal Reforms Are Likely To Come Out of Recent Officer-Involved Deaths?”](#) (CBS San Francisco, December 22, 2014)
 - [“House Dem urges grand jury reform after Brown, Garner decisions”](#) (The Hill, December 12, 2014)
 - [“4 Ideas That Could Begin to Reform the Criminal Justice System and Improve Police-Community Relations”](#) (Center for American Progress, December 18, 2014); NOTE: this article could also be used for #a
 - c. **Reduce Racial Disparities in Criminal Justice System**
(Analyze and reform racial disparities in the criminal justice system where currently people of color are disproportionately represented, from arrest all the way to sentencing)
 - [“Justice for All? Challenging Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System”](#) (American Bar Association, *Human Rights Magazine* 37(4))
 - [Reducing Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System: A Manual for Practitioners and Policymakers](#) (The Sentencing Project); This is a long comprehensive report, read pages 1–2 for introduction and starting on p.25 for Strategies
 - [“Senate Grapples With Racial Disparities In Justice System”](#) (St. Louis Public Radio, December 11, 2014)
 - d. **Address Implicit Bias**
(Teach people about and overcome the unconscious bias prevalent in all aspects of our society, including policing and the larger criminal justice system)
 - “Is Everyone a Little Bit Racist?” (*The New York Times*, August 27, 2014)
 - [“Across America, whites are biased and they don’t even know it”](#) (*The Washington Post*, December 8, 2014)
 - [“The new threat: ‘Racism without racists’”](#) (CNN, November 27, 2014)

- e. **Reform and/or Reduce Racial Profiling**
(Analyze and reform current system of racial profiling)
 - [“The long, halting, still-unfinished fight to end racial profiling in America”](#) (*The Washington Post*, December 5, 2014)
 - [“DOJ to Announce New Limits on Racial Profiling”](#) (ABC News, December 8, 2014)
6. Have students form groups according to the strategy they have chosen. Note that students should do additional research and find other articles; the above articles are just a starting place. Be sure to review with students [how to evaluate the quality of online information](#) if you have not already done so.

SMALL GROUPS: SOLUTIONS AND REFORMS

1. After students have formed their small groups, explain that each group is going to work together to learn more about their topic by reading articles, watching videos, analyzing the pros and cons and talking to people to understand different perspectives about it. The projects will take several weeks to complete and should include a combination of in-class time and homework assignments
2. Distribute to each group a [Project Worksheet](#).
3. Explain that each individual group member is required to conduct the following tasks:
 - a. Read 2–3 articles. (Students can use the previously suggested articles but they should do additional research to find more.)
 - b. Talk to/interview at least two other people (adults, other students) to elicit their opinion about it.Then explain to students that each group is required to conduct the following tasks:
 - c. Complete the [Project Worksheet](#) together as a group.
 - d. Work together to present their research about the solution in one of the following ways:
 - Create a PSA video
 - Write a persuasive letter (at least two pages) to a relevant public official
 - Develop a social media campaign
 - Draw an infographic or poster
 - Create a photo essay
 - Write and perform a dramatization
 - Create a blog or something else

PRESENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. After completing their projects, have groups conduct a class presentation on what they learned. Allow each small group 10 minutes to present their strategy to the class, which should include a general overview of their project worksheet and the presentation of the project which includes the options of how to present listed below.
 - PSA video
 - persuasive letter to elected official

- social media campaign
 - short dramatization
 - infographic, photo essay or poster
 - blog
 - other ideas
2. You may also have students present their projects to other classes in the school or provide a whole-school assembly and invite families, public officials and other community stakeholders in to listen to the presentations.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“At Home and at Work, Black Police Officers Are on Defensive”](#) (*The New York Times*, December 24, 2014)
- [“Coalition Urges Police Changes Following Ferguson Shooting”](#) (AFL-CIO Now, August 26, 2014)
- [Created Equal: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the US Criminal Justice System](#) (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, March 2009)
- [“Deadly Force, in Black and White”](#) (ProPublica, October 10, 2014)
- [“Exactly How Often Do Police Shoot Unarmed Black Men?”](#) (Mother Jones, August 15, 2014)
- [“Here’s Eric Holder’s 4-Step Plan for Police Reform Post-Ferguson”](#) (Politics Cheat Sheet, December 4, 2014)
- [“Police and Protestors Must ‘See’ Each Other”](#) (*The Washington Post*, January 8, 2015)
- [“The Science of Why Cops Shoot Young Black Men”](#) (Mother Jones, December 1, 2014)
- [“Why We’re So Mad at de Blasio”](#) (*The New York Times*, January 7, 2015)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: 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.
Standard 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development, summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Writing
Standard 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: 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.
Standard 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
Standard 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development and style are appropriate to talk, purpose and audience.

PROJECT WORKSHEET

Directions: Use this worksheet to organize your research for completing the group project.

Solution:

What is the overall solution, in your own words?

What is the underlying problem that this solution is aiming to solve?

What are the expected goals or outcomes of the solution? (List at least 3)

PROS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

CONS

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Articles Read

Videos Watched

People Talked To