

# Exploring Solutions to Address Racial Disparity Concerns

*Compelling Question: What are policy solutions that would address racial disparities in the criminal justice system?*

Grade Level		Time	Standards/Competencies	
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	<b>Common Core Anchor:</b> Reading: R1, R2 Writing: W1 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2, SL4	<b>SEL:</b> Self-Awareness Social Awareness Responsible Decision-Making
MS	HS			



## Web Related Connections

### Lessons

[Black Lives Matter: From Hashtag to Movement](#)  
[When Perception and Reality Collide: Implicit Bias and Race](#)

### Table Talk

[George Floyd, Racism and Law Enforcement \(in English and en Español\)](#)

### Other Resources

[Beyond Ferguson and Staten Island: Where Do We Go From Here?](#)  
[Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism](#)  
[Teaching about Racism, Violence, Inequity and the Criminal Justice System](#)

## Key Words

(See ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).)

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

## LESSON OVERVIEW

In 2014, the police-involved deaths of Michael Brown (Ferguson, MO), Eric Garner (Staten Island, NY) and Tamir Rice (Cleveland, OH) brought questions, anger, protests and an important public conversation about the police use of force and violence against Black people. According to the Associated Press' annual poll of editors and news directors, the high-profile death of Black people at the hands of the police and the investigations and protest 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 involved police officers in both cases, there were ongoing protests across the country and world, igniting the Black Lives Matter movement. Along with the protests came demands for reform in law enforcement, in the Grand Jury process and of the criminal justice system overall and demands to address the systemic racism embedded in many aspects of our society. In addition, some local and federal actions were proposed and some 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. Since 2014, there have been many police killings of Black people including Laquan McDonald, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Alton Sterling, Philando Castille, Deborah Danner, Antwon Rose, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and more.

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

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will reflect on the cases of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice and explore the reasons why there was a strong call for law enforcement reform.
- Students will identify possible strategies and solutions to address the underlying causes of police use of excessive force and violence.
- Students will work in small groups to research one of the reform strategies and develop a class presentation to share what they learned.

## MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- Index cards (one per student)
- [Case Synopses](#) (for teacher)
- [Project Worksheet](#) (one per group)

## PROCEDURES

### Information Sharing

1. Ask students what they know about the cases of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice. Depending on their response, share some or all of the [Case Synopses](#).
2. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - What happened?
  - Why do you think these cases, and others since then, caused so much anger, sadness, frustration and calls for reform?
  - Have you attended any of protests or read/seen photos or videos about them? What are the protests 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 have or have heard about 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.
  - Police officers should attend training to reduce racial profiling and excessive force.
  - Police officers should attend training on implicit bias.
  - Appoint special prosecutors in officer-related shootings.
  - Recruit more Black and Latinx police officers.
  - Make sure people register to vote and vote for candidates and initiatives that address police violence of Black people.
  - Pass laws that reduce police use of deadly force.
  - Redirect funds from police budgets to social services (e.g., mental health, domestic violence, substance abuse, etc.) in order to avoid using police in those problems.
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 one or two ideas they think would be best to pursue and why.
3. Engage students in a whole class discussion by asking the following questions:
  - Are there any themes or patterns you notice among the ideas?
  - Are there any ideas that you heard repeated over and over and if so, what are they?
  - Do 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 intends 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, redirecting police funds to social services.)
- [“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)
  - [“US: 14 Recommendations for Fundamental Police Reform”](#) (Human Rights Watch, August 12, 2020)
  - [“What Does ‘Defund the Police’ Mean and Does It Have Merit?”](#) (Brookings, Friday, June 19, 2020)
- 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)
  - [“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.
- [“Breonna Taylor case sparks renewed scrutiny of grand juries in police misconduct cases”](#) (ABC News, October 9, 2020)
- 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)
  - [“Visualizing the racial disparities in mass incarceration”](#) (Prison Policy Initiative, July 27, 2020)
- 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)
- “Is it possible to rid police officers of bias?” (BBC, August 27, 2020)

**e. Reform and/or Reduce Racial Profiling and Excessive Force**

(Analyze and reform current system of racial profiling and police use of excessive force.)

- “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)
- “Police stops are still marred by racial discrimination, new data shows” (Prison Policy Initiative, October 12, 2018)
- “21 ways Louisville could reform its police department and curb officers’ use of force” (Courier Journal, August 28, 2020)

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 Activity: 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.
4. Then explain to students that each *group* is required to conduct the following tasks:
  - a. Complete the [Project Worksheet](#) together as a group.
  - b. Work together to present their research about the solution in one of the following ways:
    - Create a PSA (Public Service Announcement) video.
    - Write a persuasive letter (at least two pages) to a relevant elected official (local or federal).
    - Develop a social media campaign.
    - Write and perform a dramatization that makes your case before your City Council or other elected body.
    - Create an infographic, photo essay or poster (print or digital).
    - Write a blog post or create a blog page that includes yours and others’ blog posts
    - Other ideas?

### 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
2. You can 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)
- [“Solving racial disparities in policing”](#) (The Harvard Gazette, February 23, 2021)
- [“Fatal Police Shootings Of Unarmed Black People Reveal Troubling Patterns”](#) (NPR, January 25, 2021)

## 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.
R2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development, summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Writing
R1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
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.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
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 talk, purpose and audience.

## CASEL's SEL Competencies

COMPETENCIES
Self-Awareness: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.
Responsible Decision-Making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

## Case Synopses: Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice

- 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 grand jury did not indict the police officers.

### Data and Post Events

- A [ProPublica analysis](#) of federally collected data on fatal police shootings reveals that young Black men in recent years were at a far greater risk (21 times greater) of being shot dead by police than their white counterparts.
- In “[Race and Reasonableness in Police Killings](#)” published in the *Boston University Law Review*, authors reported that “Black suspects are more than twice as likely to be killed by police than are persons of other racial or ethnic groups; even when there are no other obvious circumstances during the encounter that would make the use of deadly force reasonable.”
- After the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson in August 2014, there were waves of protests in Ferguson, New York, Washington, D.C. and in many parts of the country as well as worldwide. The protests expressed collective anger as well a strong appeal for change. Black Lives Matter protests and calls for reform have continued since that time.
- Since 2014, there have been many police killings of Black people including Laquan McDonald, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, Alton Sterling, Philando Castille, Deborah Danner, Antwon Rose, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and more. Each inspired protests and calls for law enforcement reform and other strategies to stop these killings.

## Project Worksheet

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

<b>Solution:</b>		
What is the overall solution, in your own words?		
What is the underlying problem that this solution intends to solve?		
What are the expected goals or outcomes of the solution? (List 2-3)		
<b>PROS of the solution</b> 1. 2. 3.		<b>CONS of the solution</b> 1. 2. 3.
Articles Read	Videos Watched	People Talked To