

# Companion Notebook:

Foundations of Socratic Circles  
and Social Justice Education

Center for  
Inclusive  
Innovation

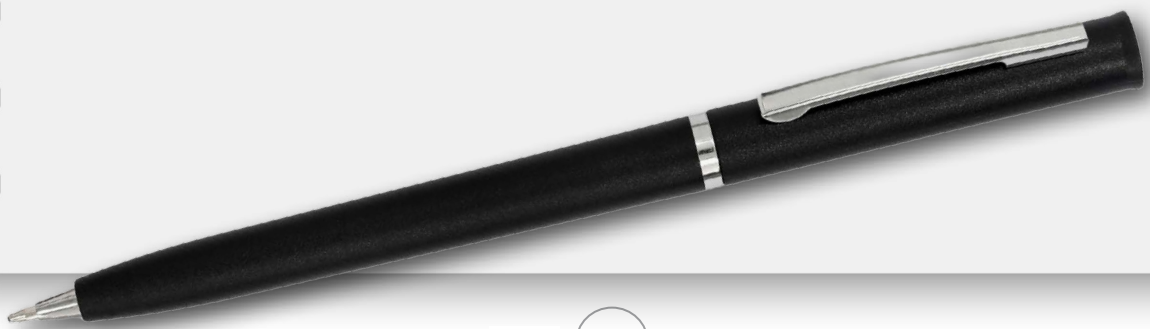
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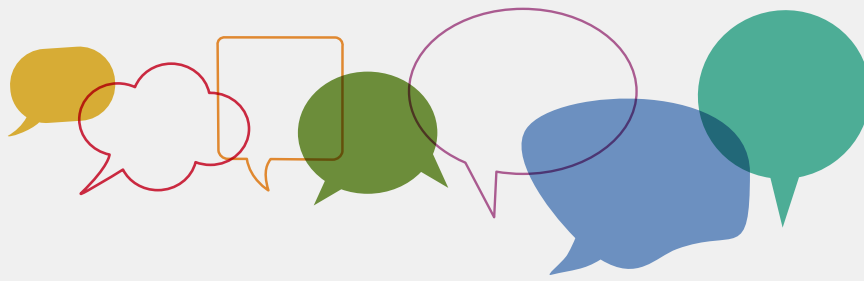


This companion notebook is a space for you to capture thoughts and ideas as you reflect on activities within each module and throughout the learning journey.

*Add your name here*

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## Foundations of Socratic Circles and Social Justice Education Introduction

This journal is a reflection and notetaking companion for Modules 3-6 of Foundations of Socratic Circles and Social Justice Education. It's a space for you to capture your thoughts and ideas as you reflect on activities within Professional Development Modules 3-6 and throughout your learning journey.

Upon completing this professional development experience, you'll be ready to bring the method of Socratic circles into your classrooms, to discuss race, social justice, and more. This method will not only aid in discussing important topics but also provide a platform to develop key skills among your students.

You'll acquire effective strategies for creating safe and inclusive learning environments and driving profound discussions. Importantly, through Socratic circles, you'll be empowering your students with critical thinking and empathy, vital skills in today's diverse world.

In addition, you will be positioned to champion equity and social justice within your school and community. Beyond facilitating necessary conversations, you'll shape the future by fostering understanding and respect among your students. Your role as an educator is pivotal in this transformative journey.

# Engage: Getting Started

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This virtual companion notebook provides and space for reflection throughout this learning journey. You can use the space as you see fit to capture notes, complete activities found within each module and type out reflections of your experiences.



# Engage: Getting Started

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## Readiness Checklist

Teachers who pilot the materials in this guidebook do not need to be experts in social justice, equity, or anti-racist work, but they should be self-reflective, open to learning, and have a baseline comfort with/willingness to facilitate classroom discussion on the project topics.

To check your readiness as an educator before beginning this process, review the following checklist:

### Knowledge

- I understand how education can be used as a force to perpetuate existing hierarchies and inequities in society but can also be used to disrupt and dismantle those systems.
- I understand how racism permeates education from inequitable discipline to recruitment and retention of teachers of color.
- I understand that my identity impacts my teaching and that I have to continually unlearn and challenge my implicit biases to support the success of my students.

*If you need more information about these competencies, the Kirwan Institute at The Ohio State University has implicit bias modules you can complete to build your knowledge and self-awareness.*

# Engage: Getting Started

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## Readiness Checklist (continued)

### Skills

- I know how to teach my students to think critically about the content in my course and about our society.
- I can support students in building both academic knowledge and cultural competence.
- I know how to identify the ways in which my curriculum may reinforce biases or stereotypes of minoritized students.
- I know how to diversify my curriculum to provide students with affirming representations of their linguistic and cultural selves.

### Dispositions

- I believe diversity in all forms (ex: race, ability, age, gender, sexuality, and class) is a strength.
- I believe all students regardless of social identities (ex: race, class, gender) can be successful in school.
- I believe it is my civic duty to support students in growing as critical consumers and democratic members of this country and global community.

# Engage: Reflect

## Reflection

What do you hope to learn from participating in this learning experience?

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# Engage: Reflect

Share your thoughts...

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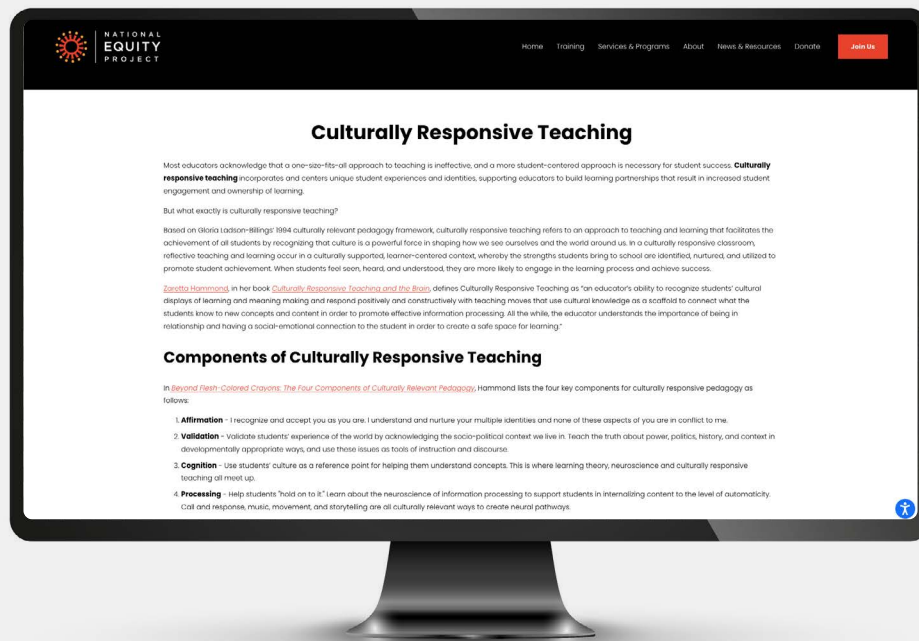
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# Module 3 – Activity 1

Click below to visit The National Equity Project Guide for Culturally Responsive Teaching Website:



## Reflection

What strategies for culturally responsive teaching are you already incorporating in your classroom?



# Module 3 – Activity 1

Are there strategies for which you need more practice?

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## Module 3 – Activity 2

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New America outlines 8 competencies for culturally responsive teaching using the graphic here. Review the competencies shown in the graphic and then reflect on the next page.



## Module 3 – Activity 2

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Which competencies do you feel you're successfully integrating into your teaching?

Which competencies could you be more intentional about?

## Module 3 – Activity 2

Have you taught a lesson lately that you would consider to be culturally responsive?

What activities do you plan that will help you understand your student's identities and experiences?

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## Module 3 – Activity 3

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How do I develop a culturally responsive curriculum?

### *Starting with Self:*

Some good starting questions to ask yourself when developing curriculum are:

1. Are there spaces where students can give input on what we're learning and room for me to adjust my instruction?
  
2. What racial and cultural experiences are represented in my curriculum? Is my curriculum telling a dominant narrative? What story do I want it to tell?

## Module 3 – Activity 3

3. What considerations about my students have I made when creating this curriculum?

4. How might my biases have informed the formation of this curriculum? How can I work against those?

5. Are there district-level constraints within which I am working? If so, how can I supplement the required curriculum to add diverse perspectives or ask my students to turn a critical eye to the curriculum?

## Module 3 – Activity 3

6. How am I including opportunities to celebrate my student's identities, experiences, and perspectives in this curriculum?

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## Module 3 – Activity 4

Students can take an active role in their learning. Adapt the affirmative action sample here to inspire conversations around race and equity by having students understand the relevance of the discussion topic and create personal solutions.

While much of the sphere of influence around affirmative action is in the hands of adults, students can benefit from locating their sphere of influence and paths to action as:

1. Talking to peers about their experiences learning from teachers of color and White teachers

2. Consider what they would say to a principal who is hiring from a pool of candidates



## Module 3 – Activity 4

**3. Volunteer for school initiatives in the recruitment of teachers of color**

**4. Collaboratively draft interview questions for school leaders in interviewing teacher candidates. Or students can write a letter in support of hiring teachers of color if they recognize racial disparities in their teaching staff.**

*How can you encourage students to generate a list of social issues that they want to address?*

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## Module 3 – Activity 5

Use or adapt this template to share with colleagues and to help students' publishing projects:

1. Determine a topic you'd like to center a discussion about racial equity around.

2. Consider if the discussion be solution-oriented or inquiry-based? Will students publish their work? Where?

## Module 3 – Activity 5

**3. Write down 3 objectives you want your students to achieve by the end of a discussion around that topic.**

**Objective A:**

**Objective B:**

**Objective C:**

**4. Write out a rationale that you would share with your students as to why having this discussion is important.**

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# Module 4 – Introduction

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## Facilitating Socratic Circles on Race and Racism

### Preparing Students for Socratic Circles

#### Self-Assessment

Take time to consider the ethnic-racial makeup of your class and reflect critically on the ways your students' experiences with schooling may be racialized. As you reflect, think about what the particular vulnerabilities and needs of your students may be. This insight should inform the content of the conversation as well as how it takes place. Asking yourself these questions can help ensure you are continuing to be equity minded as you plan.

*Ask\* yourself:*

- 1. What do I know about my student's identities and cultures? How does my curriculum welcome and affirm them?**

\*Questions adapted from Parker (2022) and Muhammad (2020).

## Module 4 – Introduction

**2. What do I know about their values, attitudes, and beliefs?**

**3. What do I know about their experiences and perspectives?**

**4. How do I know that I am not relying on stereotypes and assumptions?**

**5. How have I gotten to know my students? What activities have I done to foster connection making and encourage them to share their culture?**

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## Module 4 – Introduction

6. What skills are my students engaging with through this discussion?

7. How am I encouraging my students to gain knowledge?

8. How does this discussion help students understand power and equity?

9. How are students practicing critical thinking through discussion?

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# Module 4 – Activity 1

## Activity

Learn more about creating community agreements and the importance of involving participants.

1. Review the [National Equity Project](#) resource.
2. Create 3 example agreements to share with your students. You can use the [Digital Journal](#) to create example community agreements.

Sample Agreement 1



# Module 4 – Activity 1

Sample Agreement 2

Sample Agreement 3

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## Module 4 – Activity 2

Use the space here to consider your non-negotiables when engaging in critical conversations with students.

What type of language will not be allowed in the classroom?

What behavior is not okay?

What will you say when it's time to step in?

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# Module 4 – Activity 3

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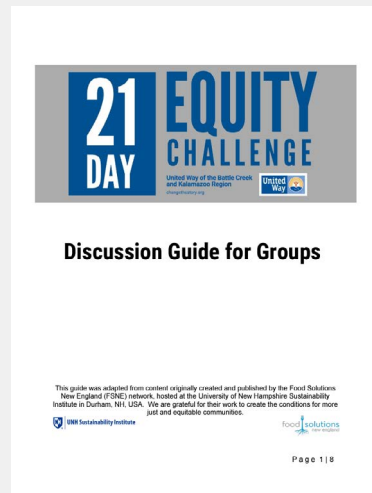
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## Activity

Review the facilitation tips on [pages 7-8](#) of the 21 Day Equity Challenge discussion guide for groups.



## Reflect

What strategies do you already use in your classroom?  
What more would you like to begin to use?

## Module 4 – Activity 4

### Preparing Students for Socratic Circle Experiences

#### Think-Pair-Share

Watch [this video \(2:00\)](#) entitled *Widen the Screen* with your students. Here is a list of initial guiding questions you can ask students:

- What was your initial response to the video? How did it make you feel and why do you think you felt this way?
- Think about this statement from the video: “If you think you know what happens next, ask yourself why.”
  1. What does this statement mean?
  2. Did you think you knew what was going to happen next? How could your prediction be tied to your personal identities?
  3. What prejudiced beliefs would people make in the scenarios below?
    - a. Assumptions about the boys in the convenience store?
    - b. Assumptions about the family outside the grocery store?
    - c. Assumptions about the man driving the car with the duffle bag?
- How does this video disrupt or interfere with stereotypes and prejudices?

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### Think-Pair-Share (continued)

- What stories of Blackness and people of color do you see in the media?
- Where do you see Black people or Black history represented in your education?
- How does this video connect to your world?

What additional questions would you add to this list:

## Module 4 – Activity 5

When considering participation, [Learning for Justice](#) advises educators:



**Rethink what participation looks like.** As adults, we are often conditioned to associate dynamic engagement with participation. Consider that when you are engaging in activities to teach honest history, or having difficult social justice conversations, participation may show up as silent reflection, a preference to write instead of verbalizing, or in lines of questioning (Pringle, 2022).

## Module 4 – Activity 5

University of Michigan's guide on creating inclusive classrooms reminds educators:



“Participation levels vary across all students, with some students more comfortable in listening roles and others more comfortable taking the lead in class discussions. While these discussion styles may be influenced by students’ past experiences, families of origin, and cultural reference points, a priori assumptions about student participation may hinder class discussion. It is important that you encourage participation among all students while also respecting the differences among students that will emerge. More equitable discussions can often be created by prefacing the discussion with a writing exercise that provides all students with the opportunity to clarify their thoughts on the discussion topic. It is also useful to remember that students’ participation levels evolve over the course of a term as they become more comfortable with the course, their classmates, and the instructor.”

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## Module 4 – Reflect

### Reflect

What could equitable participation look like in your classroom? Do you already provide students with multiple ways to participate? Are there voices in the classroom, including your own, that often dominate the conversation? Do you grade or monitor participation in any way? Should those practices be revisited and revised?

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## Module 4 – Activity 6

### Activity

Read this article on Inclusive and Equitable discussions [here](#) for ideas in ensuring equitable participation.

### Reflection

1. Are there any additional roles you would add for students?
2. How can you be flexible about participation as the resource suggests?
3. What reflection prompts can you brainstorm to help students evaluate their participation?

# Module 4 – Reflect

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## Starting with Self

Some good starting questions to ask yourself when developing curriculum are:

**1. Are there spaces where students can give input on what we're learning and room for me to adjust my instruction?**

**2. What racial and cultural experiences are represented in my curriculum? Is my curriculum telling a dominant narrative? What story do I want it to tell?**

## Module 4 – Reflect

3. What considerations about my students have I made when creating this curriculum?

4. How might my biases have informed the formation of this curriculum? How can I work against those?

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## Module 4 – Reflect

5. Are there district-level constraints within which I am working? If so, how can I supplement the required curriculum to add diverse perspectives or ask my students to turn a critical eye to the curriculum?

6. How am I including opportunities to celebrate my student's identities, experiences, and perspectives in this curriculum?

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# Module 5 – Introduction

## Assessment, Reflection & Growth

Reflecting on Personal Growth and Teaching Practices

### Teacher Self-Reflection

Just as it's important for students to reflect on their learning, teachers should also reflect student participation as well as their own facilitation. Questions to consider for teacher self-reflection are:

**How much did I speak during the discussion?**

**Did I provide my own opinions or refrain from sharing personal opinions? Why?**



## Module 5 – Introduction

Was the discussion focused?

How satisfied am I with the discussion and student participation?

What do I want to change for next time?

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## Module 5 – Introduction

### What did I learn from my students?

- *How will I use this learning to plan for future discussions?*

### What did I learn about my students?

- *How will I use this learning to make content relevant to my students?*
- *How can I use what I learned to connect more with my students?*

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## Module 5 – Activity 1

Participants can share this activity with colleagues who are also engaged in the Foundations of Socratic Circles and Social Justice Education modules of study. Ask them to journal their thoughts and ideas, and then encourage them to share 1-2 commitments they will make to themselves with you or another peer.

Here is a list of strategies.

### Caring for yourself in the face of difficult work

Our work can be overwhelming. Our challenge is to maintain our resilience so that we can keep doing the work with care, energy, and compassion.

#### 10 things to do for each day

1. Get enough sleep.
2. Get enough to eat.
3. Do some light exercise.
4. Vary the work that you do.
5. Do something pleasurable.
6. Focus on what you did well.
7. Learn from your mistakes.
8. Share a private joke.
9. Pray, meditate or relax.
10. Support a colleague.

### Switching on and off

It is your empathy for others that helps you do this work. It is vital to take good care of your thoughts and feelings by monitoring how you use them. Resilient workers know how to turn their feelings off when they go on duty, but on again when they go off duty. This is not denial; it is a coping strategy. It is a way they get maximum protection while working (switched off) and maximum support while resting (switched on).

#### How to become better at switching on and off

1. Switching is a conscious process. Talk to yourself as you switch.
2. Use images that make you feel safe and protected (switch off) or connected and care for (switch on) to help you switch.
3. Find rituals that help you switch as you start and stop work.
4. Breathe slowly and deeply to calm yourself when starting a tough job.

For more information visit [www.proqol.org](http://www.proqol.org)

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 Craig Higson-Smith, M.A., *South African Institute of Traumatic Stress*  
 Amy C. Hudnall, M.A., *ProQOL.org* and *Appalachian State University*  
 Henry E. Stamm, Ph.D., *ProQOL.org*

## Module 5 – Activity 1

You can practice self-care in multiple ways.

**What is one strategy you already practice on a regular basis?**

**What is one strategy you would like to begin implementing?**

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## Module 5 – Citations and Resources

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# Module 6 – Introduction

## Fostering Community Support for Conversations about Race in the Classroom

### Activity 1

Write a communication to parents, letter or email, explaining how you plan to begin using Socratic circles in your classroom to engage in conversations about race.

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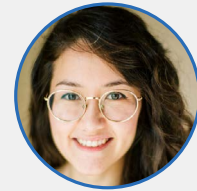
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# Module 6 – Activity 2

Read this reflection from an educator about students advocating to have different learning experiences about race and history in school.

## Students and Educators Pushing Back, Leading the Way



Sarah-SoonLing Blackburn

A few years ago, when my stepdaughter was still in elementary school, she asked me: “Why do we only learn about Indigenous Americans in the past tense at school?” She went on to describe what she *had* been taught about history. Unsurprisingly, it was the same white-centered, male-dominated narrative that I had learned in elementary school, that my American father had learned, and that his parents had learned before him. The difference was that she had the awareness to realize that what she was learning was simply that – one narrative – and she had the critical consciousness to question it.

There are many children with this critical consciousness, asking questions and advocating for access to diverse histories and complex narratives.

Lately, the news has been dominated by stories of (all too real, all too troubling) book bans and curricular erasures. At the same time, many young people are aware that this is happening and are pushing back. Across the country, students are organizing, protesting, walking out, and speaking out. They’re reading and distributing banned books. They’re even filing lawsuits in response to district policies.

When children are the ones advocating for their own access to honest, anti-racist education, the adults around them are more likely to rise to the occasion. Every day I work with educators who are actively diversifying and deepening their students’ access to racially honest history. Teachers are centering more texts by Black, Indigenous, and Latine authors. Schools are providing ethnic studies programs at younger ages. States are passing the first-ever mandates around Asian American studies. This work is happening at every level, and as long as young people continue to lead the way in advocating for this kind of learning, I retain my optimism for the future.

**Huge majorities of Americans believe that lessons about the history of racism, rather than being harmful to children, prepare children to build a better future for everyone.**

86% of Independents agree

95% of Democrats agree

76% of Republicans agree

[Ipsos Poll for Parents Together Among American Adults](#)

**Dr. Sarah-SoonLing Blackburn** is an educator, speaker and professional learning facilitator. Sarah has experience teaching at both the secondary and elementary levels and in 2011 was named Teacher of the Year at Lakeside Upper Elementary School in Lake Village, Arkansas. As a professional trainer, Sarah’s areas of focus have included workplace cultures, leadership skills, and diversity, equity and inclusion, working with organizations across the country such as Learning for Justice, Microsoft and LinkedIn. Sarah has an M.A. in Social Justice and Education from University College London’s Institute of Education and an Ed.D. from Johns Hopkins University. [Reflections on Racial Learning, 2023, p. 18](#)

## Module 6 – Activity 2

Record your reflections on this article here. What thoughts, ideas, and questions come up for you after reading this educator's reflection?

Engage

Module 3

Module 4

Module 5

Module 6



## Module 6 – Citations and Resources

*Reflections on Children’s Racial Learning, Essays and Dispatches from the Field.*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vIT1QaoaCcF9rH-yfRmzfan94VS-iZfi/view>

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