

## Activity Title: Racial Autobiography

**Source:** <http://sundown.afro.illinois.edu>; *Courageous Conversations* (Singleton & Linton, 2006)

<b>Type of Activity:</b>	Personal Identity
<b>Purpose of Activity:</b>	To help participants develop a fuller understanding of personal racial identity development and experiences linked to race.
<b>Approx Time:</b>	Varies based on activity format
<b>Best Used With:</b>	Small or large groups
<b>Materials Needed:</b>	Paper and pencil/pen for each participant Racial Autobiography Questions

### Steps to Implement:

This activity can take several forms. It can be carried out during one session, or can span several sessions, depending on the depth of exploration desired and reflection questions used.

See “Racial Autobiography Questions” for an extensive list of prompts that can be used as a springboard for writing/discussion.

### Racial Autobiography Questions

Jot down notes to answer these questions. Let them guide but not limit your thinking. Jot down any other memories or ideas that seem relevant to you. (You won't hand in these notes, but they'll help you participate in the discussion.)

#### 1. Family:

Are your parents the same race? Same ethnic group? Are your brothers and sisters? What about your extended family -- uncles, aunts, etc.?

Where did your parents grow up? What exposure did they have to racial groups other than their own? (Have you ever talked with them about this?)

What ideas did they grow up with, regarding race relations? (Again, do you know? Have you ever talked with them about this? Why or why not?)

Do you think of yourself as white? (If you're not white, do you think of yourself as black, or Asian-American, etc.?) Or just as "human"? Do you think of yourself as a member of an ethnic group? What is its importance to you?

#### 2. Neighborhood:

What is the racial makeup of the neighborhood you grew up in?

What was your first awareness of race? That there are different "races" and that you are one?

What was your first encounter with another race? Describe the situation.

Is there anyone here who hasn't heard the word "nigger"? Where did you first hear it?

What messages do you recall getting from your parents about race? From others when you were little?

### **3. Elementary and Middle School:**

What was the racial makeup of your elementary school? Of its teachers?

Think about the curriculum: what black Americans did you hear about? How did you celebrate Martin Luther King Day?

Cultural influences: TV, advertising, novels, music, movies, etc. What color God was presented to you? angels? S. Claus? The tooth fairy? dolls?

What was the racial makeup of organizations you were in? Girl Scouts, soccer team, church, etc.?

### **4. High School and community:**

What was the racial makeup of your high school? Of its teachers?

Was there interracial dating? Any racial slurs? Any conflict with members of another race?

Have you ever felt or been stigmatized because of your race, gender, or ethnic group membership? Because of your sexual orientation? social class?

What else was important about your high-school years — maybe something that didn't happen in high school but during that time?

What is the racial makeup of your home town? Of your metropolitan area? What of your experiences there, in summer camp, summer jobs, etc.?

### **5. Present and Future:**

What is the racial makeup of this institution? Of your circle(s) of friends here? Does it meet your needs?

Realistically, think about where you envision living as you start a family. What is its racial makeup? social class makeup? What occupation do you foresee, 10 years hence? What is its racial makeup? social class makeup?

### **6. General:**

What's the most important image, encounter, whatever, you've had regarding race? Have you felt threatened? In the minority? Have you felt privileged?

What do you want to tell us that we didn't ask about? About handicap, sexual orientation, social class, whatever?

Singleton & Linton (2006) have outlined a shorter version, called "Race in my Life," with broader questions such as:

"How much is your life impacted by race?"

“How does your own race impact you personally, locally, and immediately?”  
“What can you recall about the events and conversations related to race, race relations and/or racism that may have impacted your current perspectives and/or experiences?”

For a simpler version of this activity, see “Reflecting on Gender, Class, and Race in Dyads”

**Potential Challenges:**

This can be a valid exercise if working with a team with which there is an established, strong relationship; however, it may be too intense for a beginning activity.

**Insights Gained:**

Deeper personal understanding of racial identity

**Connections to PBIS:**