

BARBY ASANTE

**COUNTLESS WAYS
OF KNOWING**

**A MIXTAPE
ON EDUCATION AS
A PRACTICE OF
FREEDOM**

**CRACKS IN
THE CURRICULUM**

RESOURCE 3

Cracks in the Curriculum is a workshop series and publishing platform, which aims to bring artists and educators together to think about how to address pressing social issues in the classroom. The series explores key questions and themes that run through the Serpentine Education, Exhibition and Live programmes. The third edition, *Countless Ways of Knowing – A Mixtape on Education as a Practice of Freedom*, aims to open up a space for teachers and students to talk about race and racism in the classroom. The content emerged from a workshop with Barby Asante, educators and Serpentine Education at the Serpentine Gallery.

The resource features a series of questions for critical discussion, an experimental digital collage activity, a series of quotes and a reading list for further study. The sections fold down to A4 so they can be photocopied and used for lesson planning. Towards the end of the resource is a quote by James Baldwin selected by Barby Asante, alongside a still from Asante's project with sorryyoufeeluncomfortable *Baldwin's Nigger RELOADED*.

Countless Ways of Knowing – A Mixtape on Education as a Practice of Freedom is an invitation for educators in primary, secondary, further and higher education to create safe spaces for people of colour (POC) to feel confident to speak their lived experiences in the classroom.

In this resource we speak about Black Lives Matter as a powerful and visible movement addressing systematic racism and anti-blackness around the world. This is not to undermine any other group working towards the elimination of racism or to privilege one group over another, but because BLM is most visible it brings into focus a number of very significant questions:

- Why do Black Lives Matter?**
- How do we as educators develop discursive and creative opportunities to support understanding of why Black Lives Matter?**
- What opportunities are there for young people to critically and creatively transform the polarising narrative around race?**

Barby Asante is a London-based artist, curator and educator whose work explores space, place and identity. The drive of her work is to create spaces for dialogue, collective thinking, ritual and re-enactment. Using archival material in the broadest sense, she is interested in breaking down the language of archive, not to insert or present alternatives to dominant narratives but to interrupt, interrogate and explore the effects and possibilities of the unheard and the missing.

Recent projects include: *As Always a Painful Declaration of Independence. For Ama. For Aba. For Charlotte and Adjoa*, an ongoing project that performatively collects stories of Women of Colour, of which an iteration was shown in the *Diaspora Pavilion*, Venice 2017 and *Run Through*, a collaboration with architect Gian Givanni which showed in *BLUEPRINT: Whose urban appropriation is this?*, curated by Metro 54 at TENT, Rotterdam. She is also part of agency for agency, previously working in collaboration with Serpentine Youth Forum with students from Westminster Academy.

In an article in *The Guardian* in 2010, 'Multiculturalism Undermines Diversity', the writer, lecturer and broadcaster Kenan Malik poses the question 'What are the social roots of racism and what structural changes are required to combat it?'. The poignancy of this question to current conversations around race and racism today couldn't be more urgent!

Across the world we see more lines drawn and divisions created along the lines of race and ethnicity: the inflammatory rhetoric and actions of Donald Trump, the rise of the right in Europe, Islamophobia, deaths of black men and women at the hands of the police, the Black Lives Matter movement and Indigenous communities claiming agency and land rights.

Every day people of colour are expressing the lived experience of racism, in particular through social media, trying to articulate this within a culture of systematic racism and white supremacy, and often getting shouted down for this exposure. How can we open up conversations about race and racism in the classroom, in order to effect the current polarising narrative and allow young people to critically and creatively consider ways to transform this narrative?

A mixtape is usually a home-made compilation of music recorded to a cassette tape. Although the cassette tape is no longer a widely used thing, the concept of the mixtape is something that has not gone away, particularly in hip-hop and dancehall culture. Mixtapes were a way of sharing music, ideas and narratives, through peer-to-peer networks and informal sales. Some mixtapes have become legendary and have been reproduced in digital formats, with originals fetching high prices from collectors.

More recently, artists such as Larry Achiampong, Sonda Perry, Amal Alhaag, Hannah Catherine Jones and Maria Guggenbichler have taken this idea and expanded it into the visual through mixing digital images, videos and music to make live 'mixtape' performances. It could also be said that Arthur Jafa uses a similar aesthetic strategy to make his work.

My proposal for a mixtape methodology is to think about this as a way to explore issues and express opinions through creating digital mixes of images, texts, video and sounds. I think about this as similar to a sketch book or as playful way of sharing. It's like an active collage, a way of collecting and curating research material. The idea is to think about and explore different narratives and perspectives through story-telling, thinking about given narratives and exploring truth and fictions around race and other issues. This is a simple activity that stimulates frank discussions, allowing young people to express opinions and ideas through mediums they are exploring outside of school.

EXERCISE 1

WHY DO BLACK LIVES MATTER?

- **Begin by asking the question ‘why do Black Lives Matter’? Or ‘how do you understand racism and race relations in the UK’?**
- **Working in groups of three or four, ask the young people to answer this by choosing between three and eight videos, news stories and/or sounds from the internet. Ask each group to discuss and select the content together.**
- **Once they have made a selection ask the young people to decide together the order they will present the material to create a narrative about their ideas.**
- **Finally, invite each group to present their choices to the rest of the class and use this as a way to develop the discussion.**

EXERCISE 2

DISCUSSING BLACK LIVES MATTER PRINCIPLES

Black Lives Matter was founded in 2013, by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman. Black Lives Matter is now a member-led global network of more than 40 chapters including chapters in London and Nottingham. BLM are known for their work on highlighting and resisting police violence and anti-black racism.

- **Go to** www.blmla.org/guiding-principles
- **Read their guiding principles**
- **Discuss**

EXERCISE 3

WRITING A FICTIONAL STORY

Using the BLM principles and the thoughts and questions that have emerged in the discussions, invite students to write a fictional story that imagines the guiding principles in action in the near or imagined future.

- What will the future look like?
- How will people relate to each other?
- Will we be able to accept our differences in the future?
- What impact would this have on our societies?

EXERCISE 4

STAGING THE STORY

- **Ask students to work in groups to select a topic from the BLM principles and develop a script for a factual podcast or a role-play scenario that could be used to share the discussion with others.**
- **How do the principles relate to personal experiences and understandings of race and race relations?**
- **Are there any stories that illustrate these experiences and understandings?**
- **Working in groups, choose a creative way to tell this story. How does it relate to the discussion about principles?**
- **Upload the podcast and share with others.**
- **Present the role play to another group of young people and have a discussion with them.**

You might also open up to more local concerns relating to experiences and understandings of race and racism. Things to critically explore could include:

- **Slavery and colonialism, looking beyond historical facts, independence and its legacies including immigration.**
- **Post-war migration and the stories of people like Kelso Cochrane, the Race Relations Acts and Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech.**
- **The riots in the 1980s, education policies, policing/SUS laws, anti-racist movements and actions.**
- **War on terror and the rise of Islamophobia.**
- **Police brutality and racist violence, such as the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the recent murder of Jo Cox.**
- **Multiculturalism, post-blackness, the time of Black Lives Matter, Trump and Brexit.**

Using the above points and more, what activities and actions can be created to explore race and racism and encourage young people to develop transformative thinking?

**TO ANY CITIZEN OF
THIS COUNTRY WHO
FIGURES HIMSELF AS
RESPONSIBLE—AND
PARTICULARLY THOSE
OF YOU WHO DEAL
WITH THE MINDS AND
HEARTS OF YOUNG
PEOPLE—MUST BE
PREPARED TO
“GO FOR BROKE”.**

OR TO PUT IT ANOTHER
WAY, YOU MUST
UNDERSTAND THAT
IN THE ATTEMPT
TO CORRECT SO MANY
GENERATIONS OF BAD
FAITH AND CRUELTY,
WHEN IT IS OPERATING
NOT ONLY IN
THE CLASSROOM
BUT IN SOCIETY,

YOU WILL MEET
THE MOST FANTASTIC,
THE MOST BRUTAL,
AND THE MOST
DETERMINED
RESISTANCE.
THERE IS NO POINT IN
PRETENDING THAT
THIS WON'T HAPPEN.

Quote from James Baldwin,
A Talk to Teachers or The Negro Child
— *His Self-Image*, 1963



Still from *Baldwin's Nigger RELOADED*,
Barby Asante and sorryyoufeeluncomfortable
October Gallery, 2015

But all our phrasing – race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy – serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015)

Culture comes into play at precisely the point where biological individuals become subjects, and that what lies between the two is not some automatically constituted ‘natural’ process of socialization but much more complex processes of formation.

- Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans, *Visual Culture: The Reader* (1999)

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.

- bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994)

FURTHER STUDY

- Eula Bliss, *Notes from No Man’s Land: American Essays* (2010)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015)
- Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (2018)
- Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. 4th ed. (2002)
- bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994)

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