

Stay W.O.K.E.

A 4-step Process to Increasing Cultural Awareness



W: aWare

Step 1- Look Inside Yourself: *My Personal Cultural/Racial History*

“We all carry inside us, people who came before us.”

—Liam Callanan

Directions: *Create a personal cultural/racial history using genealogy records, personal accounts, and your own memory. Use the guiding questions to help you in your research.*

Arrival in America

1. Who, in your family, was the first to come to America?
2. How did your family get to where you currently live?
(Example: After arriving at Ellis Island in the early 1800s, my German, Scottish-Irish ancestors settled in the Appalachian regions of Eastern Kentucky and Western Virginia and began work in the coal mines. Sometime during the first half of the 20th century, both sides of my family moved into the Ohio River Valley and eventually my grandparents all ended up in Evansville, Indiana.)
3. How did you move from your home of origin to where you are now (if applicable)?

Living Life

1. Consider your ancestors: How did the various generations earn a living?
2. Consider your ancestors: What kinds of homes did the various generations live in?

Family Traits

1. Has your family historically belonged to a specific religious affiliation (denomination, etc.)?
2. Has anyone in your family been recognized for their accomplishments? In what industry/area?

My People

1. Were there any difficulties, struggles or hardships endured by the people of your culture? Explain.
2. What are some of the customs, traditions, and celebrations that are important to your family/culture?

Reflect

1. What realizations or emotional reactions did you encounter as you completed this activity?
2. Are there any parts of your family’s past that you wish you could erase? If so, explain.
3. Now that you are aware of your own personal racial/cultural history, what hopes and dreams do you have for your future descendants?

O: Open-Minded

Step 2- Small Group Discussion: Listen to and learn from others

“We don’t always have to agree, but we must empower each other, we must find the common ground, we must build bridges across our differences to pursue the common good.”

—Cory Booker

Directions: In small groups of no more than four, share your reflections on your cultural/racial history. Follow the directions below.

1. Choose a group leader

*The group leader will be responsible for guiding the group through this discussion activity.**

2. Group Agreement

Group Leader: *We will start by reading the Group Agreement aloud together:*

In this discussion we will:

- ▶ Acknowledge each other’s responses,
- ▶ Participate in the conversation,
- ▶ Listen with respect,
- ▶ Remain open-minded,
- ▶ Struggle together,
- ▶ Work together to gain a deeper understanding of each other and
- ▶ Understand that although we don’t have to agree, we must work to build bridges across our common differences in order to pursue the greater good.

3. Sharing

Have each group member take turns reading their personal cultural/racial history aloud. Ask group members not to ask questions or make comments while people are sharing.

4. Group Discussion

The group leader will facilitate the discussion. Use the guiding questions to help with the discussion:

1. Share some surprising or interesting information that you learned during your research.
2. If you could go back in time and erase any of your family history, what would you erase? Why?
3. Did any of your ancestors participate in racism, sexism or some other form of cultural oppression? If so, how did you feel upon learning this information?
4. Were any of your ancestors affected by cultural oppression from another cultural group? If so, how did you feel upon learning this information?
5. If you could make amends for the cultural oppression carried out by your ancestors, what would you say?
6. If your ancestors were oppressed by another cultural group, what would you like to say to the oppressors?
7. How do you think your own personal cultural/racial history affects the way you interact with people from other cultures?
8. How do you think the personal cultural/racial history of others affects the way people from other cultures interact with you?
9. What is your reaction to the information you have heard today? Share feelings in a general way without directing comments at a specific group member.
10. Go around the group and each group member will say something like, “Thank you for listening to my narrative today. I really appreciate what you shared with me. I hope we can continue this open and honest dialogue.”

**Note to the group leader: If your group is having a hard time communicating in an open, courteous and honest way, you may want to use the “How to Communicate When Discussing Difficult Subjects” sheet to outline specific guidelines.*

How to Communicate When Discussing Difficult Subjects

To facilitate difficult conversations, equip participants with strategies they can use to persevere during difficult conversations. Here are some pedagogical approaches to help group members learn to sit with their discomfort and to moderate it over time.

1. REITERATE
2. CONTEMPLATE
3. RESPIRE
4. COMMUNICATE

Explain these steps as a way to communicate while feeling difficult emotions. These steps won't prevent or change the emotions students may feel, but they can help them self-regulate.

Step 1: Reiterate

Restate what you heard. This step enables group members to reflect on what they have heard as opposed to what they think they may have heard. Repeating what they have heard limits miscommunication and misinformation.

Step 2: Contemplate

Count to 10 before responding. Participants can think about their responses and use the time to compose what they want to say. Taking time to think about their responses helps move group members away from immediate emotional responses that can potentially derail the conversation.

Step 3: Respire

Take a breath to check in with yourself. Suggesting members take a few breaths before responding may help them settle their thoughts and emotions during difficult conversations.

Step 4: Communicate

Speak with compassion and thoughtful-ness. Participants should do their best to speak as they want to be spoken to, assuming good intentions and seeking understanding. Explain that when they disagree with something someone has said, they should focus on challenging the statement rather than the person who said it.

Adapted from Let's Talk: Discussing Race, Racism and Other Difficult Topics With Students, a publication of TeachingTolerance.org. Original PDF can be found at <http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/TT%20Difficult%20Conversations%20web.pdf>

K: Knowledgeable

Step 3- Self-Reflection: Integrate new knowledge

“Real knowledge is to know the extent of one’s ignorance”

–Confucius

Directions: Reflect on the new knowledge gained from your personal cultural/racial history and your group discussion. Use the guiding questions to aid in your self-reflection.

1. Who I Am- Consider what you’ve learned about your personal cultural/racial history: What connections can you see between your cultural and ancestral history and your life today?

2. How I Feel- What realizations have you had during this process?

3. Thinking About Others- What new knowledge did you learn about other cultural/racial groups during this process?

4. Moving Forward- How has your understanding of other cultural/racial groups changed or shifted?

E: Engaged

Step 4- Brainstorming: Encourage Others to Build Awareness

“As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him.”

–Mahatma Gandhi

Directions: *Gather together as a large group and brainstorm ways to encourage others to build cultural awareness. Use the guiding questions to facilitate your brainstorming session. Have one group member record answers on a white board, poster board or another format.*

- 1. Who We Are-** *Think about your organization. What are your strengths in terms of cultural awareness? What areas could use improvement?*
- 2. What We've Learned-** *Think back through the first three steps of the W.O.K.E. process. What new insights have you gained?*
- 3. Opportunities for Growth-** *Could other groups within your organization (families, the community, etc.) benefit from the W.O.K.E. process? How could you implement this?*
- 4. Adapting the Process-** *What changes or adaptations would your organization need to put in place in order for this process to be most effective with your other constituencies (families, the community, etc.)?*
- 5. Planning for Barriers-** *What barriers might need to be addressed (childcare, transportation, work schedules, participation, etc.)?*
- 6. Who's Doing What?-** *Assign specific roles to group members, and make a timeline for implementation.*
- 7. Remember-** *Staying W.O.K.E. means continuing to look for and make known the injustices and oppression (both overt and covert) in the system.*

Always be aWare, Open-minded, Knowledgeable, and stay Engaged.