

Student Guidelines for Difficult Conversations

In a country as large and diverse as Canada, we have so much we can learn about ourselves, about each other, about what it means to be in treaty, and about what kind of society we are working to create. By participating in REEL CANADA programming, and by listening, sharing, and engaging with peers with diverse backgrounds and experiences, we hope you can find truth, support, and solidarity in familiar stories, as well as greater understanding of those lived realities that differ from your own.

Some of our programmes touch on forms of discrimination and oppression, such as racism and colonialism. **Because these topics can be difficult or uncomfortable to discuss, we hope you will keep the following points in mind:**

- We all have different identities and come from different backgrounds. If you approach these topics with respect for each other's unique contributions and challenges, you'll be better able to learn.
- Some of you and your classmates live with the effects of racism and other forms of discrimination in your lives. Everyone should acknowledge that we are not discussing these themes in an abstract sense, but rather as something that causes real harm to us, or the people around us.
 - For those of you who live with these realities, it's okay if these conversations are too difficult to participate in. Know that you have the freedom to step away and take a break at any point, or get help from school counselors or the support resources in this document. Also, know that you are not expected to represent your entire communities when you share.
 - For those of you who do not live with these realities, recognize this as a privilege, and approach these conversations with that knowledge. As you learn more about topics like racism, you may experience discomfort. These feelings are a normal part of learning. Working through them together *and* individually is important.
- You may feel awkward or be afraid of saying the wrong thing or not knowing the right words. It's okay to make mistakes. If your words are hurtful—even if you don't intend to harm—apologize, learn from it, and keep going.
- It is not reasonable or acceptable to expect others to teach you about their experiences with discrimination and oppression. And others shouldn't expect you to teach them about yours. Rather, the goal is to create a safe space where everyone feels empowered to speak their truths.
- Start by assuming that none of us have the answers to big questions, so our goal should be to learn by listening, reflecting on what others say, and speaking from our own experiences.

- You can disagree, but do so respectfully. Don't focus disagreements on the person, but on engaging with their ideas and perspectives.
- When we talk about the lived realities of people who are socially and culturally marginalized whether based on race, ability, sexuality or other factors, please always remember that there is no single experience of any of these identities. There is rich diversity in cultures, histories, beliefs, and relationships within and between these communities.
- We hope that whatever you take away from these events, you see it as part of an ongoing process of making anti-discrimination a practice you're continually developing, so that you can better address the ways racism and oppression are present in your world, be better equipped to confront these, and to demonstrate to others how to divest from harmful systems.

For resources to support you, visit <https://reelcanada.ca/student-support-resources/>