



Race-Based Trauma

Competency

Educators will use their knowledge of how individual and institutional racism, racial bias, discrimination, and microaggressions can cause traumatic reactions in students of color, to create a safe and brave environment that can help students cope with race-based trauma.

Key Method

The educator learns about the history and impact of systemic racism on students and designs a healing-centered environment to support students.

Method Components

What is Trauma?

According to the Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center, trauma “results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening.” These events, and a person’s response to them, can lead to lasting adverse effects on how they function—impacting their mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being. Traumatic experiences can include abuse, neglect, sudden separation from a loved one, poverty, racism, discrimination, violence, war, natural disasters, and more. Traumatic experiences can also include other forms of social oppression, such as sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, ableism, etc.

Historical trauma is also a part of the broader definition of trauma. It is loosely defined by the cumulative harm to a group caused by a historical event (e.g., genocide, violent colonization, and slavery) and whose effects impact multiple generations.



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Children who experience trauma can enter your class believing that the world, and even school, is a scary place and that trusting others is risky. Some children may be most impacted by racism and other forms of oppression through their experiences in schools that have policies and practices that overwhelmingly harm students of color, LGBTQ+ and other historically marginalized groups.

The impact of traumatic experiences are so significant that they can hinder the brain's normal development. This causes behavioral, emotional, academic, and other developmental changes that a person who has not experienced a traumatic event is far less likely to have. Seemingly simple things—a facial expression, one's proximity, or tone of voice—may trigger memories of a painful event. This can lead to various reactions, including aggression, isolation, perfectionism and more.

While research shows that trauma affects one in four children, evidence suggests that with supportive educators and a healing-centered school community, students can learn, achieve, and begin to heal.

What is Race-Based Trauma?

According to Mental Health America, "Racial trauma, or race-based traumatic stress (RBTS), refers to the mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes. Any individual that has experienced an emotionally painful, sudden, and uncontrollable racist encounter is at risk of suffering from a race-based traumatic stress injury. In the U.S., Black, Indigenous, and people of color are most vulnerable when they live under a system of white supremacy in society at large and within its systems (i.e., criminal and legal systems, educational, and health and mental health systems).

Experiences of race-based discrimination can have detrimental psychological impacts on individuals and their wider communities. In some individuals, prolonged incidents of racism can lead to symptoms like those experienced with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This can look like depression, anger, recurring thoughts of the event, physical reactions (e.g. headaches, chest pains, insomnia), hypervigilance, low-self-esteem, and mentally distancing from the traumatic events. Some or all of these symptoms may be present in someone with RBTS and symptoms can look different across different cultural groups. Racist and oppressive systems—whether in schools or the larger community—cause great harm to children and adults. *Source: Mental Health America*
<https://www.mhanational.org/racial-trauma>

Additionally, all students are exposed to images, narratives and stories about race and racial difference through the media, daily experiences and their own personal family history. Oftentimes, the messages underlying these media about people of color are negative and reflective of stereotypes that are dehumanizing. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network states, "While all students can be susceptible to distress from direct experience or viewing coverage of traumatic



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events related to racism, BIPOC students may be more likely to experience distress from acts of violence and aggression against people of color (Harrell, 2000).

Repeated exposure to trauma-related media stories focusing on perceived racism can impact the student emotionally, psychologically, and even physically. Stories in the media may fail to acknowledge students' history, communities, or shared narratives of resiliency.”

To help all students develop empathy, the ability to recognize unfairness in our society, and the ability to take action when they see it, it is important to discuss the impact of U.S. history and systemic racism on the present day with all students, regardless of their racial identity.

Source: National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). [Addressing Race & Trauma in the Classroom: A Resource For Educators](#)

Four Types of Racism

When most people think of racism, they think of individual acts of meanness, discrimination, violence and/or harm toward Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. While this is one aspect of racism, the reality is that racism takes many forms. Note the following four types of racism:

- **Internalized Racism** includes our private beliefs and the learned prejudice we have towards people of different races or ethnicities. It is in our thinking and actions and can manifest in two ways:
 - Internalized oppression—an assumed racial inferiority by people of color
 - Internalized privilege—an assumed superiority by white people
- **Interpersonal Racism** shows up when people interact with others who are racially different from them. These are public expressions of racism and can include microaggressions, bias, racial slurs, and other hateful words and actions.
- **Institutional Racism** is racism perpetrated by organizations and institutions that have the power to affect large groups of people that belong to a racial group. It shows up in both formal and informal ways and in the systematic distribution of resources, power, and opportunity in our society. It is present in every corner of the U.S. and is maintained by policies that privilege and protect whiteness.
- **Structural Racism** includes the history, culture and ideology of institutions and policies that legitimize the process that gives privilege and power to white people at the expense of communities of color.

These types of racism affect students and adults across classrooms, schools and districts in our nation. From kindergarten–12th grade, students of color and educators may encounter internalized, interpersonal, institutional and structural



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racism that serves to create and or maintain racial inequity in their educational and or professional experiences.

According to Mental Health America, the mental and emotional injury caused by racism, bias and discrimination can lead to race-based trauma and generational trauma connected to race. This affects a student's self-image, self-esteem, academic engagement, behavior, and more. It is important to note that racism also harms white students. Beliefs and feelings of immunity or superiority can lead white students to have an over-inflated sense of self, a skewed view of all people in our society, and a lack of empathy.

Sources:

1. [University of Missouri—Inclusion, Diversity and Equity. Addressing the Four Levels of Racism](#)
2. [National Museum of African American History and Culture—Being Antiracist](#)

Signs of Trauma

Depending on the student's age, they may exhibit these signs of distress that result from trauma:

Preschool Students	Elementary School Students	Middle and High School Students
Bedwetting	Changes in their behavior such as aggression, anger, irritability, withdrawal from others, and sadness	A sense of responsibility or guilt for the bad things that have happened
Thumbsucking	Difficulty adjusting to a new school	Feelings of shame or embarrassment
Acting younger than their age	Difficulty building friendships or getting along with peers	Feelings of helplessness
Difficulty separating from their parents	Fear of separation from parents	Changes in how they think about the world
Temper tantrums	Fear of something bad happening	Loss of faith
Aggressive behavior like hitting, kicking, throwing things, or biting		Problems in relationships, including peers, family, and teachers
Not playing with other kids their age		Conduct problems
Repetitive playing out of events related to trauma		



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exposure		
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Definitions

For the purposes of this micro-credential, please use the following definitions:

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory is an intellectual movement and loosely organized framework of legal analysis based on the premise that race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of color. Critical race theorists hold that the law and legal institutions in the United States are inherently racist insofar as they function to create and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between white people and people of color, especially African Americans and Native American and Indigenous communities given the history of slavery and genocide in the U.S.

Anti-bias

Anti-bias means opposing or prohibiting unfair discrimination against people based on race, religion, etc.; preventing or counteracting bias.

Anti-racist

Anti-racist means confronting and opposing racism and implementing policies and practices that promote equity and abandoning those that do not promote equity.

Bias

Bias means prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared to another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.

Brave Environment

A brave environment is one in which everyone is willing to take a risk to authentically engage.

Racism is

- (1) The belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race;
- (2) a system of advantages and disadvantages based on one's physical and/or social qualities; and
- (3) having personal prejudice and bias against others based solely on their physical and/or social qualities.

Discrimination



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Discrimination is a political, economic, or legal system that engages in or perpetuates actions based on race or otherwise reinforces racial inequalities in wealth and income, education, health care, civil rights, and other areas.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental slights, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatized, historically or culturally marginalized groups. Microaggressions happen more frequently than even overt forms of racism in many settings.

Race-Based Trauma

Racial trauma, or race-based traumatic stress (RBTS), refers to the mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes.

Privilege

A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or that is available only to a particular person or group. Privilege can exist in many forms. Clinical psychologist Dr. Pamela Hayes identified how privilege can be thought about in the ADDRESSING Model— **A**ge (and generational influences), **D**evelopmental and acquired **D**isabilities, **R**eligion and spiritual identity, **E**thnicity and racial identity, **S**ocioeconomic status, **S**exual Orientation, **I**ndigenous Heritage, **N**ational Origin and **G**ender.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

Safe Environment

A safe environment is one that promotes feeling safe both within oneself and from the risk of physical or psychological harm from others. In a trauma-informed school and classroom, psychological safety is clearly defined for students; potential triggers or trauma-reminders that may undermine psychological safety are identified; and plans are in place to help youth re-establish psychological safety when being triggered or experiencing traumatic stress reactions.

White Supremacy Culture

White Supremacy Culture is a form of racism centered upon the belief that white people are superior to people of other racial identities and that White people should politically, economically, and socially dominate people of color. While often associated with violence perpetrated by the KKK and other white supremacist groups, white supremacy also describes a political ideology and method of systemic oppression that perpetuates and maintains the social, political, historical and/or industrial dominance of white people.



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Supporting Students Who Have or Still are Experiencing Racial Trauma

The social climate of society today can be overwhelming, violent and stressful. Students of color are especially vulnerable to an onslaught of race-based violence, and systemic inequities. This can lead students to feel unwelcome, misunderstood, and fearful. As educators, it is our responsibility to understand and recognize race-based trauma. Below are some ways you can support students who may have, or may still be, experiencing race-based trauma and foster empathy in all students.

As a prerequisite to taking action to support equity, educators must do the “inner work” to understand and address personal biases and their influence on your instructional and disciplinary practices. Educators must reflect on the way one thinks about and interacts with students, families and colleagues. Engaging in an on-going process of critical self-reflection will be important to taking action that effectively promotes equity.

With honest self-reflection, educators can create a safe and brave learning environment for all students with the following actions:

- Teach activities that help students learn more about and take pride in their own racial identity.
- Help students learn about other’s racial identities and ethnic backgrounds and how they are different from their own (whether or not students with these identities are in your class or school).
- Build community and trust among your students with team building activities for your students
- Encourage the sharing of ideas without placing judgement on them
- Incorporate anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) teaching pedagogy
- Incorporate tasks to make connections with the lived experiences and cultures of all learners
- Use formative assessments to identify individual needs of learners
- Demonstrate for learners and practice different ways they can:
 - Participate in class
 - Work collaboratively
 - Resolve conflicts peacefully
- Take on leadership roles at local, state and/or national levels to lead initiatives that interrupt systems and practices that perpetuate racially traumatic experiences (e.g., microaggressions, discrimination, erasure, discipline practices, etc.)
- Include social and emotional learning (SEL) in your educational lessons and activities. *The five core SEL competencies are:



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- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

**Based on the CASEL's SEL framework*

Suggestions for doing research on community and school data

Learn more about racial trauma in schools and communities

- Investigate the racialized history of your state, district, and school
- Explore your current school and district data
 - What are the racial demographics of schools across your district? What are the neighborhood boundaries? What is the economic status of the various neighborhoods?
 - What resources are available at each school (e.g., access to honors, AP and other advanced coursework, variety of school clubs and extracurricular activities, etc.)
 - What does disaggregated data regarding academic achievement, graduation rates, suspension and discipline rates, and other indicators reveal? What trends do you notice across your school, district, and state?
 - What schools have the most experienced teachers? What communities or neighborhoods do these schools serve?
 - What schools have teachers with the least amount of experience?
- Explore your current school and district practices—what policies, practices and generally accepted ways of operating or engaging with students and families might promote race-based trauma?
- See “Research Racial Injustice in your State & District” in the resource section for tools to help you conduct your research.

Managing Your Own Trauma

As educators, we can become overwhelmed with the issues and problems that our students might bring to school. That is why it is important for you to take care of yourself and avoid compassion fatigue, burn out and or secondary trauma. You should practice self-care strategies and know when and how to seek support from family, friends, and or professionals. In some cases, it may also be helpful to assess your own history of trauma and consider how it may be triggered while trying to take care of others. If this happens, please see the resources below for additional support. Remember this familiar airplane adage: In case of an emergency, put on



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your oxygen mask first before helping others put on theirs.. These are some suggestions for self-care:

Addressing Triggers in the Moment	Long-Term Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Breathing exercises● Yoga● Mindfulness activities● Journaling● Taking time away● Taking media breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Cultivate and maintain healthy relationships● Attend workshops on social emotional skills● Journaling● Therapy● Developing a regular mindfulness and meditation practice

Supporting Rationale and Research

Ellias, Maurice J. "Who Do You Call On? Rooting Out Implicit Bias."
www.edutopia.org/, 21 May 2021.

Linbong, Andrew. "Microaggressions Are A Big Deal: How to Talk Them Out and When to Walk Away."
www.npr.org/, 9 June 2020

The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI).
www.challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/

Shade, Kelly, and Oberg. "Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms."
www.ghequityinstitute.com, 1997

Tutt, Paige. "A High School Turns to Former Students to Address Racism on Campus."
www.edutopia.org/, 21 May 2021

Resources

Racial Trauma
[Medical News Today—What to Know about Racial Trauma](#)



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[National Child Traumatic Stress Network—Addressing Race and Trauma in the Classroom](#)

[Harvard Graduate School of Education—Responding to Racial Trauma](#)

[National Child Traumatic Stress Network—Cultural Responsiveness to Racial Trauma](#)

[Coping with Racial Trauma](#)

Racism and Bias

[Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics—The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health](#)

[Learning for Justice—Social Justice Standards: The Teaching Tolerance Anti Bias Framework](#)

[If We Aren't Addressing Racism, We Aren't Addressing Trauma by Dena Simmons \(article\)](#)

[NEA EdJustice — 5 Things Educators Can Do to Address Bias In Their School](#)

[What is a Microaggression?](#)

[Empowering Educators: A Guidebook on Race & Racism \(ABAR Pedagogy\)](#)

[Moving the Race Conversation Forward \(video\)](#)

[Theoretic Framework of Racism: A Gardener's Tale](#)

[Four Levels of Racism](#)

[BU Center for Antiracist Research](#)

[Understanding & Interrupting Implicit Bias](#)

[Four Tools for Interrupting Bias](#)

Social and Emotional Learning

[Why we can't afford whitewashed social emotional learning by Dena Simmons \(article\)](#)

[Supporting our Youngest Learners: Trauma, Mental Health Concerns, and Social Emotional Wellness](#)

[everfi Social Emotional Curriculum](#)



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Case Studies

[Basic Tips on How to Write a Case Study](#)

[What Exactly is a Case Study? | UniversalClass](#)

[Top 21 Empathy Interview Questions and Answers](#)

[Empathy Interviews—Learning Forward](#)

[Conquering Teacher Home Visits with Three Simple Questions](#)

[The National School Report Card](#)

Research Racial Injustice in your State & District

[Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education \(article\)](#)

[Equal Justice Initiative—A History of Racial Injustice Calendar](#) (search for your state's name to see historical race-related events for your state)

[State Department of Education](#)

[The Nation's Report Card](#)

[US Department of Education—Civil Rights Data Collection](#)

[US Department of Education—Data and Statistics](#)

Sources:

[Addressing the Four Levels of Racism](#)

[Being Antiracist](#)

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3, and be proficient for all components in Part 2.



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Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

Before you start this work, we recommend that you take the free “Race IAT” test from [Project Implicit](#). You will not submit this for review, but it may help you frame your work.

(250–500 words)

Please use the suggested word count as a guide to answer the following contextual questions. This will help our assessor understand your current context for working on this micro-credential.

Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

1. How do you think earning this micro-credential will improve your school, classroom, or teaching assignment? Compare and contrast where you went to school with the demographic makeup of your classroom, school, or district. Please include:
 - a. free and reduced lunch rate
 - b. race and ethnicity of student population
 - c. special needs
 - d. discipline data
 - e. second language learners
 - f. any other important information
2. How do you support students who may be experiencing racialized trauma in your classroom or school?

Passing: Response provides reasonable and accurate information that justifies the reason for choosing this micro-credential to address specific needs of both the teacher and the student. Educators include a learning goal that describes what they hope to gain from earning this micro-credential.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the **three** artifacts described below as evidence of your learning.

**Please do not include any information that will make you or your students identifiable to your reviewers.*

Artifact 1: Impact in Community

Identify the impacts of history and systemic racism in your school community (3–5 pages, single spaced and 12-point font)



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Conduct a research project to explore the ways race has impacted your school community. Gather the following data for the present day and as far back as you can find:

Citywide Data:

- Racial demographics
- Income levels across racial demographics
- Home ownership rates across racial demographics
- Percentage of college degrees obtained by race
- Population distribution across the city by race (e.g., where do the majority of students of color and white students live?)
- Locations of hospitals in the community
- Number of full-service grocery stores and in which neighborhoods they are located
- Laws, policies, or practices that created opportunity for some community residents and created barriers and disadvantage for others

School District Data

- Year the district was established
- Racial demographics
- Percentage of students by race in gifted, AP and honors classes
- Percent of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch
- Where did students attend school before the district was created?

School Data

- Racial demographics
- Percentage of students by race in gifted, AP and honors classes
- Percent of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch
- Year the school was founded
- For whom or what is the school named

Analyze your findings and include responses to the following questions:

- When you compare data between your city, district, and school, what do you notice? What is different between the present day and the past?
- In the past, did any group receive an advantage or disadvantage over the others? If so, how? What about in the present?
- Does your analysis lead you to identify any past or current inequities in your city, district, or school? If so, what are they?
- If you identified any inequities, when and how did they begin? How might they be affecting students today?



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- How might your research identify factors that may have contributed to the presence of race-based traumatic stress (the mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes)?

Artifact 2: Plan

Develop a plan to create a safe and brave environment to help students cope with race-based trauma.

Given your research and analysis, draft a plan to create a safe and brave environment for students. Be sure to include detailed answers to the following questions:

- How will you create psychological safety and trust among your students? (Include examples of actions you will take.)
- How will you give students options for managing their emotions?
- How will you help students share their cultural experiences?
- How will you create space to help students discuss what they are feeling, hearing and seeing (especially as it may relate to race-based current events)?

Artifact 3: Summary of Results

After you have developed your plan, put it into action. Write a summary of your results. Your summary needs to include the following information:

- The connections you’ve made between the historical events in your school community to the present day. How might this influence race-based trauma among students?
- Describe your learning environment. Share evidence of how you are creating a safer and brave space for students.
- Describe the impact your efforts are having on students. Include your evidence.

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	Basic	Developing
Artifact 1: Impact in Community	Analysis thoughtfully reflects on the impact of race on the community.	Analysis reflects on the impact of race on the community. The analysis includes information from	Analysis is a description of the data, but does not reflect on the impact of race on the community.



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	<p>The analysis includes and specifies information from: -city -school district -school</p> <p>The analysis draws on the data from your research and clarifies where the information is specific to</p> <p>The analysis considers</p> <p>-the change over time.</p> <p>-advantages or inequities in the school system</p> <p>-race-based traumatic stress in your school</p> <p>The analysis thoroughly examines how historical inequities may continue to impact students in your community.</p> <p>Writing is well thought out and meets the length requirement.</p>	<p>fewer than 3 areas, or the target of the information is not clearly identified.</p> <p>The analysis does not consider all three of the required impacts.</p> <p>-the change over time.</p> <p>-advantages or inequities in the school system</p> <p>-race-based traumatic stress in your school</p> <p>The analysis mentions, but does not thoroughly examine how historical inequities may continue to impact students in your community.</p> <p>Writing is well thought out and meets the length requirement.</p>	<p>The analysis includes information from fewer than 3 areas, or the target of the information is not identified.</p> <p>The analysis does not consider all three of the required impacts.</p> <p>-the change over time.</p> <p>-advantages or inequities in the school system</p> <p>-race-based traumatic stress in your school</p> <p>The analysis does not thoroughly reflect on how historical inequities may continue to impact students in your community.</p> <p>Writing is not clear to understand or it does not meet the length requirement.</p>
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<p>Artifact 2: Plan</p>	<p>Your plan clearly demonstrates how you will create a brave environment for your students.</p> <p>Your plan includes how you will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -create psychological safety and trust among your students -give students options for managing their emotions -help students share their cultural experiences? -create space to help students discuss what they are feeling, hearing and seeing 	<p>Your plan explains how to create a brave environment for students, but is not specific to your classroom or environment. The words are more general in nature.</p> <p>Your plan mentions 2-3 of the following criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -create psychological safety and trust among your students -give students options for managing their emotions -help students share their cultural experiences? -create space to help students discuss what they are feeling, hearing and seeing 	<p>Your plan attempts to explain how to create a brave environment for your students, but is not specific to your classroom or environment. The words are more general in nature.</p> <p>Your plan does not mention the following criterion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -create psychological safety and trust among your students -give students options for managing their emotions -help students share their cultural experiences? -create space to help students discuss what they are feeling, hearing and seeing <p>OR</p> <p>Your plan seems to be undoable or not related to meeting the goals required.</p>
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<p>Artifact 3: Summary of Results</p>	<p>Summary clearly explains the results of your action plan.</p> <p>Summary includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Thoroughly examines the connections between historical events on the current state of your students' experiences -Thoughtfully considers the impact of race-based trauma on your students -Describes your environment and how you have created a safer and/or braver environment for your students using specific changes you have made in your classroom -Describes the impact that your changes have made on your students with specific examples from your observations. 	<p>Summary explains the results of your action plan.</p> <p>Summary includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -some connections between historical events on the current state of your students' experiences -considers the impact of race-based trauma on students in general -Describes your environment and how you may create a safer and/or braver environment for your students, but is not specific to your classroom -Does not describe any changes 	<p>Summary is missing or predicted.</p> <p>Summary includes 1-2 of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -some connections between historical events on the current state of your students' experiences -considers the impact of race-based trauma on students in general -Describes your environment and how you may create a safer and/or braver environment for your students, but is not specific to your classroom -Does not describe any changes
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Part 3 Reflection

(250–400 words)



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Please answer the following reflective questions. Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.

[How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?](#)

1. How will this work impact how you support students who have or are still experiencing race-based trauma?
2. What did you learn from the experience of researching the history and impact of structural racism in your school community?
3. What did you learn about yourself?

Passing: Reflection provides evidence that this activity has had a positive impact on both educator practice and student success. Specific examples were used to justify responses.



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