



**RACE**  
IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD

**TEACHER GUIDE**  
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# RACE

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**TARGET AUDIENCE** Post secondary

**CURRICULUM AREAS** Sociology  
Psychology  
Canadian Studies  
Multicultural Education  
Family Studies  
Performance Art  
Cultural Studies  
Canadian History

**SUBJECT TOPICS** Personal Identity  
Racial Identity  
Parenting  
Canadian Culture  
Storytelling  
Canadian Black History

## INTRODUCTION

The term “four-letter word” refers to a bad word, a socially unacceptable word, a pejorative word, or a swear word. The film *Race Is a Four-Letter Word* explores positive aspects of the word *race*, a word that has four letters with multiple meanings and associations.

## 1. THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Real people named or quoted in the film:

- a. James Baldwin, American writer  
[www.biography.com/search/article.do?id=9196635](http://www.biography.com/search/article.do?id=9196635)
- b. Diane Rutherford, British sociologist
- c. Camille Turner, Canadian artist  
[www.year01.com/camille/](http://www.year01.com/camille/)
- d. Tim Dunn, Canadian artist/model
- e. Ruth Bailey, Canadian nurse  
[www.blackhistorysociety.ca/Facts.htm](http://www.blackhistorysociety.ca/Facts.htm) - 1948
- f. George Steeves, Canadian photographer  
[www.thecoast.ca/1editorialbody,lasso?token.folder=2007-02-22&token.story=150316.113118&token.subpub=](http://www.thecoast.ca/1editorialbody,lasso?token.folder=2007-02-22&token.story=150316.113118&token.subpub=)

Why do you think the director, Sobaz Benjamin, chose these particular people? What role do they play in moving the narrative through his thinking process on race and racial identity? How does each one contribute to our understanding of Sobaz's questions and search for answers about race, identity and parenting in a world that seems to identify a person negatively by their race?

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## 2. PERSONAL IDENTITY

Think about your own identity. What personality traits, behaviours, beliefs, cultural elements, emotions, experiences, physical features and so on contribute to your personal identity? Are there other elements that you would include to define or describe yourself?

How do you think society defines/describes you? Sobaz explains that race is one of many doorways into his identity. Picture the elements of your identity as a jigsaw puzzle. Label the pieces of the puzzle and try to fit them together.

## 3. TEACHING CHILDREN THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THEIR ETHNIC IDENTITY

Sobaz Benjamin and Diane Rutherford want to teach their children to define and understand their identity by what is important and intrinsic to them, not by what society dictates. Diane and Sobaz want to teach positive attitudes to their children regarding their race, their identity and the relationship between the two. On being black: they want to instil in their children a sense of pride, belonging, respect and self-esteem. They want to ensure that their children understand the complexity of race as both an internal and external (social) construction and that for the individual, it can provide a sense of home, safety and security, and therefore a source of strength, understanding and knowledge to succeed. They struggle to create a society where their children are accepted for the positive aspects of who they are and who they are able to become. What parenting choices, practices and strategies could help Sobaz and his family achieve this goal?

## 4. PERFORMANCE ART – THE MARRIAGE OF A CONCEPT AND AN IMAGE

Camille Turner created the persona of Miss Canadiana. Discuss how she used the stereotypical symbols of Canada to make us and others rethink our notions of national identity. Sobaz Benjamin and Tim Dunn shed their clothes and don masks to explore personal identity. How do the images of Miss Canadiana and the masked Sobaz and Tim force the viewer to confront and question their assumptions about identity?



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## 5. ADOPTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHILD'S IDENTITY

Tim Dunn, whose skin colour is white, spent most of his pre-adolescent formative years living with the Bailey family, who are black. By today's definitions, this seems to have been a foster care situation where he was not adopted by the Baileys and he had contact with his birth parents. He grew up considering himself a part of the Bailey family, and he still feels this to be true. Discuss his novel situation.

Today, where you live, what are the policies and practices that govern adoption and foster care across racial, ethnic and, or, religious lines? Are these policies and practices enshrined in the law of the land or are they commonly accepted by the community? How could these policies and practices influence the development of a child's identity?

Today, many couples opt for international adoptions; e.g. baby girls from mainland China, babies from Iron Curtain countries after the fall of communism, babies from developing countries. Are there programs, services or supports in your community to help these adoptive parents deal with possible identity issues as these children grow up?

What does the current research say about the development of a child's identity in the following types of families:

- Adoptive
- Foster care
- Blended (step-parents)
- Single-sex parents
- Divorced
- Multiracial
- Multicultural
- Two or more religions

