

Dear Mustangs,

I am writing this email as I truly believe you are the voice of change.

News over the weekend revealed a teacher within the TDSB being sent home for wearing a “black face” during Halloween celebrations last week Friday. The principal, in her response letter to students and parents wrote *“Caricatures of peoples’ race or culture are not appropriate and are offensive and hurtful. Regardless of whether this was intended or not, it was racist and dehumanizing.”*

Whilst I cannot comment on that particular case which is now in the news, (the TDSB has a very clear policy around racism & discrimination and will investigate and make decisions accordingly), I will say, that far too often people consider such actions simply as a lack of understanding and ignorance.

Ignorance however, is no excuse and it certainly does nothing to ease the hurt felt by those experiencing the insult and pain of such actions. For us (humans) to live, learn and work together in a truly inclusive respectful environment means having the willingness to understand and call out discriminatory comments and racist practices and to have meaningful consequences. While we cannot always recognise immediately that someone’s words or actions are racist or discriminatory, understanding the meaning behind some important words may help you to recognise these oppressive actions sooner.

Below are some key definitions taken from the TDSB’s Equity Glossary of Terms to help you identify oppressive practices. A full list of their terms can be found here on the TDSB’s website:

<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/About-Us/Equity/Glossary-of-Terms>.

Glossary of Terms Often Used when discussing issues of Equity

Anti-Black Racism – Anti-Black racism is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and its legacy.

Anti-Indigenous Racism – Anti-Indigenous racism is the ongoing race-based discrimination, negative stereotyping, and injustice experienced by Indigenous Peoples within Canada. It includes ideas and practices that establish, maintain and perpetuate power imbalances, systemic barriers, and inequitable outcomes that stem from the legacy of colonial policies and practices in Canada.

Antisemitism – Antisemitism is latent or overt hostility, or hatred directed towards, or discrimination against, individual Jewish people or the Jewish people for reasons connected to their religion, ethnicity, and their cultural, historical, intellectual, and religious heritage.

Cultural Appropriation -* Cultural appropriation refers to the use of objects or elements of a non-dominant culture in a way that doesn't respect their original meaning, give credit to their source, or reinforces stereotypes or contributes to oppression.

* *Definition taken from VeryWell Mind Website - <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-cultural-appropriation-5070458>*

Homophobia – The irrational aversion to, fear or hatred of gay, lesbian or bisexual people and communities, or of behaviours stereotyped as “homosexual.”

Islamophobia – Islamophobia includes racism, stereotypes, prejudice, fear or acts of hostility directed towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia can lead to viewing and treating Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic and societal level

Racism – Racism includes ideas or practices that establish, maintain or perpetuate the racial superiority or dominance of one group over another.

Racial Discrimination – Racial discrimination is a legally prohibited act. It happens when any distinction, conduct or action, whether intentional or not, is based on a person's race and has the effect of imposing burdens not imposed upon others.

Transphobia – The aversion to, fear or hatred or intolerance of trans people and communities. Like other prejudices, it is based on stereotypes and misconceptions that are used to justify discrimination, harassment and violence toward trans people.

How can you make a difference in the fight against racism?

- **Be willing to listen if called out**

If a person calls you out for something that they feel is racist, rather than defend your actions, take the time to listen to why they believe what you have done or said have led to their calling you out. Also take the time to acknowledge their feelings and be willing to reflect on what is being said to you, what you have said and be willing to apologise.

- **Stand Up for yourself and those around you**

Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself (or a friend or even a stranger) acts of racism. You don't have to be mean, just show that you won't let these comments go on. It could be as simple as saying "Why would you say something like that?" or "That's a really mean thing to say."

- **Report Wrongdoings**

If you've experienced racism, or discrimination, document it and bring it up to an authority (like a teacher, CYW or principal). This is an important way to make sure these actions don't happen in secret, but that people are aware and taking action. It's important to show others that this kind of behavior is not okay and will not be tolerated.

- **Be willing to discuss issues around race**

Racism will not go away by avoiding discussions about it. Although it may feel uncomfortable, having small group discussions with your friends or class discussions with your teacher about racism, what it looks and feels like, and how it affects your school, can actually help provide more understanding and more tolerance.

- **Be an Ally**

Being an ally means you use your position to help others. If someone says something to your friend, stand up for your friend in that moment and say, "It's not okay to say things like that; that's racist."
Allyship- How to Be an Ally - <https://libguides.kent-school.edu/race-racism-antiracism/ally>

- **Join the Social Justice Group**

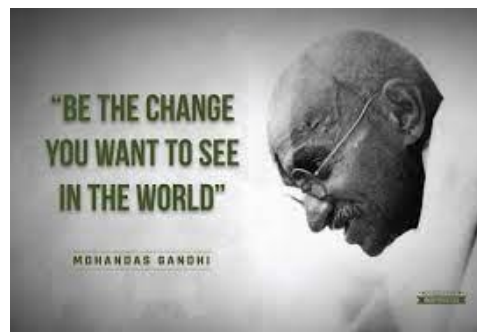
Take a hands-on active role in planning ways to promote inclusion and educating members of the York Memorial community through working with like minded peers in this school club.

- **Educate Yourself**

Immerse yourself in all things that celebrate cultural diversity. Often racism is rooted in misunderstanding or not bothering to take the time to learn. So, talk to others or read books about celebrations such as Diwali, Ramadan, Kwanzaa, lunar New Year etc. Talk to other students in your class and be open to learning about their culture.

Thanks for taking the time to read this; it is really appreciated.

As a teacher, I believe education is the key to change so many things including the reduction in racism and discriminatory practices. You have the opportunity to be apart of that change and to make this world a more accepting and caring place for all humankind.



In closing, below is a link to an article which explains the history of “BlackFace” and why it is so offensive. I encourage you to make the time to read it as knowledge leads to understanding and better choices.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/02/us/racist-origins-of-blackface/index.html>

Yours sincerely,

Ms. Drummond