

# America to me *real talk*

## EPISODE GUIDE 05

### Academic Expectations Based on Race

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## TOPIC

### Academic Expectations Based on Race

In Episode 5, we meet a new group of white students at Oak Park and River Forest High School (OPRFHS), whose experiences contrast with those of the school's students of color. One key area of difference involves academic expectations - what is expected of the white students academically as opposed to the students of color, and the influence that those high or low expectations have on the students' placement (Honors Track, College Prep, etc.), teacher attention, student motivation, and academic success.

**Organizing a Group Discussion?**  
**Be prepared! Before you start, read the Organizer Guide.**



## ANALYZE

- Describe the racial demographics between the honors class and the reading class. What does that say about academic expectations, particularly based on race?
- How are academic expectations demonstrated differently between the reading teachers Emily and Paul, and physics teacher Aaron Podolner?
- What role do Caroline's & Terrance's families play in their academic expectations for them?

### WHAT IS A BIAS?

**A bias is a belief that some people, races, ideas, etc., are valued more than others; a prejudice for or against something.**

## REFLECT

- What experiences have you had with academic integration/segregation? What are the arguments for and against academic tracking?
- What happens when the topic of race and academic performance comes up in your school or community? If it doesn't, why not?
- Who has the power in your school or institution to decide an individual's level of access and success? What measurements are used?

## ENGAGE

These can be group or individual activities. Encourage participants to share their findings with the whole group.

- ☑ **Implicit Bias Tests** [20 min.+]  
Have your group or class take one or more of Harvard's Implicit Bias tests. Once everyone has finished, ask them to write what they learned about themselves and why they think they scored the way they did.
- ☑ **School Research** [1 hour]  
Take a walk through your school or a school in your community and:
  - Note whose pictures are on the walls. What are the demographics most represented in those pictures?
  - Ask about the school's discipline policy. What's the racial breakdown of the students who find themselves in detention most often?
  - Interview at least two students of color and two white students about the school's academic expectations of them. Which tracks are they in and how do they feel about their placement?

## RACIAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Describe your racial experience in classes during any part of your K-12 schooling.

- What was the racial makeup of your classes or the levels/tracks you were in?
- While you were in school, what was your racial understanding of the classes or tracks within your school? How has that understanding changed over time?
- What were the embedded (overt or covert) expectations of the spaces you described?

