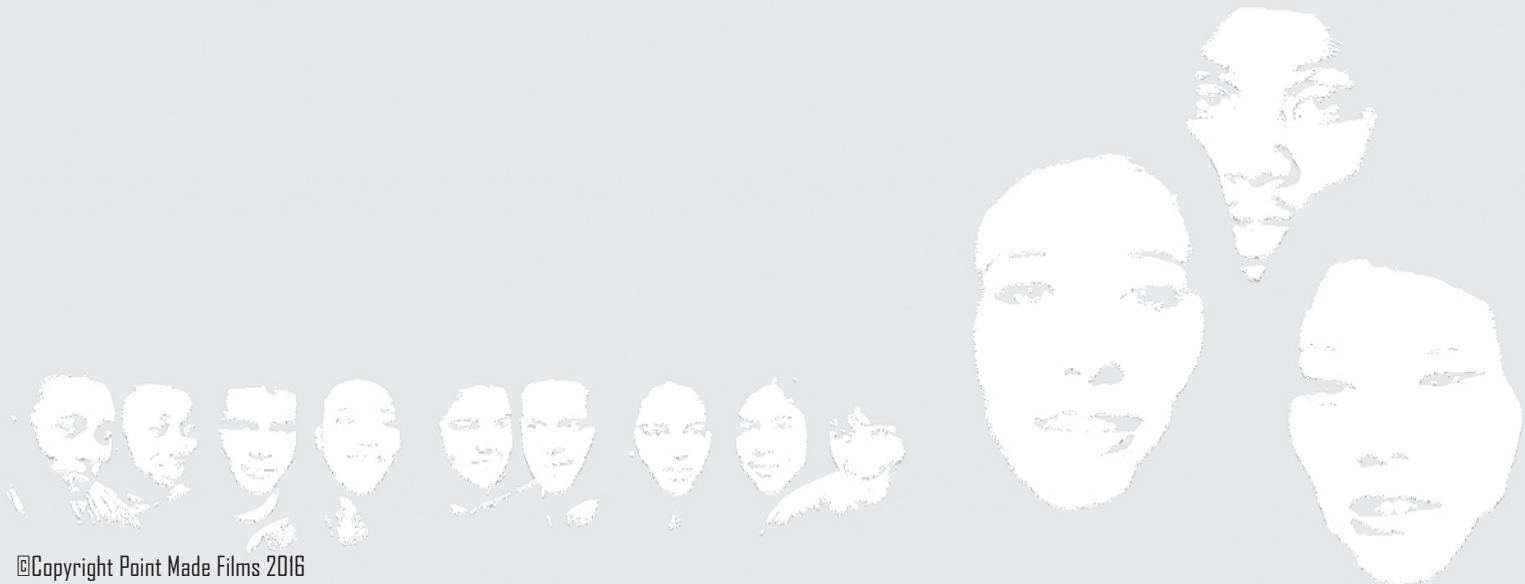


INRAI Look Deeper

I Wish I Were Black Discussion Guide

Level I



INRAI Look Deeper | Wish I Were Black Discussion Guide, Level I



Overview

In the documentary, *I'm Not Racist... Am I?*, Martha – who is white – says to the group that she often wishes she were black or Hispanic. It's not an uncommon feeling, but it led to an awkward tension in the room with eyes rolling and some muffled laughter. No one challenged the statement at the time, but by the end of the film, Martha realized her comment was hurtful and that she wasn't thinking about all that comes with being a person of color.

In this lesson, students will watch additional video footage shot during the production of *I'm Not Racist... Am I?* to explore what was behind Martha's comment, why it could be considered hurtful, and how the concept manifests in American society.



Objective

The goal of this lesson is for students to understand that racial identity in America has more to do with power, privilege, and access than with physical characteristics or accessories.

The lesson will focus on three themes that often emerge when people say they want to be another race:

1. **Access** - The perception that getting a job or getting into college is easier for people of color due to diversity initiatives and affirmative action.
2. **Guilt** - Feeling badly about racial discrimination and the benefits that come from being white might lead a person to distance him/herself away from being white by adopting other cultural norms.
3. **White = Boring** - Many white Americans' ethnic identity fades over generations of assimilating to American culture. Being white might feel "boring" if there's no personal connection to the rituals, foods, or music of a particular heritage.



What You Need

- Ability to play 10-minute video in the classroom.
- Chart paper or board for recording responses

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Background/Homework

I. To deepen your students' understanding and awareness, after having watched the film **I'm Not Racist...Am I?**, let students know that you will be showing them a video titled "I Wish I Were Black." Ask them to think about that statement by considering the following questions:

1. Have you ever heard someone say they wished they were a race other than their own?
2. Why might someone say that?

II. Ask students to think of examples – either in their school or in entertainment – of people wearing clothes, jewelry, or costumes traditionally affiliated with ethnic or racial groups that are not their own. If possible, ask them to print any images from the internet that they would like to share.



Warm-up [5 minutes]

OK? Or Not OK?

Draw a vertical line down the center of your board or chart paper to make two columns.

In the left column, write down examples of ways people borrow elements from cultures that aren't their own. Examples could include:

- Quoting a Native American proverb
- Dressing like a Geisha for Halloween
- Wearing a bindi
- Wearing a Native American headdress
- Having a "gangsta" themed party
- Wearing a sombrero on Cinco de Mayo
- Getting a Mandarin character tattoo

Discuss each example on the board and ask the students whether each one is "OK" or "Not OK."

Let the students know that there are no clear-cut answers but that it's important to think about both why we might want to borrow from other cultures and the impact it might have on people from those cultures.

Video [10 minutes]

Play "I Wish I Were Black" for the class.

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Activity - Small Group Discussion (20 minutes)

I. Break the class up into small groups so that half of the students are discussing one of the following themes from the video:

Access

- Do you think that it is easier for a student of color to get into college? Why or why not?
- The educator in the film, Hilary, said to the three girls that a white person saying she wants to be a person of color would be like "Trading your ace for a two." What do you think she meant by that?

Note to Facilitator: Please clarify for students that Hilary's comment is about power hierarchy and not about race preference. Help students understand that she isn't saying that being white is better than being a person of color, but that racism sets up a power structure such that a person of color has less power than a white person. Most importantly, model Hilary's guidance and ask your students to think beyond what seems "cool" or more interesting and consider the power, access, and privilege that come with being white.

Cultural Appropriation

- Why do you think people might want to borrow clothes, food, or customs from cultures other than their own?
- What is the difference between cultural exchange and cultural appropriation? Which is more important to consider: the intent behind the person borrowing from another culture or the impact that action has on the person from the other culture?

II. Reconvene as a large group and ask a student from each group to sum up points from their small group's conversation.



Wrap-up (10 minutes)

I. Ask students to think back to the background exercise when you asked them to think about why someone might say "I wish I were black." Ask them if their perspectives have changed after watching the video? How?

II. Refer back to the two columns from the Warm Up exercise. Ask students if they would change any of their "OK" or "Not OK" responses. Can they now think of additional examples of appropriation that they've witnessed in their school or communities?

III. Finally, ask the group to think about how Martha's statement, "Sometimes I wish I were black or Hispanic" made others in the group feel. While Martha didn't mean to offend anyone, her words did hurt others in the room. Encourage students to think about the impact actions have on others rather than just the intent behind those actions.