

Critical Race Theory: The Case For Evaluating What We “Know” and How We Teach

***Empire Club of Canada Speaker’s Event
February 21, 2023***

A Companion Teaching Guide for Secondary and Post-Secondary Schools

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[The Empire Club of Canada](#) is pleased to present a speaker's event to commemorate Black History Month: ***Critical Race Theory: The Case For Evaluating What We "Know" and How We Teach***. The event on February 21 will feature the following speakers:

- Craig Wellington, Executive Director of Black Opportunity Fund.
- Kearie Daniel, Executive Director and Founder of Parents of Black Children
- Joshua Sealy-Harrington, Assistant Professor, Lincoln Alexander School of Law, TMU

The [Empire Club Foundation](#) is pleased to offer the live streaming event free to school boards, universities and colleges. The event is also available free of charge, after February 21, to the general public.

This guide offers secondary and post-secondary school students and their teachers:

- a context for the origins, features, and issues of CRT,
- its main features, characteristics, applications to curriculum study and its challenges,
- approaches to dealing with controversies arising from interpretations and misinterpretations of CRT
- exploration of its application and relevance to past Canadian history and contemporary issues in Canadian society

The target audience for this guide will be secondary and post-secondary courses in education, law, history and sociology. Parts of the guide may also be relevant for secondary school Civics or English courses.

Introduction to Critical Race Theory

Race Theory (CRT), originally developed in the 1970s in the United States of America, is about understanding power and inequality in society. CRT looks at the social, economic, political, and legal conditions that coordinate the oppression of racialized people.

From the Introduction in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed The Movement* (Kimberle Crenshaw) the following passages help to define it:

"Critical Race Theory embraces a movement of left scholars, most of them scholars of color, situated in law schools, whose work challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole."

"... there is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which we all subscribe. Although Critical Race scholarship differs in object, argument, accent, and emphasis, it is, nevertheless, unified by two common interests. The first is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created

and maintained in America, and, in particular, to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as "the rule of law" and "equal protection." The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it."

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has become controversial, as it has gained prominence in discussions about race and racism. Both supporters and critics of CRT have used or misused it as a companion to other ideas related to promoting equity in schools and in society, along with "equity", "equality", "diversity", and "social justice". Much of the controversy has coincided with a campaign of right wing censorship against mere discussion of race and gender inequality. Two sources on this are:

[The War on Critical Race Theory - Boston Review](#)

[Watch Kendall Thomas give the 2020 Equality and Diversity Lecture | Faculty of Law \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

While CRT initially arose in the USA, for an example of Canadian scholarship engaging with CRT, see "[Follow the Drinking Gourd](#)" by Adelle Blackett. Likewise, Carol Aylward's text *Canadian Critical Race Theory* responds to claims that the lens or methods CRT should not be applied in Canada. Aylward states:

"Canada and the United States have similar colonial histories that gave rise to anti-Black racism and oppression, which have often been reinforced and perpetuated by law. The similarities between the two countries run deep and the concept of "race" is a powerful force in both societies. Although most Canadians would deny the existence of widespread racism and, in particular, anti-Black racism in their country and would reject comparisons to the racial situation in the United States, the fact remains that Canadian history, legal and non-legal, does not support such denials."

While CRT's is most often associated with Black political and legal struggle, it intersects with many other forms of *contemporary* political struggle. The following resources are useful:

Gender justice: [Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics \(uchicago.edu\)](#)

Asian people: [Mari Matsuda: Critical Race Theory is not Anti-Asian – Reappropriate](#)

Indigenous people: [Vampires Anonymous and Critical Race Practice \(umich.edu\)](#)

The following video clips give short overviews of CRT and some of the issues facing American public schools today:

| [Khiara M. Bridges Explains Critical Race Theory](#)

| [What is Critical Race Theory and Why is it Under Attack?](#)

The following two news articles may be useful in beginning the conversation about CRT and Canadian Schools:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/black-canadians-school-curriculum-1.5706510>

<https://theconversation.com/why-critical-race-theory-should-inform-schools-185169>

GETTING TO KNOW THE SPEAKERS

These resources can be used before or after the event to support students in knowing the background the three speakers:

Craig Wellington, Executive Director of Black Opportunity Fund

[Black Opportunity Fund](#)

[Interview with Craig Wellington on Vibe Talks](#)

Kearie Daniel, Executive Director and Founder of Parents of Black Children

[Parents of Black Children](#)

[Interview with Scott Neigh on Talking Radical Radio](#)

| *Joshua Sealy-Harrington, Assistant Professor, Lincoln Alexander School of Law, TMU and Counsel, Power Law*

[Access to \(In\)justice: A critical race reflection | Joshua Sealy-Harrington - The Lawyer's Daily \(thelawyersdaily.ca\)](#)

[Untelling the Story of Race](#), Joshua Sealy-Harrington, The Walrus Updated May 21, 2022, originally published July 15, 2020

Questions to use to guide discussions either pre or post speaker event:

- How has “race” been interpreted in modern human history as a biological or social construct?

- How has race been used as a justification for discrimination and subjugation of people in modern human history?
- Does “race neutrality” really exist?
- To what extent are Canadian and American contexts the same and different?
- To what extent do the Canadian and/or American constitutions support CRT?

Three Possible Teaching Contexts for Canadian Courses

The study of Black history in Canada can focus on similarities and differences between the Canadian and American experiences throughout our histories. It is important to remember that although Black History Month shines a focus on Black history, it should be integrated throughout the school year.

1. A general model for examining current issues in Canada with a CRT lens:

Classroom Inquiry through the Media

Much of what we know or learn about racism and the role governments and citizens play comes from the media. Therefore, it’s important to learn how to analyze media treatment of any issue. A thesis is a statement about an issue supported by evidence and based on clear criteria. This can be a component of the culminating end-of-unit task to be displayed or handed in if there is a current event that has attracted the class’s interest.

1. Students either individually, in small groups, or as a whole class select a problem or issue in Canada today that they wish to explore through the lens of Critical Race Theory.
2. They collect stories, pictures, or information about the topic over a three or four week period from the local newspaper or other media, including appropriate and online sources approved by you. Websites linked to the federal government such as Parks Canada, Statistic Canada, and the National Archives may also serve as media to investigate.
3. They prepare an analysis which might include such aspects as the following:
 - historical background to the issue (as reported in the newspaper and in the text),
 - the perspective(s) taken by the newspaper or other media examined,
 - a weighting of the different perspectives to arrive at a defensible conclusion on the issue in question.

Students can create a paper or digital “scrapbook”.

It is recommended to keep the searches manageable by limiting newspapers to the two national dailies (*Globe and Mail* and *National Post*) plus local papers. National TV and radio could include CBC, CTV and Global.

To go beyond the above students would need considerable work in media literacy to identify fact from opinion, misinformation from disinformation, as well as determining specific criteria for evaluating the truth of claims.

2. The Jackson Park Project

A resource that fits into a high school history class comes from [THE JACKSON PARK PROJECT](#). Their mission statement describes the work as “A multiplatform not for profit corporation created to explore, memorialize, and celebrate the history of the Emancipation Day celebrations that took place in Windsor, Ontario. Our project focuses on the celebrations from the 1930s to the 1960s, through the development of educational resources, a digital archive and entertainment - a historical drama and documentary; furthermore, aiming to encourage ongoing conversations about these celebrations, and their place within the larger landscape of Canadian history.”

Among the resources they have produced is one that may illustrate how CRT plays in Canadian history. "[Fighting a Double War: Remembering Windsor's Unsung Black Heroes Who Fought Fascism Overseas and Racism at Home](#)." The 1 hour 28 minute YouTube presentation from the Amherstburg Freedom Museum also allows students to jump to 10 key moments in the video.

Questions for Classroom Inquiry

As students view *Fighting a Double War*, they can look for examples of

- racism resulting from individual behaviours
- racism resulting from legal, political, or social structures that promote racism as a norm
- efforts and successes individuals and groups had in overcoming racism, whether such racism is individual or societal

These questions can be used in any study or resource related to Black History or Black History Month. Also note that CRT is not a means to blame people but an avenue to show history in context and to promote dialogue**.

** Heather Ann Bailey, a guidance Counsellor for the Toronto District School Board's Safe and Caring Schools initiative has contributed to thinking about the nature and goals of CRT .

3. The Book of Negroes

A resource that fits senior high school and introductory survey courses in post-secondary schools can incorporate media and literature based on Lawrence Hill's novel, *The Book of Negroes*.

In a history or literature class students investigate the connections between literature and history in Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes*. The following, in addition to the actual book can be used to note the connections between literature and history.

- The CBC Gem TV dramatic series based on the above (available with a free subscription)
- The original *Book of Negroes*: a naval ledger (book of accounts and personal assets)

that listed written at the end of the American Revolutionary War in which the American colonies gained independence from Britain. It listed the names of Black Loyalists who fled to what became Canada as well as information such as who was travelling with small children, who had contracted smallpox, and much more. Information for this can be found online at Library and Archives Canada under Carleton Papers <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/loyalists/book-of-negroes/Pages/introduction.aspx>.

In their investigation of the Hill novel, the TV series, and the original ledger students can

- Compare stories and accounts
- Note how literature and media bring history to life and
- How history supports the ideas in the novel and the TV series

Teaching Strategies to get Students Thinking

The following are a number of teaching strategies that can be used at any level to engage students in critical thinking, effective feedback and student dialogue. They can be used in any classroom with any topic but are provided here with a context to suggested teaching resources.

Visible Thinking to Reveal What Has Been Learned

One approach to seeing the impact of any curriculum program comes from decades of work sponsored by the Harvard University graduate school of education called “visible thinking”.

Making Thinking Visible came out of the work of [Project Zero](#). It currently consists of a rich website with links to downloadable articles and videos as well as a book with its own DVD (Ritchhart, R, Church, M and Morrison, K. (2011). *Making Thinking Visible: How To Promote Engagement Understanding, and Independence for All Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.).

This [Thinking Routines](#) is a video that provides an overview of a key implementable feature of this approach-the use of “thinking routines”. These are simple-to-use strategies that through observations and conversations bring the products of thinking to the surface by making them visible both to you and to your students. They often serve as a pre- and post-test with student group discussion in between as they share ideas and perspectives. Repeated use of a few can become thinking “habits” for students that they consciously use when the occasion merits or when you offer a prompt.

One of the ideas it promotes is judicious use of a few of the routines so that teachers and students get really familiar with them. We do get better with practice! At this stage when they have become “routine”, they can then be adapted and build upon.

| In many of the routines students write as individuals in order to help them focus their thinking.

The following table summarizes some of them:

STRATEGY	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE from PROJECT	OTHER POSSIBILITES
Connect, extend, challenge	Assess any presentation from the audience point-of-view through active thinking and reacting rather than passively absorbing information	Any scene from the CBC series <i>The Book of Negroes</i>	Any reading, presentation in which learner is the “audience”
I used to think...now I think...	Assess changes in student thinking and perspectives about an idea, person, or event in history	Critical Race Theory as a lens for viewing Canadian history	Any topic to be examined
See, think, wonder	Thinking about visual images	Photograph of the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands at the 1 hour 11 min. mark of <i>Fighting a Double War</i> presentation noted above	Any visual image
Headline	Summarizing the essence of an idea, event or topic	What is Critical Race Theory and Why is it Under Attack?	Any topic or event
Think-pair-share	Deeper discussion about any topic	How did WW2 influence the struggle for equality by Black Canadians?	Any question with a possible range of answers
Snowball/consensus	Student input into and commitment for doing a study or unit	Black History as a general topic	Any topic
Making history triangle	Determining the role individuals play in “making history”	The life and career of Viola Desmond	Any historical figure

The next section provides detailed instructions for using each of the above routines.

“Connect, Extend, Challenge”

This routine is used for connecting new ideas to old knowledge.

Looking at any scene in the CBC series *The Book of Negroes* students **connect** what they see to what they already know about slavery in Canada.

Then students continue viewing the series and **extend** their thinking through small group discussion and class sharing about things they learned about conditions for Black Loyalists that new to them; for example, that discrimination occurred north of the United States.

Finally they **challenge** themselves by thinking and sharing what still puzzled them about slavery and discrimination— what they still could get their heads around; for example, why would these loyalists still be subject to prejudice and discrimination?

“I used to think.... Now I think.... “

This routine can assess the thinking of students on this project as a whole and any course, unit or lesson that introduces new ideas to students. Here is a sample script you can use:

“When we began this study of Black Canadian history in war, you all had some initial ideas about the contributions and struggles Black Canadians have faced throughout Canadian history and what role if any Canadian government and policy played in the quest for equal treatment in society. In just a few sentences, I want you to write what it is that you used to think about the role Canadian government and society played in Black Canadian history. Take a minute to think back and then write down your response to “I used to think...”

Now, I want you to think about how your ideas about Black Canadian history have changed as a result of what we’ve been studying/doing/discussing. Again, in just a few sentences write down what you now think about Black Canadian history. Start your sentences with, “But now, I think...”

See, Think, Wonder is a routine for use in looking at images from war or any other topic that shows artistic or photographic information about a topic.

- What do you **see**?
- What do you **think** about that?
- What does it make you **wonder**?

This routine encourages students to make careful observations and thoughtful interpretations. It helps stimulate curiosity and sets the stage for inquiry.

Use this routine when you want students to think carefully about why something looks the way it does or is the way it is. Use the routine at the beginning of a new unit to motivate student interest or try it with an object that connects to a topic during the unit of study. Consider using the routine with an interesting object near the end of a unit to encourage students to further apply their knowledge and ideas.

Ask students to look at an object—it could be an artwork, image, artifact, cartoon or topic—and to follow up with what they think might be going on or what they think this observation might be. Encourage students to back up their interpretation with reasons. Ask students to think about what this makes them wonder about the object or topic.

The routine works best when a student responds by using the three stems together at the same time, i.e., *“I see..., I think..., I wonder...”*. Make sure students begin by noting what they actually see and avoid jumping to conclusions too quickly.

“Headline”

Headline is a synthesizing routine to get students to capture the core or essence or core of an event, idea, topic or concept. The stress is on its essence, not coming up with a catchy headline.

For our understanding of CRT we began with the video from Education Week then ask students to create a headline to describe CRT.

Think-Pair-Share: A Basic Co-operative Structure for Pairs Work There are many versions of think-pair-share, a cooperative structure developed by Frank Lyman (1981) in which:

1. You pose a question or problem; for example: “How did WW2 influence the struggle for equality by Black Canadians?”
2. Students are given time to think (30-60 seconds).
3. Students pair and discuss their responses.
4. Students share their combined insights in a whole class discussion or question- answer sequence.

This technique helps students process the information they are learning through wait time and discussion of their ideas.

There are many ways to “think”, “pair” and “share” including,

- Think-Write-Pair-Share has students jot down their ideas before turning to a partner to discuss them. This version increases individual accountability, since you can walk around the room to ensure that students do not just sit back and let their partner do all the thinking.
- Think-pair-square has pairs pair with another pair before sharing with the class.

Think-pair-share can be used anytime in a lesson: at the beginning to assess prior knowledge or opinion on the topic to be explored in a unit, within the lesson to check for understanding, and at the end of the lesson to assess understanding

For more on this versatile structure, go to www.kaganonline.com for ideas.

Structures for Extending the Pairs

“Snowball”, sometimes called “Consensus” (Craig and Ward, 2004) is a way to help students acquire skills in designing powerful questions for an inquiry. Such questions should: be engaging to students, be connected to important curriculum goals, and require an informed, reasoned answer based on evidence and clear criteria for making a judgment. Here is an example based on this project:

The class is introduced to the topic of Black History Month.

1. Individually each student writes down three questions they would like to answer about this topic.
2. Students pair and compare questions. They come to agreement on three questions they both consider important to answer.
3. The pairs combine with another pair. The groups of four come to a consensus on four questions they want answered.
4. The groups of four combine and come to agreement on five important questions.
5. Each group puts their questions on the board.
6. With the teacher’s help the class comes to an agreement on 5-6 important powerful questions they want answered about the focus for Black History Month. As individuals, pairs, or small groups they use these questions as anchors for their studies.

An added benefit for the teacher is that students have contributed to potential assessments, including test questions for which they are motivated to achieve since they shaped their learning goals. In addition to increased commitment by students in answering their own questions, you can use these powerful questions as you plan end-of-unit tests or other culminating tasks.

An element that links many of the teaching strategies is the role of student talk.

Why Talk?

Talk allows students to

- take risks with colleagues
- try out ideas through hypothesizing, verifying, adapting, and revising
- gain deeper insights and understandings when the talk is purposeful and in pairs than can be attained by one student working alone

- promote quality writing and/or quality whole classroom discussion after students have talked through the ideas, issues, concepts, and information. The more we talk the more we learn!

Why Pairs?

- easier to set up than larger groups
- can be combined and divided when appropriate
- easier to monitor and manage to ensure individual accountability

It's hard to hide in a pair!

Uncommon Commonalities (Adapted from Ellen Bull and Bob Cox, Centennial College)

In column 1 take 4 minutes to list eight things of interest about you (hobbies, favourite pets, etc.) For the next five minutes compare your choices with others.

Column one: Things of interest to me.

Column two: Things from column one that are shared with one other person.

Column three: Things from column one that are shared with two other people.

Column four: Things from column one that are shared with three other people

One	Two	Three	Four

This is one of many ways to learn about your classmates and is one step for turning a group of academic strangers into academic colleagues.

Extension: Does social media promote or prevent forming bonds with other humans? What role did co-operation among humans shape our history as a species?

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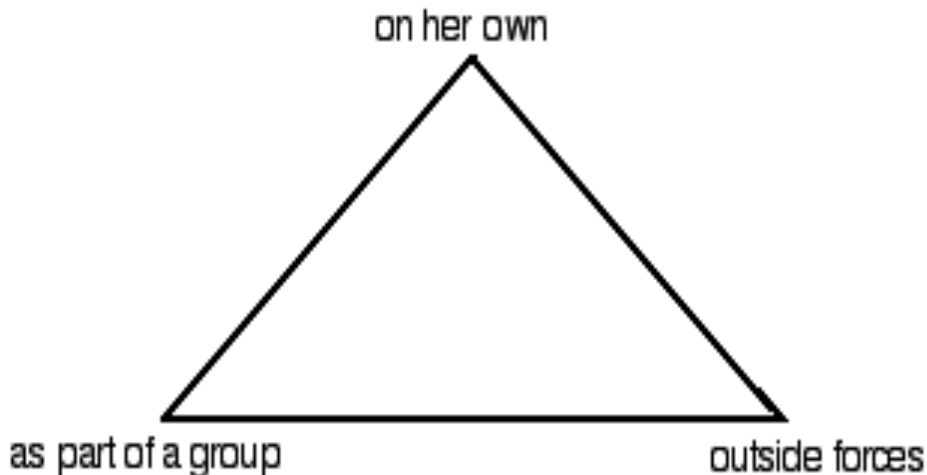
Historical Triangles

People make history, but why?

Were they born great and made history all by themselves? Did they have the “right stuff”? -
Were they made great by working with others? Were they the leaders or figureheads
representing a larger group? Can any leader do it all? -

Did they have greatness thrust upon them by outside forces- the right person at the right time?
Would someone else have come along?

These questions and possible answers can be investigated using the following triangle as a graphic organizer.



Such diagrams can help students organize their thinking.

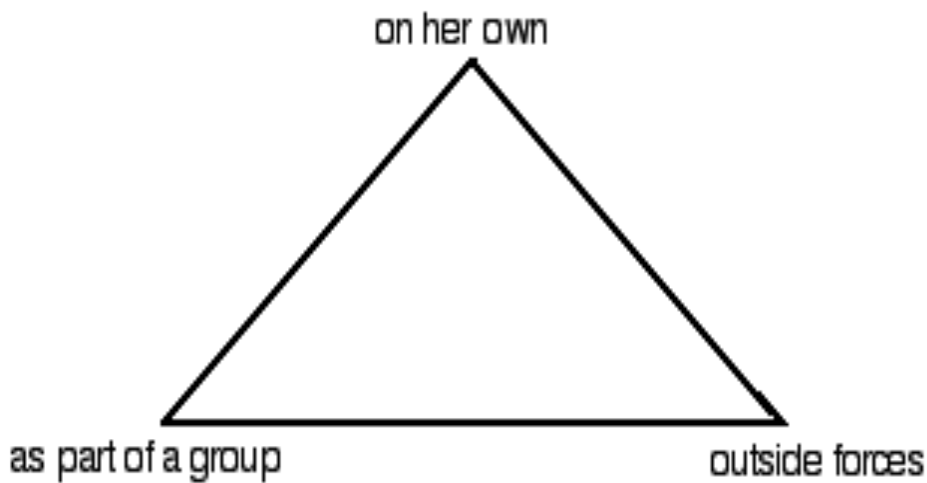
Students in pairs, conduct research into Viola Desmond’s life. There are many online resources.

Students work in pairs and identify a number of highlights of her life and career. Teachers can set an arbitrary number such as “at least 10 highlights which offers students a chance to add more if they wish. begin

As each pair comes to agreement on the highlight of an individual’s career/biography you can provide feedback on their ability to recognize significance in historical events. They may even determine an event as significant, that other students or even teachers fail to see.

Once they have written and numbered their highlights, they place the number inside the triangle. The closer to a corner, the more the event is seen as evidence of a person’s contribution to the event.

Now ask students: “Where would you place the numbers of the events in Viola Desmond’s life?”



Deeper Exploration for Examining Critical Race Theory

Applications in Indigenous History

Within the Canadian context students can ask similar questions about Indigenous history in Canada. The following are few suggestions.

Thomas King’s *The Inconvenient Indian* offer readers to compare Canadian and American experiences. How well does CRT offer insights into comparisons of Canadian and American history?

Tanya Talaga’s *Seven Fallen Feathers* tells the stories of seven Indigenous students who were attending high school in the city far away from their homes and families. She looks at each of their lives and their situations while they were living in Thunder Bay, as well as the circumstances of their disappearances and deaths.

Resources

In addition to the specific resources serving as samples such as *The Book of Negroes*, the Life of Viola Desmond, and *Fighting a Double War*, as well as online sources for teaching, here are others referred to in the guide:

Banks, J.A. (1995). Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice. In J.A. Banks & C.A. M. Banks (Eds.). *Handbook of Research on Multicultural educations* (pp.3-24) New York: Macmillan.

Craigen, J. and War, C. (2004). *What’s This Got To Do with Anything?* San Clemente, CA: Kagan Cooperative Learning.

Lyman, F. T. (1981). The responsive classroom discussion: The inclusion of all students. In A. Anderson (Ed.), *Mainstreaming Digest* (pp. 109-113). College Park: University of Maryland Press.

Peel District School Board (2000) *The Future We Want: building an inclusive Curriculum*. Mississauga ON: Peel District School Board.

(Ritchhart, R, Church, M and Morrison, K. (2011). *Making Thinking Visible: How To Promote Engagement Understanding, and Independence for All Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.