

NEWSLETTER



Special Edition
12th June 2020
www.bexleygs.co.uk

Introduction

Welcome to a special edition of our weekly newsletter dedicated to BLACK LIVES MATTER. We have all been shocked and challenged by the murder of George Floyd. The subsequent worldwide protests to demand equality and justice for black people around the world have ensured that each one of us has looked anew at racial prejudice in our own communities. There has never been a better time for us to stand together and tackle injustice in all its forms.

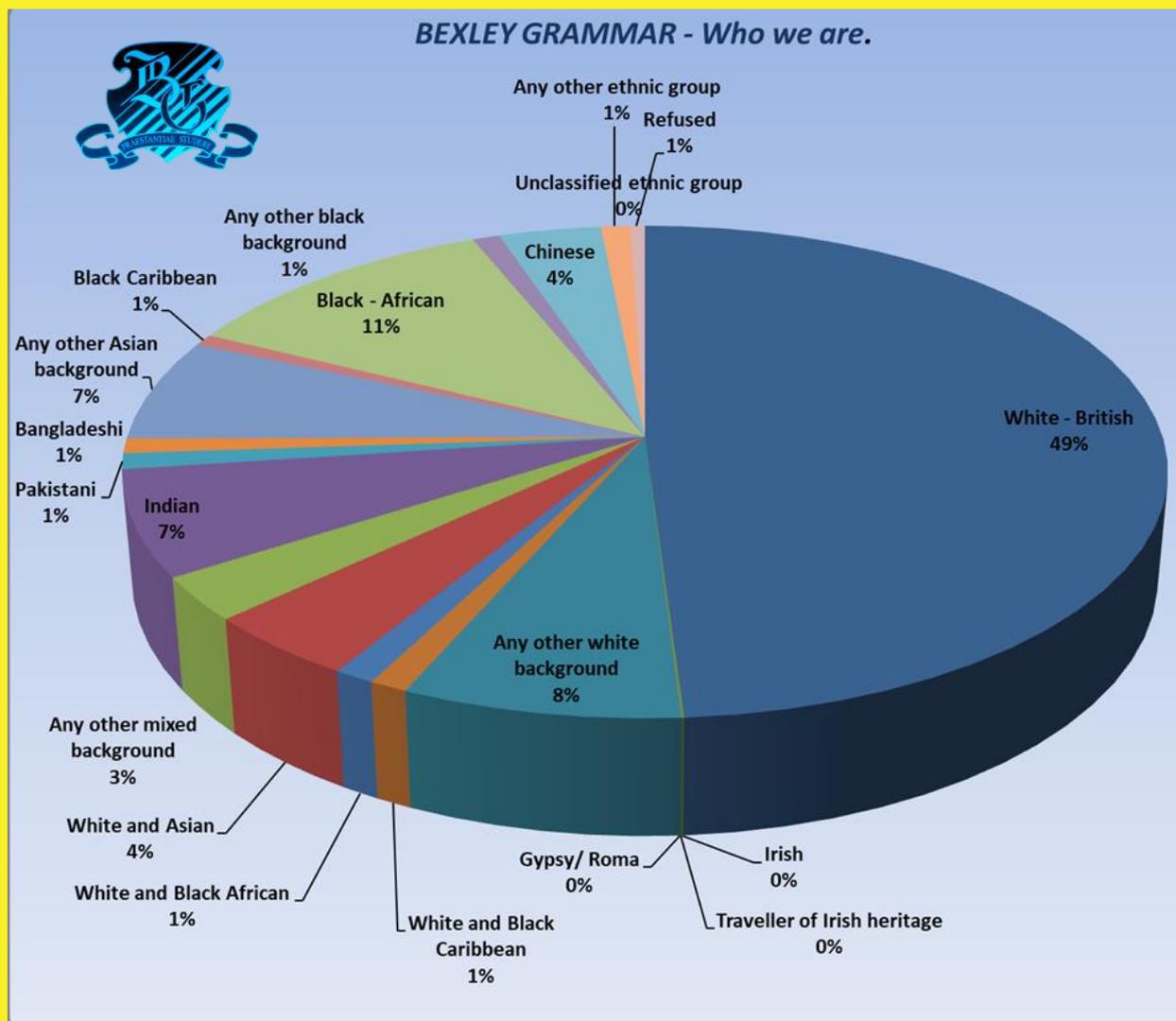
**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**

It has been so frustrating in the current lockdown that we have not been able to discuss and debate with our students in person, face to face with your energy and passion. Instead, I have been struck and often moved by the articulate and powerful responses that many of you, students both past and present, as well as parents and teachers, have expressed to me in emails and letters. Without exception, these responses express a determination to make the world a better place, through permanent change, starting with our shared context, our school life.

The media will focus elsewhere in time but I want this newsletter to help us to reflect on our personal responses, perhaps our unconscious bias, and help us to commit to a much longer-term collective resolve to eradicate racism in all its forms from our school community. It is through education that lasting change will be achieved, and that includes my education and our own staff training. This newsletter marks our first step.

This edition includes powerful personal experiences and thoughtful perspectives as well as information and resources to help us to educate ourselves. And it includes our aspirations as a school: The article - *'Black Lives Matter - a movement, not a moment'* - provides some detail about what we are setting out to achieve, together, as a school community; I am delighted that Ms Fuwa, Mrs Moore and Miss Contini, have been so active and insightful in setting out a clear vision for us to follow - I am deeply indebted to them.

We are a richly diverse community, which helps to power some of the clubs and societies we have, sometimes started by students, such as the Afro-Caribbean Society. You may be interested in the infographic showing the current ethnic profile of our students on page 2. It feels all the more shocking to reflect that, not so many years ago, the headquarters of the BNP were just up the road on Upper Wickham Lane here in Welling. Read Mrs Moore's moving reflection on her childhood which puts this in a personal context.



I am proud of our vibrant school community, our thriving extra-curricular life (in non-Covid-19 times) and the strong relationships between staff and students that are the strongest evidence of our success as a school. It therefore hurts all the more to hear that some students have experienced racism in our community; I am determined to eliminate such experiences to ensure that every student at BGS is equally respected and valued.

Finally, we are proud of our IB curriculum, with its outward, international focus. We are proud to be developing compassionate leaders based on our ethos of intellect, empathy and courage, an ethos that is rooted in the elements of the IB learner profile. But we recognise that we need to carry out a full review of our curriculum, especially in the lower school, to remove any colonial narratives that still frame the teaching of some subjects. This week we have started a systematic audit for that review. As I said earlier, we are committing to long-term solutions that will stand the test of time.

After reading this newsletter and the outline of what we are setting out to achieve, if you would like to offer any further comments or would like to be involved, please complete the relevant form below:

[BLM Student Response](#)

[BLM Parents/Carers/Wider Community](#)

Mr Elphick
Headteacher





Black Lives Matter - a movement, not a moment

The BLM protests that have rocked the world no doubt represent a watershed moment - it is clear that the world is not going to be the same. Fuelled by the recent injustices such as the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, and amplified by the grief caused by COVID-19 disproportionately affecting BAME people, these protests (though rooted in pain and sorrow) have already been successful in achieving some important victories. For example, Derek Chauvin, the police officer who killed George Floyd, has now been charged with second degree rather than third degree murder, which was his original charge; all the other police officers have now been also been charged, where initially they would have probably gotten away with being suspended or re-assigned. And whatever anybody may think about the statues being toppled by the protesters, nobody can ignore the significance of this gesture: symbols of slavery, brutality and oppression have come down - in Bristol, London and even in Belgium. Even the fact that a huge number of people are taking this as a moment of self reflection and improvement, and having conversations at home and with friends about racism and whether the behaviours they engage in are racist, represents a huge moment of reckoning.



However, there is a real risk that when the protests die down, the media attention will be re-directed somewhere else, and these issues will be swept under the carpet again. This is why as a school we are committed to not let this happen, and we have embarked on a journey to make our school actively anti-racist, to amplify black voices (not only of our students and staff but also in every field of knowledge) and to review our curriculum and policies to question in which way they are still reinforcing a racist narrative by disproportionately punishing black students, for example, or not celebrating the contributions of black academics. This does not mean erasing white voices, going on a witch hunt against everybody and everything we have learnt, but it means critically evaluating our practices and whether they are complicit in systems of oppression. So here are some of the initiatives we, as a school, have already embarked upon and we commit to carry on:

Decolonising the curriculum:

What it means - in the UK, we are still living under the 'legacy' of the British Empire. As a result, much of what we are taught reflects the values of the British Empire and its colonial ambitions. That thanks to men and women of the 16th, 17th and 18th century, Africa, Asia and the Americas became civilised. That as a result of Christian missionaries, these continents have government, education, law and order - that they can now be considered a civilisation. But prior to the arrival of Europeans on these continents, these very things were already established. So our curriculum tends to highlight and glorify the actions of British men and women over centuries rather than equally discuss the negative implications of their actions. These include Florence Nightingale's refusal of Mary Seacole during the Crimean War and encouraging her nurses not to associate with Mary. As well as Winston Churchill's colonialist ideology in the face of African countries demanding independence, for example the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya in 1952. Decolonising the curriculum is a reconsidering of the curriculum and how it is taught.

How can we do it - Departments across the school will need to evaluate their curriculum and the narrative that white achievements are more important. Departments will need to be willing to remove content that is outdated and encourages that bias. Departments will need to be willing to create new schemes of work to address the imbalance between white and black lesson content. Black people can be found in





Maths, Science, English, Music and the Arts, and therefore should be learnt about.

What we will hopefully achieve - Nelson Mandela said, 'Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.' What we teach reflects our values. When we change what we teach and have a curriculum that truly reflects the world that we live in, then, I believe that education can help undo the racism, discrimination and prejudice that is so prevalent and accepted in our society.

Staff training:

How to decolonise the curriculum - this is a huge undertaking as it means questioning the way we as staff have learnt anything, which has definitely shaped the way we teach it. Support will be sought and given in order to do a thorough and meaningful job.

Implicit bias - this is one of the most important areas to work on; we all have implicit bias, in that we all form an opinion or a judgement about somebody within a few seconds of seeing them; often this judgement affects the way we interact and we label that person; often this affects the expectations teachers might have of their students, and very often it is at the root of students' underperformance or exclusion rates, which disproportionately affect black boys. Even though BGS is a very warm, welcoming environment where we pride ourselves on caring about each individual student, and the relationships between staff and students are very positive on the whole, we are not immune from implicit bias - we are human and have been conditioned since the first day of our existence. We will seek the support of external agencies in delivering training to recognise and mitigate the effects of implicit bias, which will hopefully have a positive knock on effect on the relationships with black students.

Safe space for students:

We will encourage and support the setting up of an after school club, open to anyone who is committed to taking an active stance on racism and further educate themselves - not only on inequality but also on the brilliant contributions of black artists and academics in any field of knowledge. Ideally, this would be led by Sixth Form students (also an amazing CAS project) and supported by members of staff. It can be a place for safe discussions, but also to read literature, watch movies and documentaries and discuss/plan whole school initiatives such as assemblies and other events.

We are truly thrilled to be part of this movement and we know we have a lot to live up to, but we are confident that we can count on the support of fellow staff, SMT and all of our students.

Ms Fuwa, Mrs Moore and Ms Contini





The Origins of the Black Lives Matter Movement

The #BlackLivesMatter movement started in 2013 when 17 year old African-American, Trayvon Martin was shot by a neighbourhood watch member, George Zimmerman, who just thought he looked sketchy and because he was black, shot him. Zimmerman was put on trial, but at the end he was found to be 'not guilty'. People were now claiming the justice system to be unjust and spreading awareness by using the hashtag, formed by Alicia Cullors, Co-founder of BlackLivesMatter network.



On 17th July 2014, Eric Garner, also a black man, was killed a year later by police in Staten Island, even when he repeatedly said as he was being arrested "I can't breathe!".

People were angry and large groups of protesters of all races were coming out onto the street against the police, holding banners and some were peaceful protesters and some weren't. The phrase 'I can't breathe!' was also used on social media to raise awareness. A few weeks later a young black boy, Mike Brown was shot multiple times by police in the middle of the street. Apparently he had his hands up, but ran and he was shot.



All these stories came up on headlines and the word 'armed' is usually associated with them. They are never armed. The police are armed. Not only with weapons, but with racism. These events show that they can kill or discriminate any person of colour different from them, and at the end of the day, when it comes down to a trial, the justice system fails us. Taking the side of the perpetrator, never the victim. Protests started getting violent in Ferguson. No surprise there. People wanted to be seen. People wanted to be heard, but no one was listening to them. The protests got to a turning point when police started pulling up mothers and children and pointing guns in their faces.



Activists from all around the country came to Ferguson to protest. It brought back some old citizens and influencers from all over. It was becoming a 'magnet'. The demand of the movement, then came to the indictment of Darren Wilson, the police officer who shot Mike Brown. The Jury, however, was not in favour and Darren Wilson had no charges pressed on him. The movement continued. In the city of Baltimore 2015, things got worse. Big rappers, singers, sport players and actors started doing their part to spread awareness and stand up for justice. The protests had turned into riots and looting and many buildings and businesses were looted, cars were burnt and many arrests were made. News stations were then twisting the message and people's words and saying the Black Lives Matter movement were a violent, hate group.





Recently, three black people who were fatally shot only at the beginning of this year (2020).

February 23rd, 25 year old Ahmaud Arbery, while out on a jog, was shot by McMichael (who had been chasing Ahmaud with his father, Gregory); before shooting him, he addressed him with a racial slur. He was shot 3 times, in what many have described as a modern day lynching.

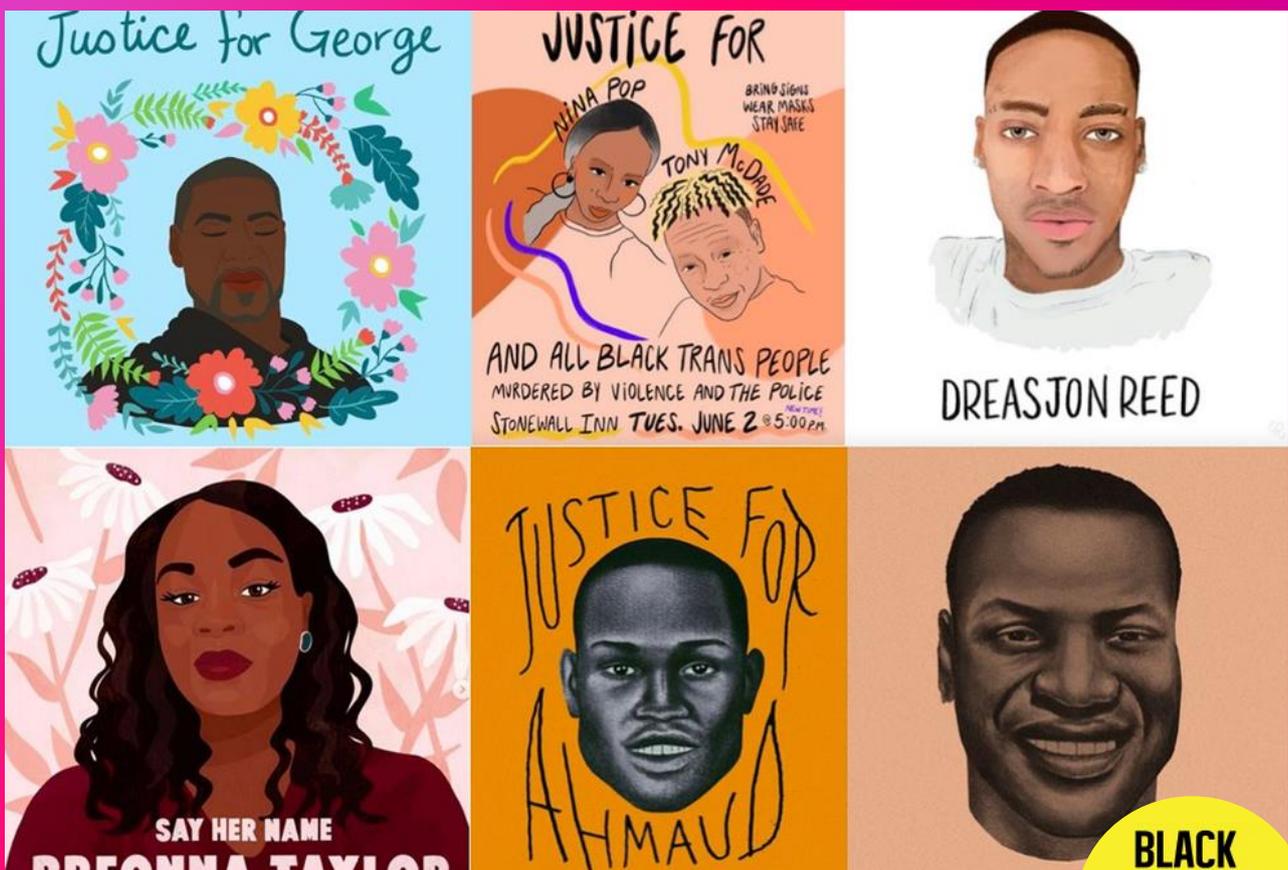
March 13th, 26 year old Breonna Taylor, an emergency medical technician who had been working tirelessly as part of the coronavirus response, was shot in Louisville, Kentucky, when police broke into her home whilst she and her boyfriend were sleeping, in an attempted 'drug sting'. She was shot 8 times, months before turning 27 in June. As it turns out, not only police had the wrong address, but they were searching for someone who was already in custody.

May 25th, 46 year old George Floyd was killed by police during an arrest for forgery. Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for 8 mins 46 seconds, whilst Floyd repeatedly said, 'I can't breathe!'. It took days of protests for all four police officers to be arrested and charged, and for the charges against Derek Chauvin to be increased from third to second degree murder.

These events ignited the spark that erupted in the current Black Lives Matter protests that have been seen worldwide.

This seems like a never ending war, so GET WOKE AND STAY WOKE!

Kaito Iheancho, Year 9





Institutional Racism has been present in society through multiple generations, especially towards African Americans. In History Lessons, they teach you about the slavery-to-segregation process that innocent black people endured along with the political forces which were prejudiced against African Americans (e.g. The KKK) and how they were ridiculed and appropriated for their culture and most importantly the colour of their skin. However, the topics that we don't get taught in schools is, despite the Civil Rights Movement and marking a milestone in the initiated fight for racial equality, that there are still many financial, discriminatory and criminal injustices that affect black people's lives every single day in both the USA and UK.

Recently, a man called George Floyd was murdered in the middle of the street by a policeman named Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. Floyd was originally arrested under the accusation of paying a counterfeit bill and was restrained to the ground, where the policeman Derek Chauvin proceeded to kneel on George Floyd's neck, notwithstanding the fact that George Floyd was crying out that 'He Couldn't Breathe' whilst bystanders were filming and begging Chauvin to stop. Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 40 seconds until he fell unconscious and was reported to be dead later that day. An American-Asian Policeman known as 'Officer Thao' was a colleague of Chauvin, along with two others, stood by and didn't interfere even though George's death was impending. On Social Media Platforms, the video spread like wildfire around Twitter, Instagram etc. and I even had the displeasure of seeing this diabolical murder with my own two eyes. I was flabbergasted to see that innocent black people, in 2020, are still being treated like animals.

Therefore, I joined the movement to receive justice for all of the prejudice against African American people and the innocent lives of all Black People taken due to the everlasting societal stigmatisation of The Black Community. The campaign is present to break that stigmatization and display the purpose and the impact of Black People in societies and how Black Lives Matter! Spread awareness, read books, sign petitions, safely protest, donate to charities, stream YouTube videos which are contributing money to the cause. Don't stay silent in these times, fight against the unscrupulous police system that allows for racial minorities, including, Black People to be socially, economically and politically discriminated against. Remember, if you choose to do nothing, you have automatically sided with the oppressor. Your silence is deafening. Black Lives Matter!

Nathan Singleton, Year 9

HOW TO RESPOND TO COMMON RACIST STATEMENTS

By @wastefreemarie





Black Lives Matter

The tragic murder of George Floyd pushed me to learn more about why racism exists. It was chilling to see that the officer didn't care that his brutality was captured on camera. I wondered why no one could stop him. Then I did some research and it took me back to the years of slavery. Slaves were disposable. They had no rights. No voice. No feelings. They had a high threshold for pain. How could slave owners at the time believe this, and also believe that slaves were human? Maybe they didn't believe in the humanity of slaves. Maybe this belief system has still not gone away.



What surprised me though was that I did not hear about this in the history lessons at school.

My Experience

I wasn't always aware that I was black. The first time I realised was when my friend said I couldn't go to her birthday party because her mum doesn't want any n****s in her house. We were 7 years old. I was shocked, but too stunned to be angry. I never looked at her the same way again. Or the world. It was the first time I realised me being black could be a problem. Similar incidences continue until today. Some obvious, some subtle. The impact is the same. They slowly chip away at my sense of self-worth. Sometimes it is a battle to get out of bed, knowing I have to go out and face life with racism.

We have now been at home for many weeks due to the lockdown. After the first few weeks I realised that I was happy. We were all happy. The difference was that we did not have to go out and deal with racism. Is this a good thing? Is it sad? Wouldn't it be amazing if I did not battle the thought of leaving the house in the morning? Was my new found peace to last until lockdown ended?

Then I noticed a pattern in the news headlines which my family watched every evening. The heroes did not look like me. The images of the fatalities did. Over and over the reports said that BAMEs had underlying conditions that put them at risk. I wondered why the nature of their jobs was not the highest risk factor. Most people I know work in the care sector including the NHS. This made me wonder whether our genes were weak.

I then mentioned to my mum that history is being documented on the screens. Many years from now the images of our heroes will play on the screen, and so will those of the fatalities. The views of future generations are already being shaped.

Then George Floyd happened. It started to come together.

Could it be that the officer who knelt on George Floyd's neck did not really believe in his humanity? Was that view shaped centuries before the officer was born? Or did he learn to view people of colour this way? Could he unlearn it? Could the world unlearn the views they've held for centuries? What role do schools have in shaping the views of future generations?

Currently at my best I brace myself for a world where racism still exists, but at my worst I wonder how long I can keep up the fight. Hearing people who have already given in and go by their given labels disheartens me. Will they rediscover who they are? Will we live long enough to discover who we truly are and what we are capable of? Will the world accept who we really are? Will it tell our actual story?

Christabel Masaba, Year 10



BGS My Experience ~ Looking back and planning for the future

Starting secondary school is daunting for any kid, but I remember the summer before I arrived at Bexley Grammar School in 1993 (yes, a very long time ago!), there were protests taking place in Welling. I remember this well because there were publicised violent clashes between anti-racist protesters and the far-right British National Party whose headquarters were near my soon-to-be School. Hearing about this and racist attacks felt unsettling enough, yet sadly, experiencing racism was nothing new for me personally. Before I began Year 7 student life, I had already been called many racist names. I had even been spat at in the streets by strangers – so understandably, these events only heightened my 'new school' fears.

On the whole my experience at Bexley Grammar School was positive, however overt, racism did still exist. There were many moments where I did not feel like I had a voice to speak out, yet I somehow found my own way to deal with it. Reflecting back, perhaps I needed an adult to talk to, but I did luckily have the amazing support of my friends at school. This was hugely helpful at the time. Friendship support that's so strong that even now, these same friends have reached out to me as the world has witnessed recent events and a global stand against racism.

Today as a teacher at Bexley Grammar, I want all of our students to know they are not alone. This school is here to support them and I am personally committed to putting myself out there. We will be their voice if they need us to be and help them to find theirs. We should be a school that listens when any student wants to speak up and we'll provide a safe environment where all views can be heard. The learning never stops and we all play a part, so let's embrace this opportunity to be the change for good. Let's read more, talk more and most importantly listen carefully to each other with good intention.

We are in this together and the work doesn't stop here. It's up to our school, families, and wider communities to have these difficult conversations and continuously improve our understanding of what it means to be inclusive and "anti-racist". So when the media attention settles down, we can continue our momentum to reflect and act on what we learn – with our thoughts, insights and everyday choices. Together, I am confident we can make our future even brighter and better for all of us.

Mrs Moore, KS5 Science Leader

I believe the History curriculum is very focused on highlighting significant people of predominantly white background and I feel like there should be more diversity. For example, in GCSE history, we learn about how Florence Nightingale helped soldiers during the Crimean War, but we don't learn about people like Mary Seacole who also significantly helped during the wartime and showed resilience despite setbacks due to her race.

I also believe that there should be zero tolerance to racism as racism happens so often in society and it can have detrimental impacts on one's mental health, whether it's meant as a joke or not, to the point where black people may have to put up a fake persona to satisfy the opinions of other people or act in a different way to defy negative stereotypes.

Favour Amurukonye, Year 10





I have a voice

I am not black, but I do have a voice, so I want to use it instead of staying silent. I stand against racism - whether it's black people, people of colour or even white people. Someone should never be treated differently because of their race, colour, background, ethnicity, beliefs, culture etc. Discrimination against anyone is never okay because we live in a society where we should all be treated equally, but it's 2020 and we still go on to talk about this. All lives matter, yes, but there is more hate and injustice towards black people and it has been made apparent that many people still continue to believe that black lives don't matter. This isn't right. Many people are using their platforms to speak out and still, the brutality doesn't stop. It may not be all police officers, but there is a difference between arresting someone for a crime and killing someone on the spot for no reason. Racism should immediately be stopped! I myself, am not white nor black, but I know well enough that I should stand for rights and justice. I recognise what is right and wrong and it seems that most of our generation have forgotten to be aware of these things and that racism is a very important topic that tends to be ignored. The people who are hurting others because of their skin colour etc. should be punished for their actions. This situation needs to be spoken about as it is just as important as education because some people may not realise that what they're doing is wrong due to the fact that they weren't raised to be aware of racism etc. I feel deeply sorry for everyone who are/ have been affected by racism and I appreciate all those who understand and acknowledge that they have privileges, but everyone should be respected regardless of their race. I agree that we should come together, work together and become anti-racist, but I do not stand by the fact that rioting and looting are right. Everyone has a right to be mad and upset during this time, but the protests should also stay peaceful and organised as we are still going through a very dangerous pandemic. I would like to contribute this message to others to raise awareness.

Thank you.

Kelly To, Year 7

After most of the country had accepted that we were to be in lockdown for longer than we had expected, it came as a surprise to many that we would be able to make dramatic changes to the world's justice system. From home, or from our own streets, we have managed to work together as a community to fight for something that should have been changed years ago. The death of George Floyd has brought many old cases to light, uncovering an ongoing set of crimes and murders involving racism and police brutality. It has exposed both President Trump's and our own UK Government and Prime Minister's racist remarks and attitudes, which, not long ago, much of the public were oblivious to. I am sure many are surprised that racism and other forms of discrimination are still a major part of our modern society, especially in diverse countries such as our own.

It came as a surprise to me that most of the blatant racism shown by the world's leading politicians is only becoming apparent to the majority of people now that there are protests taking place all over the world. News shows and social media have been recently given the citizens more of an insight to what's been going on over the past few years that has not received enough coverage. Now that more people are starting to realise how prevalent discrimination has become in our modern day, it could bring good change to the attitudes of the world, and better judgement when it comes to voting for our new governments and leaders. Protests that started out wanting justice for George Floyd have now ended up fighting for justice for many more people, and for the end of racism as a whole. Some are only at the beginning of their new beliefs; others have been actively anti-racist for most of their lifetime. Overall, this is a movement agreed on by many people, and we are fighting together to achieve the equity that should have been accomplished last century.

Lauren Rees, Year 10





Being Black at BGS

You mentally prepare yourself to hear "Can I call you...?" or "Do you have a nickname?" because no one can say your name right.

You wonder if you'll have any black teachers, usually, you don't.

You've come to terms with being 1 out of 6,5,4,3, even 2 black people in your class.

Sometimes you are the only black person in your class.

As soon as the word slavery leaves your teacher's mouth, you can already feel the apologetic stares burrowing through your skull while you watch endless videos where people who look like you are tortured.

You want to tell them that slavery is not the only thing black people had,

That we had ancient civilizations and kings and queens and that the richest person who ever lived was black, that African empires rivalled Rome and our kings and queens sat on gold, rubies and topaz.

But you don't know any of that. You aren't taught about it.

You know all about the Slave Triangle and plantations, all

about the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King,

You watch Selma and The Butler,

But it all stops there.

You laugh when teachers confuse you for another black person, but really you know that you don't look alike.

You say nothing when people bring up "The N-Word Argument" because you know they all say it anyway so it won't matter what you say.

You don't want to be the Angry Black Person.

You read *Of Mice and Men* in English, and your teacher somehow manages to convince everyone that it's "just a word", yet anytime anyone says it, they look at you with a wary look in their eyes. You leave the classroom embarrassed.

You don't want to be the Angry Black Person.

You go to your first party, and people shout it in your face. You laugh awkwardly, but no one notices - I mean, it's just in a song right? Wrong.

But you don't want to be the Angry Black Person.

So you keep quiet, you don't argue when it comes to race or anything else that directly concerns you because you know people won't listen.



Anonymous

My views on Racism!

Racism is the prejudice directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group. In this day and age, many people have moved past discriminating against someone else for being different, but it seems as though a small minority of people in the world are stuck in the past and can't accept that everyone is equal. As a young black male, I have had to realise that the odds are stacked against me and I have to work twice as hard as my white counterparts just to be noticed. This is the definition of injustice! I would like to state that the black community acknowledges that all lives matter, but this clearly isn't being portrayed when innocent black people are being killed because of the colour of their skin! I hope that we overcome racism soon and we can all live together in peace; to all the people who face oppression in their daily lives, aggression and anger is not the way to respond. This just gives the oppressors something else to categorise us as. We need to stand up for ourselves and speak our minds and also demonstrate what LOVE is. **BLACK LIVES MATTER!**

Alan Terry, Year 10





Abraham Adeyemi, BGS former student

I feel it sensible to preface this with some context. To those of you reading this, who I assume are current Bexley Grammar students, my name is Abraham Adeyemi and I was a student from 2002 – 2009. Should it not be obvious from my surname, I am of Nigerian heritage.

I currently work as a writer-director and producer of film/television and theatre and I only mention this to add context to my thoughts on Bexley Grammar below, which refer to my film No More Wings (should you wish for further context, a [trailer](#) can be found on YouTube).



Hundreds of past BGS students have been discussing, on social media, the state of affairs of the world currently, specifically in regards to the suffering of black people. There were many posts about their times at school and accounts of racist incidents.

In recent days I have spoken with Ms. Among (who I assume you will all know to be Mrs. Moore? Heads up, eleven years onwards and I can confirm that you will probably never feel comfortable calling your former teachers by their first names, despite them permitting/inviting/demanding you to do so). We felt that it might be worthwhile to share some of the comments that I wrote to BGS Alumni in response to our discussions.

I hope that there might be something you take from it:

"I speak for myself but hope many can relate when I say that any critique of the school comes from a place of love. I quite simply would not waste my time if I did not feel so strongly about this establishment, and grateful for what it has instilled within me.

I have incredibly fond memories of Bexley Grammar, one might describe my film, in fact, to in some ways be a love letter to the school. The school has set me up with a bunch of qualities/traits that have taken me this far in life and I'm sure I will continue to credit it for the rest of my life. Equally, many of my closest friends were made in this school and also feel the same about the invaluable impact it has had on us. We would not be where we are without it and we are eternally indebted.

For the avoidance of doubt - despite my undeniably glowing review of our beloved school - I would like to make it clear that I, too, did suffer racism during my time, both from students and staff. And I shouldn't need to say "not all" as I've not said "all", but I know people sometimes find offence in sweeping statements, so, again, for avoidance of doubt, not at the hands of all non-black students or staff.

A friend of mine once said that someone asked them "if everything is fine, why do you still go to therapy?" to which she responded "why would I not want to be a better version of myself? No matter how great I am, I am not perfect, there's always room for improvement and therapy is a continued commitment to working towards being a better version of myself."

All of this is said to reaffirm that, no matter how terrific BGS may have been for me and the impact it's had, reading your posts - specifically the accounts of racism that were shared - shows there is room for improvement, regardless of whether you experienced these things or not.

Why wouldn't we all welcome that?"





BGS LGBT+ Alliance

BLACK PEOPLE HAVE BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF ADVANCES IN LGBT+ RIGHTS FOR DECADES - YET CONTINUE TO FACE RACISM FROM WITHIN THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY. HERE, WE CELEBRATE AND HONOUR THEIR WORK.



It is crucial that the LGBT+ community defends and amplifies the voices of the black people, indigenous people and other people of colour within the community. At the BGS LGBT+ Alliance, we know that LGBT+ liberation and anti-racism must go hand in hand, which is why this Pride month we want to say loud and clear: Black Lives Matter.

Here we've focused on three leading figures, past and present, on both sides of the Atlantic.

Marsha P. Johnson

Marsha P. Johnson was a transgender African American activist who was a key figure in the Stonewall riots of 1969, which kick-started the contemporary LGBT+ movement, paving the way for huge leaps forward in the liberation of the community. Those riots were in response to a police raid on a gay bar, and are historical evidence that protests work.



*Marsha P Johnson (left) and Sylvia Rivera (right).
(Pink News, originally from 2017 Netflix documentary
The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson)*

Together with Sylvia Rivera, Johnson founded STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) in order to help transgender youth. Johnson also spent a lot of time advocating for those with AIDS, including working with ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power).

Josephine Baker

Josephine Baker was a bisexual African American entertainer in France who used her platform to speak out against racial injustices. During World War II she collected information for the French, learning secrets from German soldiers during her performances. She was also involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and often spoke out against segregation, including refusing to perform at segregated venues and writing articles on segregation. At the 1963 March on Washington, she gave a speech highlighting the problems with segregation and the need to speak out. Baker also worked with the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), who designated the 20th May as 'Josephine Baker Day'.

"My life is behind me. There is not too much fire burning inside me. And before it goes out, I want you to use what is left to light that fire in you. So that you can carry on, and so that you can do those things that I have done."



Image taken from Wikipedia



Labi Siffre - British singer-songwriter, musician, poet, activist

"Labi Siffre, a black, gay activist, and one of the most talented singer songwriters you've probably never heard of." -- **Alexandra Pollard, The Independent**

Singer of the 1987 anti-Apartheid hit *Something inside So Strong*, Siffre, now 74, was born in London to a Barbadian/Belgian mother and a Nigerian father.

His work has been sampled and covered again and again, including other hits such as *It Must Be Love* (1971), covered by Madness in 1981, and Eminem's first hit *My Name Is*, which sampled Siffre's work. Initially, however, Siffre denied Dr Dre and Eminem the rights to sample his song until they removed the homophobia and misogyny from their lyrics, which Siffre denounced as "lazy writing" in a **2012 interview**. He told them to "Diss the bigots not their victims"

He's been openly gay throughout his career, a real trailblazer in the music industry - yet few know his name. It's time he got the recognition he deserves.



Album cover image taken from Spotify

Senior Prefect Team

As prefects, our job is to represent the school and students within it. In this way, we stand against all forms of prejudice, and are committed to eradicating racism from our community and curriculum. We would like to celebrate the Black Lives Matter movement and the incredible work and actions of students and staff across the school, in working for such positive change. We also want to highlight the work of other fantastic groups, like the Afro-Caribbean Society (ACS), who gave us this incredible quote we'd like to share: "If you live in this system of white supremacy, you are either fighting the system or you are complicit. There is no neutrality to be had towards systems of injustice, it is not something you can just opt out of" - Ijeoma Oluo.



We believe that actions such as decolonising the curriculum are of vital importance, and have been discussing what we can do, to ensure that this change and passion is continued well into the future. Our job is also to be the channel between staff and students so if you have any ideas or suggestions, please don't hesitate to let us know - you can contact us through the SPT Instagram account (@seniorprefects_bgs).

We hope everyone continues to be safe and we want to encourage all members of the BGS community to keep educating themselves and their families on not only the present issues of racism, but the true history of suffering that was, and in many ways still is, experienced.

The Senior Prefect Team





Afro-Caribbean Society

Many people nowadays believe that racism is no longer a problem in the UK, nor is it worthy of comparison to racism in the USA - I would like to challenge this thought. Systemic racism. What is it? Systemic racism is a form of racism expressed through discrimination in social and political institutions; reflected in disparities regarding wealth, income, criminal justice, employment, education, and other significant areas of society. Some examples of this are as follows: Black Caribbean and Mixed Caribbean children have rates of exclusion about three times than that of the pupil population as a whole, Black workers with degrees earn approximately 23.1% less on average than White workers, Black people who leave their school with A-levels typically get paid 14.3% less than their White peers, and the statistics go on. When racism has manifested itself in society, it becomes almost invisible to those who do not experience it and it is all of our responsibilities not only to be educated on this topic, but to actively pursue change with a policy of anti-racism. Everyone, especially those in positions of authority, must question themselves as to how they express *their* policy of anti-racism - neutrality is not acceptable. We are all able to invoke change in our society, whether it is through protesting, or using our positions to change mind-sets; whatever way we choose requires an attitude of more than just passive sympathy. The abominable murder of George Floyd has sparked a mass movement against racism of all forms and we must all play our part in ensuring that his death was not in vain. So, how will your response go down in history?

"The beauty of anti-racism is that you don't have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it's the only way forward." — Ijeoma Oluo
#blacklivesmatter

Ways you can reach us:

Instagram @bgs_acs

Twitter @BGS_ACS

Joshua Azubuike, Afro-Caribbean Society President, Senior Prefect

After the exposing of the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police brutality, people have taken to the streets of major cities to proclaim the statement "Black Lives Matter". Through largely peaceful protest, we as people have managed to make our voices heard all over the country and, hopefully, we will continue to enact real change. However, the problem of systemic racism goes much deeper than what we have seen on video. From personal experience, I have seen that through systemic racism, many children of colour are persuaded into abandoning dreams and goals they strive to achieve, as they are told the roles of CEOs, judges, scientists - the roles of people that have an impact in society - are simply meant for someone else.

As a result, the devastating impacts of systemic racism can continue to rage rampant in positions of power. This unequivocally shows that although we see these protests on the streets, the real struggle starts in classrooms. Education is the biggest factor in making real change. We as a society must teach young people of colour that their goals are valid and are achievable. Some white people may be asking, what does all of this mean for me? Understand that success and achievement for people of colour will not victimise you, but actualise a world where our level of success is not predetermined by the pigmentation of our skin, and we can create the change we so desperately wish to see.

Grace Gbadamosi, Afro-Caribbean Society Vice President





Black Mental Health Matters

Black people experience racism within their personal everyday lives, ranging from 'casual' slights and microaggressions to explicit hurtful comments and verbal and/or physical aggression. As a direct result of the systemic racism prevalent within the UK, Black people are also more likely to face societal disadvantages in numerous areas of their lives, inc. access to employment, welfare, educational opportunities, healthcare, etc.

This routine maltreatment of Black people can create (and worsen) very real and valid trauma for individuals. Impacts of racism on Black mental health also include: feelings of powerlessness, increased risk of depression and anxiety, feelings of being isolated and misunderstood, decreased trust and hope in others and yourself, panic and worry, and many others. Sometimes a sense of identity is also lost when racism occurs - this can manifest as existential questioning, which can lead to serious conflict within everyday life.

We know that nobody should ever have to feel this way. This is why radical healing needs to take place:

- Set your own boundaries and enforce them. You do not owe white people education or emotional labour.
- Allow yourself to feel your feelings without judgement. It's okay to feel exhausted, stressed, despondent, enraged, hopeless, and many other things. They are all justified feelings. If it is not on your own terms, and you don't feel comfortable doing so, do not feel that you have to explain why or how you're feeling to other people.
- Remember to continue celebrating Black culture. Remember that your voice and other Black voices continue to be powerful, and continue to make a difference. Do not feel like you have to 'tone down' your Blackness or change anything about yourself - you are enough.
- Do things that bring you comfort and allow you to relax - it is important that you are taking yourself into full consideration when trying to heal.
- Don't be afraid to reach out for professional help. If you believe it is something that will help you, don't let others tell you that your feelings don't justify therapy, that it is a waste of time and/or money, or that you should be able to heal without it.

Know that it's okay to need support and that you can seek it from staff members; not only to let them know that you have been subject to racism, but to have somebody to talk to and to let them know how it's affecting you. Mrs Moore, Miss Fuwa and Ms Contini are all happy to be contacted if you want someone to talk to about how your wellbeing is being impacted. They can be contacted by email from these addresses:

moore_m@bexleygs.co.uk, fuwa_o@bexleygs.co.uk, contini_l@bexleygs.co.uk.

**“it is being honest
about my pain that
makes me
invincible.” —
Nayyirah Waheed**





Resources for Improving Black Mental Health:

Black Minds Matter

<https://www.blackmindsmatteruk.com/>

A new charity providing free professional mental health services for Black individuals and families across the UK. All therapists are Black.

Stop Hate UK

<https://www.stophateuk.org/>

Free 24hr helpline providing independent support to people affected by hate crime.

Nafsiyat Intercultural Therapy Centre

<https://www.nafsiyat.org.uk/>

Intercultural therapy available in 20+ languages, with free mental health assessments (via phone) for North London residents.

The Free Psychotherapy Network

<https://freepsychotherapynetwork.com/find-an-therapist/>

Free psychotherapy with FPN therapists across the UK.

Switchboard

<https://switchboard.lgbt/>

Free support (via phone, online chat & email) for LGBTQ+ community. All volunteers' self-define as LGBTQ+.

Therapy for Black Girls

<https://therapyforblackgirls.com/>

An online space dedicated to encouraging the mental wellness of Black women and girls.

Therapy for Black Men

<https://therapyforblackmen.org/>

A dedicated place for men in order to strip away the stigma of Black men not seeking support.

Body & Soul Initiative

<http://bodyandsoulcharity.org/sharethelove/>

Weekly live streams for people aged 16-30, focused on "effective, concrete skills to help young people manage emotional distress".

Samaritans

<https://www.samaritans.org/>

Free 24hr helpline via phone, email & letter.

Maudsley Centre for Child and Adolescent Eating Disorders

Refer yourself or someone you know at: <https://mccaed.slam.nhs.uk/young-person-and-families/> Also contactable at: 0203 228 2545.

Melanin and Mental Health

Podcast series run by "two brown chicks".

Liberate

An app, including some free meditations for BIPOC on trauma, microaggressions, and more, delivered by BIPOC.

The Safe Place

An app focused on educating the Black community about mental illness, including providing self-care tips, mental health resources, inspirational videos & podcasts, and self-assessment questions.

Calm Harm

An app focused on helping teenagers manage the urge to self-harm.

**Chloe Adebiji, Niamh O'Toole-Mackridge and
Samantha Hayes-Holgate, Year 12**





Black Lives Matter - key terms for people to research:

You may have heard about these terms, especially lately. You may have never heard of some of them, however...why not research their meaning to understand the issue of racism in more depth?

Key Term
Colour blindness
Colourism
Cultural appropriation
Decolonisation
Environmental racism
Eurocentrism
Hate crime
Mass incarceration
Militarisation (of the police)
Myth of bootstrapping (bootstrap theory)
Myth of reverse racism
Police brutality
Racial profiling
Racism
School-to-prison pipeline
Stop and search
Structural racism
Tokenism
Whataboutism
White saviour complex
White washing





Combating Racism

Over the last couple of weeks, the issues in society have become more prominent and visual. With social media platforms (other than televised news) it's been made clear that we have swept issues like racism and police brutality under the carpet and have normalised the unlawful killings and racism that black people face on a daily basis. In efforts to try and combat racism and expel it out of society, there are necessary and relatively simple steps we, as humans, can take to relieve and hopefully distinguish the problems the black community and society face.

1. CALL IT OUT

The most important step is to **identify when someone is being racist** or if something is said that is actually racist. We live in a society where **racism is hidden under layers of banter** or 'friendly' behaviour. People believe that if it is said in a song, or a book, or if other people have said and gotten away with it, it's okay to repeat racist language used. Regardless of who it is, make sure you make them aware of what they are saying, and ensure they don't say it again and warn them of the consequences if they repeat it. It is important to inform people about their actions and quickly stop a first time situation from developing into a mentality and mind-set. Calling racism out will **prevent their ideologies from developing**.

2. EDUCATE YOURSELF

Sometimes, **it is easy to be racist or use racist language and not realise what we are saying**, because it is used so commonly around us. Education is the key to becoming more informed and making others aware. Media tools such as films, books and podcasts ensure that we are all able to understand racism and its appearances. Even social media apps such as Twitter and Instagram may help people gain a full understanding of what's happening every day, as it has been made apparent that **a lot of mainstream media and news sources sometimes don't show the full story** and are biased.

3. SPEAK OUT

It is a common belief that racism doesn't concern those who haven't experienced it. But in actual fact, **we all have a duty to reinforce equality across all races**. A lot of people, especially teenagers, feel uneasy about what their friends will think of them if they speak out about these issues and believe they will lose social status and followers when they address issues faced by the black community. Generally, this is not the case and **you should not let your peers stop you from speaking out** about these issues. Therefore, on all platforms you have, from Snapchat stories to Twitter, whether they are small or big, it is imperative that you speak up about racism and are spreading the word to help combat this global issue.

4. STOP FUELLING STEREOTYPES

A lot of racism experienced by black people and the opportunities members of the black community face is unfortunately based on stereotypes that have built up over the years. One especially prominent and active stereotype that will even get black people rejected from jobs is the assumed **'thuggish', inarticulate and aggressive** nature black people are **predicted to have**. These **stereotypes are even used when it comes to police** and the authorities; where black people are stopped by police for no reason and are sometimes disbelieved when giving testimonies in court. This is all based on **racial profiling**. Not using these stereotypes in everyday life and not using them as a way to judge black people on first looks, will provide a fairer chance and more equal opportunity for all people and a better way of life.

To conclude, doing these steps it would greatly help the battle that we face daily against racism. As previously mentioned, this is not just a battle that solely black people should fight. When **all races come together** to combat such issues, it sends a more powerful message to the world and emphasises the fact that we have a problem in society that needs to be tackled. We hope that with this information you will **take the necessary steps** to help combat this problem and gain equality amongst all races.

Thank you for reading.

Fola Akinsuyi, Emmanuel Oliech and Prosper Omopariola, Year 10



How can I educate myself on the topic of racism and on the experiences of Black people?

One of the most important issues that has been highlighted through the recent Black Lives Matter protests and the surrounding coverage, is that informing ourselves about the issue of racial prejudice is so very, very important. With this in mind, we have compiled a list of suggested resources that are really useful tools not only for learning about the issue of racism, but also how to talk about it and have the conversations that clearly aren't happening often enough. It is by no means exhaustive, but should provide a good starting point.

Books:

The link attached is a fantastic list of books, compiled by Jennifer Lake (Year 12) and various students and members of staff across departments: find it [here](#).

Films & Documentaries:

- '13th' (Netflix, 15) - a poignant documentary about racial inequality in America and its prison system.
- 'Dear White People' (Netflix series, 15 - also a film with the same name) - follows a group of students who attend a majority-white Ivy League college and their experiences of topics like misguided activism and cultural bias.
- 'Fruitvale Station' (Film, 15) - an incredibly poignant film that depicts the experiences of the last day of Oscar Grant's life and the events leading up to his death, at the hands of BART Police Officers.
- 'Explained: the racial wealth gap' (Netflix, 15) - a discussion on how centuries of inequality and housing discrimination has led to a racial wealth gap across the globe.
- 'The death and life of Marsha P. Johnson' (Netflix Documentary, 15) - a re-examination of the 1992 death of transgender activist Marsha P. Johnson, who was found floating in the Hudson River. Originally classed as a suicide, many in the local community think that it was murder.
- 'When they See Us' (Netflix, 15) - Five teens from Harlem become trapped in a nightmare when they're falsely accused of a brutal attack in Central Park. Based on the true story.
- 'Empire' (Jeremy Paxman BBC series, available on YouTube) - Jeremy Paxman traces the story of the British Empire.
- 'Racism, a history' (BBC and available on YouTube) - a detailed look at how racism affects everyday lives
- 'Windrush Generation: The scandal that shook Britain explained and debated' (Channel 4 and available on YouTube) - Gathering those directly affected, whose lives have been ruined, together with leading politicians, campaigners and thinkers, to ask: What does it say about us? This Britain?



Podcasts & Other:

- [Have you heard George's podcast? \(available on BBC Sounds\)](#) - an experimental podcast delivered in various forms, including poetry, history, music and news.

**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**



Protesting Safely

Across the globe, many people have taken to the streets to protest and support the Black Lives Matter movement. There are, of course, many other ways in which you can support the movement, but if you are planning to join the local protests, here is some guidance to follow:

- There is still a pandemic going on: bear in mind that this is still the case - take extra precautions, including wearing a face-covering (advice on how to make your own can be found [here](#)) and observing social distance.
- Bring the right essentials: water, a small bag with personal items, snacks and suitable clothing should be taken with you, to make it as easy and comfortable for you as possible.
- Plan beforehand: consider how busy the trains will be, the new laws on wearing face-coverings while on public transport and make sure that you have a plan, in case of emergency. Amnesty International has released some guidance on how to stay safe when protesting, read it [here](#).
- Know your rights: it is important that you do your research beforehand, to educate yourself both on the issues that you are protesting against and the rights that you have (find out more [here](#)).

Charlotte Allen & Elena Storry, Year 12

PROTESTING SAFELY

WHAT TO WEAR



Nondescript, solid color, layered clothing; cover identifying tattoos



Goggles & mask



Heat resistant gloves



Tie your hair up



Emergency contacts written down

WHAT TO BRING



Water for drinking & tear gas



Snacks



Cash/change & ID



Washcloth



Bandages & first aid supplies



Earplugs



Protest signs

DON'T BRING



Cell phone without first turning off Face/Touch ID, going on airplane mode, and disabling data.



Jewelry



Anything you don't want to be arrested with



Contact lenses





ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND RACIAL JUSTICE

In this day and age, it is easy to identify the overwhelming numbers of problems in our society. Unfortunately, it seems that the movement towards equity and justice (not only for individuals of varying minorities and disadvantaged groups but also for the very environment which we all live in) simply functions as a painfully inefficient system, whereby individual issues are focused on at a time until another takes over, leaving the former unresolved until its next turn.

It can be argued that our biggest problem as a society is the inability to recognise the otherwise clear connections between these issues as opposed to the strenuous efforts put into tackling them one-by-one. As stated by Van Jones, the co-founder of several non-profit organizations, including the Dream Corps, "Environmental justice is the movement to ensure that no community suffers disproportionate environmental burden or goes without enjoying fair environmental benefits". In this sense, it is imperative to acknowledge the interdependence of environmental justice with racial justice.

Firstly, whilst it is inarguable that the effects of environmental degradation is having - and will continue to have - a serious impact on every single being on this planet, this burden is far from evenly spread. This is clearly demonstrated by the concept of environmental racism, which is a term used to describe environmental injustice that occurs within a racialised context both in practice and policy. The simple fact is that we cannot achieve environmental justice without racial justice. As the global North has sacrificed the planet on the altar of the myth of endless economic growth, so too has the global North sacrificed the lives of black people, indigenous people, and other people of colour on that same altar.

As Asad Rehman, executive director of anti-poverty charity War on Want says, colonialism and the climate crisis are products of the same broken thinking - that there are some human lives that matter more than others.

Whether it's the British Empire stealing \$45 trillion from India, the ongoing water crisis in the largely black community of Flint, Michigan in the richest country on Earth, the ignoring of the





plight of Pacific island states or the people of Bangladesh, or choosing to locate a polluting factory in an impoverished community of colour, environmental and colonial racism rears its ugly head in many forms.

The voices of people of colour, indigenous groups, and the global South must be central in the response to climate breakdown: important as renewables are, we cannot simply slap a solar panel on centuries of a broken ideology and call it job done.

At the BGS Environmental Action Group, we are committed to putting anti-racism at the heart of all we do. If humanity is to succeed in tackling the climate and nature emergencies and building an environmentally just world, the world must act upon and take as a universal truth: Black Lives Matter.

By Azeezat Hassan and Sam Gee on behalf the BGS Environmental Action Group

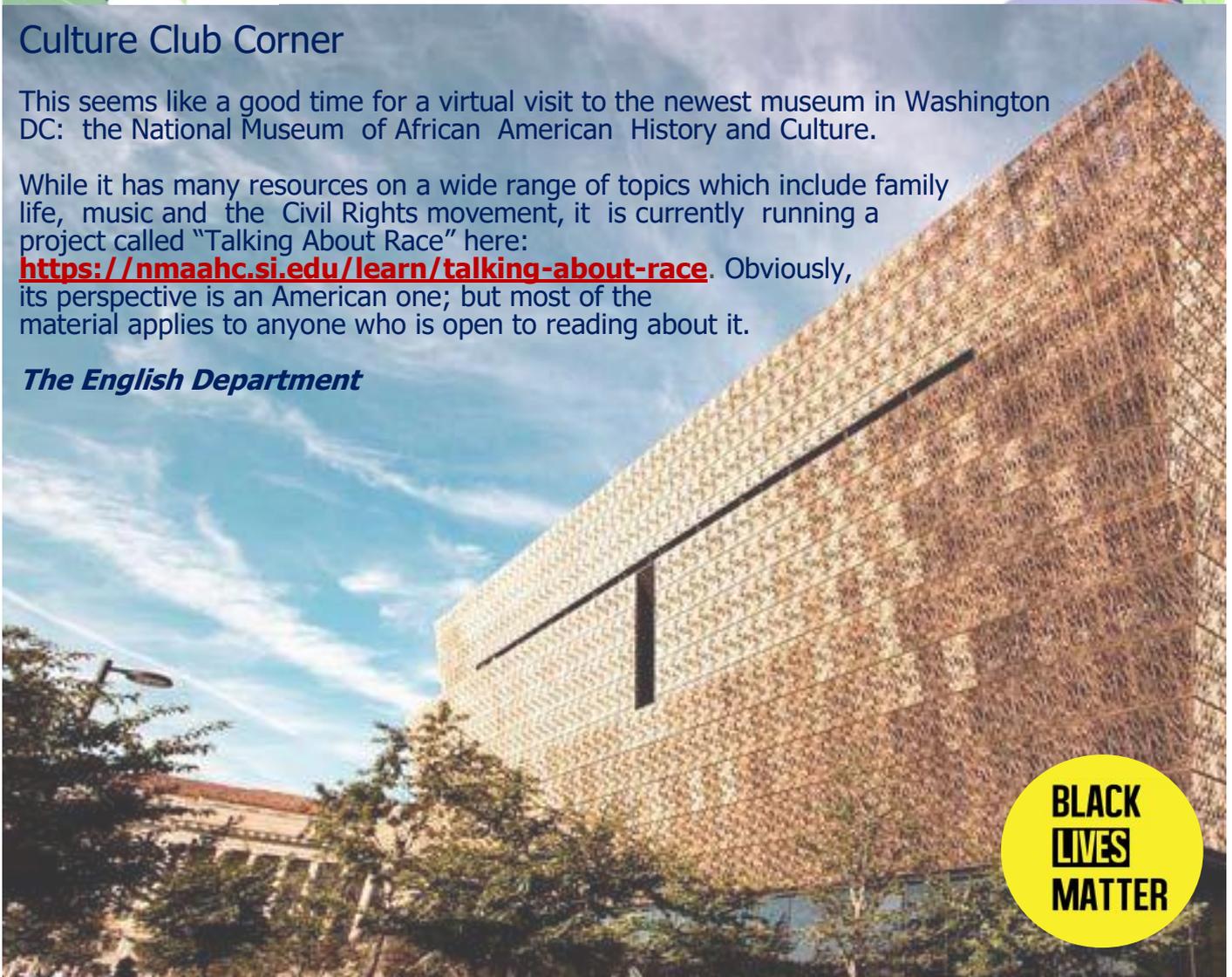
Culture Club Corner

This seems like a good time for a virtual visit to the newest museum in Washington DC: the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

While it has many resources on a wide range of topics which include family life, music and the Civil Rights movement, it is currently running a project called "Talking About Race" here:

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>. Obviously, its perspective is an American one; but most of the material applies to anyone who is open to reading about it.

The English Department





Young King - written by Jess Mally

A poem dedicated to my new found nephews.
And my brothers.
And my friend's sons whose skin shimmers golden in the sun.
And all the uncles, friends and all our fathers.
And all the ones who didn't make it.
We love you. We honour you. We see you.

Young King,
I see you.

I see the wonder and expectation in your eyes,
like the world is your oyster,
like anything is possible,
like all the potential on the inside of you is just waiting to be nurtured,
called forth and brought out.

Young King,
I see you.

I see the horror in your eyes when you first hear the story of a black boy harassed,
a black boy overlooked, a black boy bullied, a black boy hurt,
a black boy shot.
I hear the questions raging through your mind,
the doubt beginning to creep into your soul,
clutching your heart.

I see the cloud that sneaks its way into your heart
when you look around,
and see the lack of care and opportunity for boys like you.

How could your life ever look any different?
Why would your life look any different?

Young King,
I see you.

I see the options scrolling through your mind,
the temptations to achieve a 'better life' quick,
the risks you are willing to take.

But hear me, young king,
I SEE YOU.

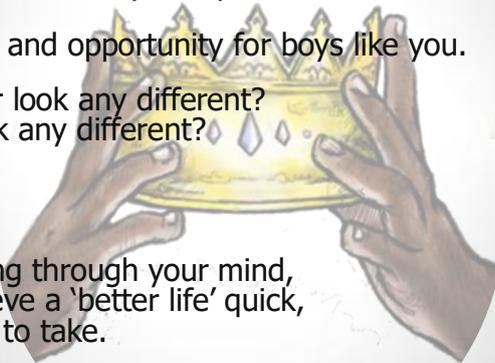
Our ancestors see you.
The fore-fathers and fore-mothers who have gone before,
fighting to give you a better future,
sacrificing so you would have shoulders to stand on.
Young King, THEY SEE YOU!

Our God sees you.
The one who gave our ancestors the strength,
to prevail through the most dire of times,
the most hopeless, unjust and violent of lives,
Young King, HE SEES YOU!

Young King,
I see you.

Hear me, Young King, it won't be easy, I can't lie.

You will have to fight harder than others,
Be better than your peers –
and still there is no guarantee.



No guarantee but generations to come
and
honouring the sacrifice of our fathers and mothers.
And maybe, just maybe, Young King,
we can shape a better world together.

Young King,
I see you.

You are strong.
You are beautiful.
You are full of dignity and light.
Your passion and emotion is good,
and your fire shall never stop burning.
You are gifted and kind
and your future is bright.

Young King,
I see you.

And I will tell your story over and over,
will shed light on the great and the good,
give my life to bring about change,
so you might get to live the life you deserve.

Young King,
I see you.



**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**