A Step-By-Step Guide

Step One: Your name
Remember the proud dignity that was once your name? Remember that even the phrase ‘proud dignity’ itself is a teeny-weeny bit challenging to pronounce, and even more difficult to spell; so when it comes to the proud dignity of your actual name, expect some alterations when you first announce it to your peers. Usually, in order that your name becomes palatable for even the simplest of speakers, the alteration will arrive in the form of a shortening, but in special cases, if your name is versatile enough, be prepared for many renditions. For example, if your name is Djibril, one can expect names like “Stabril,” “Djibo,” “Jipy” and maybe even “Jigaboo.” Be sure to laugh along with the other kids. ALWAYS LAUGH ALONG WITH THE OTHER KIDS, because you want to make a good first impression. Also, be sure to recognize that the beautiful cascade of sounds that is—or should I say was—your name is now whatever your class considers its most hilarious perversion. Your name has now become entertainment with its new purpose to amuse rather than to manifest your individuality. Don't expect the hilarity to go away anytime soon; you're stuck with it, of course you would be, it’s your name after all.

Step Two: “Where are you from?”
Now depending on your hue, some people at your school—students, faculty, administrators, and staff—might anticipate a certain exoticism to your birthplace and a simple “Hartford, Connecticut” just won't do. As if attempting to wring some sort of secret artifact out of you, the dissatisfied will ask again, and again, and again putting increasing stress on the word “from” each time. Suggestion: don’t think of the question as “where are you from?” Think of it more as “What makes you the other, a minority?” OR “if your people hadn’t been kidnapped and enslaved, and if records had been kept, try to imagine what your nationality would be if you were to look at a contemporary map of the world.” Try your best to satisfy the inquisitive asker to that end.

Step Three – Racial Humor
A significant element of presenting as black in a majority white school is the categorization of every single attempt at racial humor that uninvitingly lands on your doorstep as “funny” and “harmless.” These pitiful excuses for comedy rarely deviate from the classic “Haha, you’re (insert race here)” format. However, the five iterations of this same joke can and will occur in a multitude of situations: being late to class might inspire the quip, “He was on his own CPT (colored people time)”; the act of running might inspire, “He's so fast because he's used to running from the cops.” IF the word “black” is introduced in literally any context while you're
in the room, the environment will become slightly darker than usual. No matter how much you may protest, your race and all the struggles inherent therein will be reduced to the mere punchline of a joke. Always be sure to laugh at EVERY. SINGLE. ONE. You don’t want to be seen as oversensitive and as someone that can’t take a joke, do you? And besides, laughing is often—not always but often—way better than the alternative, in which you’re forced to believe someone was attempting to perpetuate America’s oldest and most horrific tradition. So you laugh and hope it’s the last time you have to hear it.
It never is.

Lastly, a short list of banned foods:
Chicken (Especially fried)
Watermelon
Kool-Aid (or any drink that resembles Kool-Aid, so particularly opaque brands of fruit punch are also out)

Remembering and applying what you learned here should make your school experience bearable, painless even! Just know that you will need to remember these steps throughout elementary, middle, and if you’re really unlucky, high school. But do be careful when going out into the world, ‘cause there’s a whole different set of rules for that one.