School

The following selections explore the role that schools—as places of learning and socialization—play in shaping young people’s lived experience of race.

“One Person Wonder”- Ashley Birt, pg. 26
“Being a Minority in a School of the White and Privileged” – Djibril Branch, pg. 37
“Coloring Book” – Justin Ker, pg. 110
“A Different Kind of Field” – Sierra Laventure-Voltz, pg. 112
“Racism at School” – Justin Platek, pg. 149
“For a Day the Air is New”—Claire Matway, pg. 130

In “One Person Wonder,” Ashley Birt describes her transition from a diverse high school to a predominantly white college and examines the individual pressures that come with underrepresentation. Djibril Branche humorously explores similar territory in “Being a Minority in a School of the White and Privileged.” Sierra Laventure-Voltz’s “A Different Kind of Field” recalls a time when her affluent school’s soccer team attempted to hold practice on a field in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood. Justin Platek’s “Racism at School,” describes a day at a “typical” American high school, where racial tensions result in distrust, instructor bias, and student self-segregation, while Justin Ker reflects on an early schooling experience where a lesson in coloring was also a lesson in race. And finally, Claire Matway’s “For a Day the Air is New” captures the possibility that school might be a place where students of all races come together, if just for a day.
Questions for Group Discussion

• What role does the school play shaping young people’s lived experience of race? What about other forms of diversity? Are the lessons learned in the classroom and the lunchroom the same?
• How do Birt and Branch describe being minority students in predominantly white schools? What might make their experiences more positive?
• Laventure-Voltz’s piece describes a tense moment that arises at the intersection of racial and economic inequality. How does these disparities play out in schools, both at the level of the school system and within individual schools?
• Platek observes racial self-segregation in his school, while Matway remembers a moment when students consciously chose to integrate themselves. Does self-segregation happen in your schools? Why? What can students, teachers, and other interested parties do to promote social integration in schools?

Writing Prompt

Most likely, you are more familiar with a school environment than with just about any other except for your home life. You are experts on school—the social dynamics, the expectations and rules, etc. Often, students get grouped together in external ways that can cause tension and bias—the tracking of classes, the gender and race dynamics of who is together inside and outside of the classrooms and cafeterias, the playgrounds and study halls. Are there examples of segregation, bullying, shunning, in your own school? Write about an experience at school dealing with a different kind of "education" or awareness having to do with implicit or explicit bias or discrimination or singly out of individuals in unfair ways.