

## “N” WORD DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

Directions: Some teachers may feel apprehensive about exploring racism and related issues. The following suggestions will help teachers deal with these or other emotionally charged issues. Tailor these suggestions to how you would like to structure your class discussion. Be clear about your goals prior to class. Conduct your own research on this word and how others have guided successful discussions of its use and history. You will also want to inform parents in advance about how you will be approaching the use of the word in the classroom and in the book. We suggest using the **American Literature Permission Form**. Send it home to the parents before beginning your discussion in Lesson 5.

- Never assume of your students either 1) complete ignorance of and disdain for discussing race relations and cultural differences, or 2) complete awareness of and extreme willingness to discuss and better understand race relations and cultural differences.
- You may want to ask the group to decide the format for discussion of these issues. (Anything said in the discussion session should not affect grades.) Depending on the demographics of your classroom, you may want to speak privately with African American students (or other students as needed) before beginning the unit.
- Set ground rules for the discussion, such as no name-calling, no put-downs, and respect for all viewpoints. Do not press for a resolution of friction that may occur during the discussion of these issues.
- No one individual or group should be expected to be spokespersons for their race, gender, socioeconomic group, political affiliation, or any other group.
- Invite outside experts or community leaders to give other perspectives.
- Be honest with students about your own feelings, and explain to them why you want to explore the subject.
- If the class is initially hesitant to talk, try having students express their feelings through journal entries, free writing, or anonymous responses.

Adapted from *Fires in the Mirror: Essays and Teaching Strategies*, WGBH, 1993.

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