

Racism

Essential question: What is racism and how can we eliminate it from our school?

School: Grover Washington Jr. Middle School, Philadelphia, PA

Year of project: 2001-2002

If there were racial tensions between your ethnic group and another group in your community, would you be willing to work toward understanding the causes of the conflict and try to change the situation?

Students in Sheila General's 8th grade class were willing and able to do both.

As a result of friction between the school's Asian-American and African-American student populations, these students chose "What is racism and how can we eliminate it in our school?" as the guiding question for their service-learning project.

Their partners in the process were Woodrock Inc., a nonprofit that seeks to "promote interracial, interethnic and intercultural harmony among youth," and The Big Picture Alliance, which works with young people through the medium of filmmaking. The students examined racism and prejudice using a variety of provocative and interactive exercises about inclusion, diversity, communication, consensus building and problem solving. These sessions were augmented with a range of reading and research assignments about Dr. Martin Luther King, Harriet Tubman, Anne Frank and the Holocaust.

For their service, the students created a video for teachers at the school to use to initiate discussions about racism with their students. The resulting video, produced with guidance from Big Picture Alliance's team of professional videographers, premiered at a school assembly and became this class' legacy when they moved on to high school.