Welcome to Seattle University! Here at SU a key part of our mission is “empowering leaders for a just and humane world.” An important part of that preparation is engaging in deep and critical conversations about important issues related to justice, ethics, and meaning. Each year the university selects a book to launch the academic year, and this year’s book is *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo (@IjeomaOluo on Twitter). This book, and the themes it raises, will be the focus of Academic Day, September 23. Please read the book over the summer, and come prepared to join in those conversations. This guide will help you prepare, as will our Common Text site: www.seattleu.edu/common-text.

Written by a local Seattle journalist, *So You Want to Talk About Race* offers a combination of personal history and instruction-oriented critical analysis in order to present the reader with a set of insights, stakes, and vocabularies for ongoing engagement with “some of the most complex sets of realities of today’s racial landscape—from white privilege and police brutality to systemic discrimination and the Black Lives Matter movement—offering straightforward clarity that readers need to contribute to the dismantling of the racial divide” (Seal Press).

The book’s best-selling success is no surprise, as “Oluo is an exceptional writer with a rare ability to be straightforward, funny, and effective in her coverage of sensitive, hyper-charged issues in America. Her messages are passionate but finely tuned, and crystalize ideas that would otherwise be vague by empowering them with aha-moment clarity. Her writing brings to mind voices like Ta-Nehisi Coates and Roxane Gay” (Seal Press).

As you prepare to read and discuss *So You Want to Talk About Race*, here are some opening definitions from the book that you may find useful:

**Definitions:**

- **Racism:** “A prejudice against someone based on race, when those prejudices are reinforced by systems of power (p.27).”

- **Check your privilege**: “...consider how the advantages you’ve had in life are contributing to your opinions and actions, and how the lack of disadvantages in certain areas is keeping you from fully understanding the struggles others are facing and may in fact be contributing to those struggles (p.63).”

- **Intersectionality:** “the belief that our social justice movements must consider all of the intersections of identity, privilege, and oppression that people face in order to be just and effective (p.74).”

**How you know it’s about race** (p.15-18):

1. It is about race if a person of color thinks it’s about race. (p.15)
2. It is about race if it disproportionately or differently affects people of color. (p.16)
3. It is about race if it fits into a broader pattern of events that disproportionately or differently affect people of color. (p.18)

**Resources** to help you consider your responses to the text are available online via www.seattleu.edu/common-text, as well as through some guiding questions on the reverse side of this sheet. Many of the following questions are adapted from Oluo’s publisher, Seal Press, a division of Hachette Book Group.
Questions to consider as you read:

1. In Chapter 1, “Is it really about race?” the author states, “It is about race is a person of color thinks it is about race. It is about race if it disproportionately or differently affects people of color. It is about race if it fits into a broader pattern of events that disproportionately or differently affect people of color.” After reading the author’s explanation of these points, can you think of social or political issues that many people currently believe are not about race, but actually may be? Which of the above guidelines for understanding when it is about race fit those issues? (See Chapter 1)

2. Why does Oluo make the distinction between different definitions of racism in Chapter 2 (p.26-27)? Why is it so important that we understand racism as being linked to systems of power? Prior to reading this book, which definition were you taught? How were you taught this, or how did you come to know it?

3. The chapter about privilege (Chapter 4) is placed right before the chapter on intersectionality (Chapter 5). The author has stated in interviews that she placed those chapters in that order because it is impossible to fully understand intersectionality without first comprehending privilege. How do the concepts discussed in Chapter 4, "Why am I always being told to check my privilege?" help deepen your understanding of intersectionality and help implement intersectionality into your life?

4. The author states that she grew up in a majority white, liberal area and was raised by a white mother. How might that upbringing have influenced the way that she wrote this book? How might it have influenced the personal events she describes in the book? How might this book have been different if written by a black person with a different upbringing, or if written by a person of color of a different race?

5. Throughout the book, the author makes it clear that this book is written for both white people and people of color. But does the author expect white people and people of color to read and experience this book in the same way? What are some of the ways in which the author indicates how she expects white people and people of color to react and interact with portions of the book? What are some of the ways in which the author discusses the different roles that white people and people of color will play in fighting systemic racism in our society?

6. In Chapter 12, the author lists some of the racial microaggressions that her friends of color said that they often hear. What are some of the racial microaggressions that you have encountered or witnessed?

7. When the conversation is about race, oftentimes participants will engage in channel-switching or redirecting the talk to another issue related to oppression. How does Oluo respond to this? How might you respond when you hear this or other attempts to derail the topic of conversation?

8. The final chapter, “Talking is great, but what else can I do?” discusses some actions you can take to battle systemic racism using the knowledge you’ve gained from this book and from your conversations on race. What are some actions you can take in your community, your school, and your local government?