

2020 New Student Common Text Reading Guide



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 text or texts to launch the academic year, with related events to continue the discussion throughout the year.

Given the events of the past several months, with the renewed calls for justice in the wake of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many others, and the new challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Common Text team wanted to give our incoming students a space to have those deep and critical conversations about race, racism, and citizenship in the United States today. You’ll hear from writers, artists, educators, and health professionals, in the form of articles, videos, and podcasts, chosen for their ability to frame these conversations and as voices which speak to this historic moment.

These texts pick up where SU left off last spring, having read Ijeoma Oluo’s book *So You Want to Talk About Race* in Fall 2019, and help us to further understand this historic moment. They also anticipate another critical conversation about what U.S. citizenship means, to be continued in Fall 2021 when the Common Text will be Jose Antonio Vargas’s book, *Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen*.

We hope these texts offer new perspectives, prompt difficult but necessary conversations, and perhaps even inspire action. Please take the time to read, listen, and watch. Then look for Common Text and partner events throughout the year that will provide you with multiple ways to engage these ideas.



Questions to Consider:

1. In her book *So You Want to Talk About Race*, Ijeoma Oluo defines racism as “any prejudice against someone because of their race, when those views are reinforced by systems of power,” including cultural, economic, educational, and media systems, rather than individual acts of bigotry (26, 29). Why is it important that we understand racism as being linked to systems of power? How does one or more of the texts that follow confirm or clarify this acknowledgement of systemic racism?
2. Oluo also provides some rules to determine if an issue is about race. She says, “1. It is about race if a person of color thinks it is about race. 2. It is about race if it disproportionately or differently affects people of color. 3. It is about race if it fits into a broader pattern of events that disproportionately or differently affect people of color” (14-15). Can you offer an example of an issue connected to your own experiences that is

“about race,” according to Oluo’s definition, but that you or others wouldn’t have identified as being so without this definition?

3. Which of the voices or perspectives represented in the following texts felt familiar to you? Which perspectives had you not heard or considered before? How might your positionality (the social and political context that creates your identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status) have influenced which perspectives you had previously heard or considered? To whose voices should you be listening or paying more attention?
4. As these texts illustrate, issues of race and racism have an impact on every part of our lives. How have these texts invited you to think about the presence of racism and the possibilities for antiracism in your communities, including your hometown, school, religious, or sport communities? What about in your virtual communities (for example your gamer groups or your social media networks)? What about in your intended major and eventual profession?
5. In the essay that you’ll read by Ibram X. Kendi, he maintains that “There is no such thing as a ‘not-racist’ policy, idea or person [. . .] A racist or antiracist is not who we are, but what we are doing in the moment.” Based on your reading, explain what Kendi means by this. What tools are offered in these texts that could help us do the work of enacting antiracist policies?

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