

***Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine**  
**2017-18 Common Reading Program, St. Cloud State University**  
**Teaching and Learning Guide**



# CITIZEN

AN AMERICAN LYRIC

CLAUDIA RANKINE

This guide was developed through a partnership between the Common Reading Program and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

<https://www.stcloudstate.edu/commonread/>



## About the Guide

In this guide, there is information about the book and author, links to additional writing by the author, reading questions -- including questions relating the book to Our Husky Compact --, as well as outlines of activities which can be done in class or as course assignments. There are also additional resources for classroom use of *Citizen* available on the internet that are included at the end of the guide.

If you are looking for other ways to incorporate the book or just someone to be a sounding board for an assignment you are developing, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Christine Metzso ([crmetzo@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:crmetzo@stcloudstate.edu) or 308-5299). She can meet with faculty or connect you with another faculty member who would be a good resource for your particular needs.

Fifteen copies of the book for non-first year students are available on reserve at the library under "Common Reading Program".

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## About the Book

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry and the Bobbitt National Poetry Prize, as well as finalist for the National Book Award, *Citizen: An American Lyric* is a collection of prose, poetry and images that provides a provocative analysis of race in America, with a deep commitment to advancing equality.

## Prizes and Accolades for *Citizen*

[Bobbitt National Poetry Prize](#)

[Winner of the 2015 PEN Oakland-Josephine Miles Literary Award](#)

[Winner of the 2015 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award in Poetry](#)

[Winner of the 2015 Forward Prize for Best Collection](#)

[Winner of the 2015 PEN Open Book Award](#)

[Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry and finalist in Criticism](#)

[Winner of \*Poets and Writers'\* Jackson Poetry Prize](#)

[One of the \*Guardian's\* Best Politics Books of 2015](#)

[One of the \*Guardian's\* Readers' Books of the Year for 2015](#)

[One of \*Entropy's\* Best Nonfiction books of 2015](#)

[Minnesota Public Radio's best books of 2015](#)

[The \*Atlantic's\* best books we read in 2016](#)

[Finalist for 2014 National Book Award in Poetry](#)

## About the Author

Claudia Rankine is an award-winning poet, Frederick Iseman Professor of Poetry at Yale University, MacArthur Genius grant winner (2016), and a 2017 Guggenheim Fellow. Born in Jamaica in 1963, Rankine earned her degree in English from Williams College. In her work, Rankine explores the subjective experience of systematic racism and racial aggressions. She uses language that makes visible the ways in which microaggressions register in the body of those who internalize them. Yet her work also seeks to open conversations about how society might achieve social justice. She has authored five poetry collections, plays, and edited numerous anthologies.

<http://claudiarankine.com/>

2016 MacArthur Genius Grant winner:

<https://www.macfound.org/fellows/967/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/19/claudia-rankine-macarthur-genius-grant-exploring-whiteness>

2017 Guggenheim Fellow: <http://news.yale.edu/2017/04/07/three-yale-faculty-win-2017-guggenheim-fellowships-their-exceptional-promise>

## **Reviews of the book**

New York Review of Books <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/04/23/claudia-rankine-new-way-writing-about-race/>

The New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/28/books/review/claudia-rankines-citizen.html>

The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/aug/30/claudia-rankine-citizen-american-lyric-review>

NPR

<http://www.npr.org/2014/11/20/365516416/book-review-citizen-an-american-lyric>

The Rumpus

<http://therumpus.net/2014/09/citizen-an-american-lyric-by-claudia-rankine/>

Full Stop

<http://www.full-stop.net/2014/12/18/reviews/hannah-klein/citizen-claudia-rankine/>

## Common Reading Program Events

Getting your students to attend events around the book can be a great way to stimulate discussion in class. The Common Reading Program has an Events page on our website ([www.stcloudstate.edu/commonread/events.aspx](http://www.stcloudstate.edu/commonread/events.aspx)), where you can stay up to date with new events. Here are a few events scheduled and in the works:

- Monday, September 11, 7pm Center Stage, PAC: Minneapolis-based Frank Theatre company will perform a staged reading of *Citizen* with actor's from their Spring 2017 production (<http://franktheatre.org/events/citizen-by-claudia-rankine/>). This is a great opportunity to see the book come to life. There will be a post-show conversation with the actors and director. We are also working with RHA and ARPAC faculty to set up dinner discussions in Garvey prior to the show.

### Reviews of the Frank Theatre production of *Citizen*

Star Tribune:

<http://www.startribune.com/review-frank-theatre-s-citizen-approaches-touchy-subject-of-race-with-grace/416240574/>

Pioneer Press:

<http://www.twincities.com/2017/03/12/theater-review-citizen-an-american-lyric-adapts-seamlessly-to-the-stage/>

- Wednesday, October 18, 3 pm Atwood Theatre: Documentary Screening and Discussion of 13<sup>th</sup> with Professor of Criminal Justice, Mary Clifford.
- October Date TBD: A community discussion with UniteCloud on the concept of "Citizen" in St. Cloud.
- Annual Scholarship Essay Competition:  
Prompts will be available on the Common Reading Website on September 6. Essays are due Monday, November 6, in CH 208 by 4:00pm. Scholarship winners will be announced in late November.

If you have a suggestion for an event you'd like to see for your students, don't hesitate to reach out to Christine Metzko at [crmetzo@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:crmetzo@stcloudstate.edu)

## **Structure of the book**

Rankine's *Citizen* has been called "lyrical prose," "prose poetry," and just "poetry". It's clear that Rankine's work challenges common conceptions of what makes something poetry. The book is divided into seven sections, each of which takes a slightly different approach to the introduction of critical comment on the racial microaggressions that are pervasive in American culture. There are activities for and instructor resources on teaching microaggressions later in this guide.

**Section I (pp. 1-19)** includes personal accounts of microaggressions experienced or observed by Rankine. These are the kinds of everyday examples that highlight the power of microaggressions to. This section can be a useful starting point to engage students in general introductory discussion of the concept of microaggressions in which they can begin to identify instances they witness in everyday life.

**Section II (pp. 23-36)** is more of a critical commentary on race, particularly racism applied to black female bodies as evidenced in a series of incidents involving tennis champion Serena Williams. This section can be a useful point of entry to discussing the media treatment (or lack of) of microaggressions. It's also been made quite contemporary in relevance by the present media attention to Serena Williams's pregnant body. This may be an easier point of entry to the book for some instructors and some students.

Clips from the 2009 Williams/Clijsters match discussed in this section are available to view on YouTube.

**Section III (pp.41-55)** returns to the microaggressions we saw in the first section, These microaggressions intersect more with professional settings than those in Section I, particularly academia, though there's also the real estate industry and commerce generally referenced. The academic references are particularly scathing in their assessment of presumably "enlightened" folks. With students, discussing this section from the birds-eye view that even professionals have much to learn could be very illuminating, both from the perspective of thinking about these lessons as not just a one-course or a college experience, but lifelong learning, and also from the perspective of just how pervasive these microaggressions are.

**Section IV (pp. 59-66)** delves into the emotional side of the experience of being targeted with these constant microaggressions. Several passages deal with memory. This is an important section for helping to understand the real lived experience and impact of microaggressions. Because it deals with emotional content,

**Section V (69-79)** is a bit more abstract, but carries on this connection between memory and microaggression, particularly with an eye to how words carry both.

**Section VI (pp. 82-135)** includes the scripts for situation videos that Rankine has produced with her husband, John Lucas, a documentary photographer and filmmaker. These situation videos can be found at Rankine's website, [www.claudiarankine.com](http://www.claudiarankine.com) Because the situation videos are about incidences with which students may not be familiar, using YouTube to search video

footage of the original event and/or searching for original news stories of the events to set up context for the situation videos themselves would be necessary. This could be a good research exercise for students to do in small groups, if you choose to study these situation videos.

**Section VII (pp. 139-161)** includes many lines that recall earlier scenes and moments in the book. If you work through the entire book with students, reading this section is an opportunity to reflect on and recall the earlier discussions you've had, reflect on how they've come to understand things in richer, deeper, different ways. This is a great place to engage students in a final reflection on the meaning of the title.

### **Reading Questions: Common Reading Program website**

Before you begin reading, think about your thoughts and feelings on poetry in general. Have you read much poetry? What has been the role of poetry in your life? Is contemporary or American poetry within your scope of interest?

#### **Reading Poetry:**

What is different about reading poetry? What makes the reading task different from other types of readings? Consider the questions raised by the American Academy of Poets: Poetry 101: Resources for Beginners: <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/poetry-101-resources-beginners>

If it is true that reading poetry well is part attitude (curiosity, free of preconceived ideas) and part technique (asking questions, holding a conversation with the poet), as the Academy of American Poets explains, then how does it work for reading a long prose poem like Rankine's? How can you consider attitude and technique separately? How do they work together?

What do you think it means to be a citizen? What words, definitions, or ideas do you associate with the word "citizen"? Do these associations line up with one group of people? What is the value of a personal narrative in bigger questions of citizenship?

Section II analyzes the racism and sexism tennis champion Serena Williams has experienced throughout her career. Serena Williams has been back in the news this summer. What do you take away from the analysis of Williams's experience about the nature of microaggression in contemporary society? How does this contrast with the portrayal of the privilege of white Americans throughout the text? How does the reference to the Zora Neal Hurston quote, "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background," resonate with your take on this?

(from Graywolf Press) Citizen narrates many instances of micro-aggressions—individual acts of racism that collectively form the crushing experience of racism in America. Is racism a singular



action, or is it a series of acts? What is the difference between the singular action and the accumulation of them?

Flip through the book and look at the pictures. What initial memories or impressions come to you when you look at the images in the book and on the cover? Section 6 is actual the scripts for situation videos that Rankine has produced with her husband, John Lucas, a documentary photographer and filmmaker. You can view these videos at Rankine's website: [www.claudiarankine.com](http://www.claudiarankine.com). How does seeing poetry as film change your experience of the poetry?

The [Our Husky Compact](#) dimension highlighted this academic year is THINK Creatively and Critically. *Citizen* was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Awards in both Poetry and Criticism. Critics have pointed to how Rankine's work defies established distinctions between genres. Do you see the book more as poetry or as social critique? Both? Neither? In what ways do these distinctions matter? What is the effect on the reader of collapsing these distinctions?

What has changed in the three years since this book was published? Do those changes make the themes of the book more or less relevant today than 3 years ago? What is the role of various emotions (e.g., grief, anger, sadness, joy) in American social change?

**Discussion Questions from Graywolf Press:**

<https://www.graywolfpress.org/sites/default/files/Citizen%20Discussion%20Questions.pdf>

**More reading questions from University of La Verne:**

[https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/C36BB20B-9927-1AE9-F5689F4682486302/citizen\\_reading\\_guide.pdf](https://www.gvsu.edu/cms4/asset/C36BB20B-9927-1AE9-F5689F4682486302/citizen_reading_guide.pdf)

**Tying the book to the 'Our Husky Compact'**

The 2017-18 annual dimension of the year is Think Critically and Creatively. *Citizen* is the first book explicitly selected to align with Our Husky Compact dimension of the year. We will have a couple events this year that feature this connection, including the Frank Theatre production on September 11.

From OHC website: New problems and challenges arise every day. The ability to think creatively and critically is core to overcoming many of those problems and challenges. A commitment to this dimension of Our Husky Compact gives our students the skills to:

- Demonstrate intellectual inquiry and curiosity characterized by innovation, divergent thinking, and risk taking.
- Reason analytically
- Find, evaluate, and communicate substantive information
- Engage multiple perspectives
- Synthesize existing ideas, images, or expertise in new combinations to achieve imaginative solutions
- Appreciate the intrinsic value of creative pursuits

One straightforward discussion instructors can have with students is how art and the creative process helps us make sense of and analyse the world we're living in. If one wants to particularly look at the way poetry is being used in political critique, there's a recent article on American poets fighting the right: <http://www.berkshireagle.com/stories/american-poets-refusing-to-go-gentle-against-the-right,505190>

But this discussion could also be held at a more general level, where students are asked to think about something artistic or creative has sparked their curiosity to find and evaluate new information to understand their world (e.g., rap or other forms of music, a photograph or painting).

There are more assignments and activities relating to Creative and Critical Thinking below in the Assignments and Activities section.

It's also important to highlight the tie to the 2016-17 Dimension of the Year: Engage as a Member of a Diverse and Multi-cultural World

From OHC website: We are all members of a global society impacted by a global economy. Engagement in a diversity and multi-cultural world broadens perspectives, encourages collaboration and promotes unity. A commitment to this dimension of Our Husky Compact gives our students the skills to:

- Understand the diverse influences on one's personal identity
- Develop intercultural competency, understanding and an appreciation for commonalities and differences
- Recognize and value diverse perspectives and the interdependence among communities, locally and globally
- Critically analyze multiple worldviews, systems and power structures to understand their implications for people's lives and our sustainable future
- Integrate diverse perspectives to address significant local and global problems collaboratively and equitably

There are assignments and activities relating to microaggression, anti-racism and understanding privilege and oppression below in the Assignments and Activities section.

## **QUESTIONS for reading and discussion based on OUR HUSKY COMPACT**

### **Think Creatively and Critically**

- Is *Citizen* a political book? What does that mean? If politics is the process by which people come to collective decision and accomplish communal goals, is it useful to have literature become part of the political process? How so?
- Examine one of the vignettes in *Citizen* for its organizational pattern. How does it move through the pattern to make its point? How is the passage introduced and concluded? How does the sequence work? Do you see a similar pattern across the book? How is this a form of poetry?

### **Engage as a Member of a Diverse and Multicultural World**

- Practice in empathy: consider one event that is described in *Citizen*. Try to write a description of the event from several perspectives: participants, observers, scholars, engaged practitioners.
- Can you find passages within *Citizen* that prepare you for a stronger understanding of our own cultural contexts at St. Cloud State University, the greater St. Cloud area, or your own cultural contexts at home?

### **Communicate Effectively**

- Define the style of Rankine's book. How is it similar in style to other books you have read? How is it similar in purpose and tone? How is it different?
- Describe Rankine's economical use of language. How does she express large ideas in very few words? Find an example and discuss.
- What is the relationship between vocabulary, sound, and image in *Citizen*?

### **Act with Personal Integrity and Civic Responsibility**

- Civic identity can be defined as a person's role as an active participant in society, one's strong commitment and responsibility to work with others towards public purposes. How would you define your own civic identity? How can a book, such as *Citizen*, aid you in developing this definition as you move forward in your own education?
- How does Rankine tell us about citizenship? What does it mean, according to Rankine, to be a citizen? Cite particular examples in the text.
- If you worked in a civil servant position (government, education, public health), how could you use *Citizen* as a guide to your work and to your outreach to clients and / or students?
- How can *Citizen* inform you or affect you as a community leader? As a member of a democracy? As an engaged citizen?
- Do you consider *Citizen* to be a book that works as a change agent, in other words, does the book promote changes in a reader's attitude, values, beliefs, or behaviors?

### **Integrate Existing and Evolving Technologies**

- In what ways is this book conventional? In what ways is this book unconventional?

### **Seek and Apply Knowledge**

- How could *Citizen* play a role in helping us understand the underpinnings of democracy and / or the First Amendment to the US Constitution (freedom of religion, speech, press, and assembly)?

- Which academic disciplines are most directly connected to the book and its content? Are any disciplines more or less relevant to this content? How could scholars in the disciplines align themselves to the book if they wished to?
- Can you find passages within *Citizen* that increase your own personal stores of knowledge?

### **General Resources for Faculty Leading Difficult Conversations**

Some faculty have expressed some reservations about their ability to juggle conversations about the challenging and very personalized content of Rankine's book. Key to addressing these difficult conversations in the classroom is creating a sense of community first. Take some time to have students get to know each other as people first, and they will typically exercise respect in the difficult conversations.

Vanderbilt University Guide on leading Difficult Dialogues:

<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/difficult-dialogues/>

Ezzedee, Souha R. "[Facilitating Class Discussions Around Current and Controversial Issues: Ten Recommendations for Teachers](#)." *College Teaching*, vol. 56, no. 4, Winter 2008.

Ten Things Every White Teacher should Know when Talking about Race (podcasts):

<https://www.acast.com/angelawatsonstruthforteachers/s5ep07-ten-things-every-white-teacher-should-know-when-talking-about-race>

5 key anti-racism resources for teachers, courtesy of #CharlottesvilleCurriculum

<https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/us/2017/08/14/5-key-anti-racism-resources-for-teachers-courtesy-of-charlottesvillecurriculum/>

Let's Talk! Discussing Race, Racism and Other Difficult Topics With Students

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/lets-talk>

Managing Hot Moments in the Classroom: <https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/managing-hot-moments-classroom>

Some sites with tips to process the aftermath of Charlottesville:

- <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/09/white-supremacy-everyday-life/>
- <https://mic.com/articles/183732/experts-explain-how-white-people-should-talk-to-other-white-people-about-charlottesville>
- <http://msmagazine.com/blog/2017/08/14/five-step-toolkit-dealing-white-supremacists-era-trump/>

## Assignments and Activities

### CREATIVE AND CRITICAL THINKING

#### **Art and Critical Thinking:**

Have students discuss the artwork in the book. What are their initial reactions? How would they interpret the various art in terms of the content of the book? On p. 52-53 is an artwork that Rankine discusses earlier, on p. 25. Have students expand on her brief discussion of the piece. How does art engage one in challenging issues in the world around you?

#### **Adaptable Critical Thinking Techniques:**

This website has 3 models for easily adaptable classroom techniques which will encourage critical thinking.

<http://www.educationdive.com/news/3-activities-to-encourage-critical-thinking-in-the-classroom/250270/>

The three activities are “Gap Fill In”, “Fishbowl”, and “Debate.” The latter two may be more familiar. The first is done on one’s own and may be less threatening to start with given the material in Rankine’s book. Fishbowl and Debate can be done when you want students to engage in careful listening and the formulation of a position on an issue. Gap Fill In is more basic and analytical and asks students to seek evidence for claims.

“Gap Fill In” uses images to stimulate careful critical analysis. There are plentiful images on the internet which portray microaggressions, racism in America, and other issues that one can find in Rankine’s book. This could either be an inclass activity or a homework assignment. On the following page are a couple examples from the recent white supremacist riots in Charlottesville on August 11. One suggestion: it’s good to know your source and provide attribution. The second picture doesn’t have a verified attribution, but I saw it posted so many times on Facebook, I still thought it useful for this exercise. Do due diligence, but used thought-provoking images and document what you can. You could also use images directly from Rankine’s book, such as the one on page 37.



Joshua Roberts/Reuters



Unverified attribution/circulated on Facebook August 12, 2017 by Shaun King, Senior Justice Writer for the New York Daily News.

### **Creative AND Critical Writings:**

Assign students one of these essays, written by Rankine:

The Meaning of Serena Williams: On tennis and black excellence (New York Times Magazine)

[https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/30/magazine/the-meaning-of-serena-williams.html?\\_r=2](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/30/magazine/the-meaning-of-serena-williams.html?_r=2)

The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning (New York Times Magazine)

[https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html?_r=1)

Have them compare the essay's format to the book's treatment of the same material. How does the poetry reveal more? Less? Does the poetic form force them to think more critically than the essay? Explain. Were they surprised at all by anything in her essay after having read her poetry? What is the relationship between the two media?

### **Current Events Analysis:**

This summer has provided ample examples of institutional racism such as Rankine presents in the book. A good mini-research exercise is for students to conduct some research into some of those recent events, finding 3 sources reporting on the event (so one needs to select events that have had substantial and varied media coverage). They should be able to present as an objective a recounting of the event as possible, and then discuss the various positioning of the sources used found. This activity would engage students in searching broadly for sources but also evaluating their sources, both critical thinking competencies of information literacy. Here is a selection of examples of the sorts of stories relating to Rankine's book that might provide robust research:

Reactions to Serena Williams winning Australian Open while pregnant (April 2017):

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/daniellerossingh/2017/04/20/serena-williams-won-the-australian-open-pregnant-sending-social-media-into-a-frenzy/#62577b41792e>

Verdict in Philando Castile trial (June 2017):

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/us/police-shooting-trial-philando-castile.html>

Venus Williams Car accident (June/July 2017)

<http://www.rollingstone.com/sports/venus-williams-fatal-car-crash-everything-we-know-w491313>

Shooting of Justine Damond (July 2017):

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2017/07/20/harteau-critical-of-mpls-cop-who-shot-911-caller>

Forced Resignation of Minneapolis Police Chief (July 2017):

<http://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-police-chief-janee-harteau-resigns/435864713/>

Minnesota Muslim Cemetery Vandalism (July 2017):

<http://www.cair.com/press-center/press-releases/14509-vandals-target-minnesota-muslim-cemetery-write-leave-you-r-dead.html>

White Nationalist Rally, University of Virginia, Charlottesville (August 2017):

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/unite-rally-virginia-sparks-counterprotests-state-emergency/story?id=49176243>

## PRIVILEGE

**Unpack Your Invisible Knapsack activity:** This activity has many variations relating to identifying one's privilege, be it in terms of race, gender, class, sexuality, based on Peggy McIntosh's original article: <http://code.ucsd.edu/pcosman/Backpack.pdf> A simple way of introducing the article and concept of identifying privilege is to take some of the statements and distribute them among the students in the class. Each student reads the privilege statement as written on their paper and those who can identify with the statement stand up. Everyone sits as the next person reads theirs. There should be no discussion of each statement, just reading and responding by standing or staying seated. In debriefing the activity, have participants discuss which statements surprised them the most, which were things they'd never thought about before. Ask them how they would define privilege based on the activity. What is the responsibility of those with privilege in overcoming oppression?

### **Class Discussion Prompts (videos/short readings), relating to privilege and white fragility**

I find that students are often nervous to talk about their own experience, particularly when it comes to addressing their own privilege. Below are a collection of short videos that can help stimulate that conversation in the classroom, hopefully in a non-threatening ways. It may be helpful to establish a few agreed upon modes of engagement.

- Microaggression in Everyday Life: <https://youtu.be/BJL2P0JsAS4>
- What is Privilege?: <https://youtu.be/hD5f8GuNuGQ>
- Privilege in Education: "13 Ways White Male Privilege Shows Up as Early as Elementary School": <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/12/early-white-male-privilege/>
- Why talented students of color go undiscovered: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/upshot/why-talented-black-and-hispanic-students-can-go-undiscovered.html>
- Privilege: why equality feels like oppression: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-boeskool/when-youre-accustomed-to-privilege\\_b\\_9460662.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-boeskool/when-youre-accustomed-to-privilege_b_9460662.html)
- Problematic things white people say about race: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ali-owens/4-problematic-statements-white-people-make-about-race\\_b\\_9212864.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ali-owens/4-problematic-statements-white-people-make-about-race_b_9212864.html)
- Tokenism: <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/02/i-am-not-your-teachable-moment/>
- Privilege and tokenism: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/what-i-said-when-my-white-friend-asked-for-my-black\\_us\\_578c0770e4b0b107a2415b89](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/what-i-said-when-my-white-friend-asked-for-my-black_us_578c0770e4b0b107a2415b89)
- Non-racist vs. Anti-Racist, or why being non-racist isn't enough (video): <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2016/jan/13/marlon-james-are-you-racist-video>



- Intersectionality: Kimberle Crenshaw TED talk on the urgency of intersectionality: [https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle\\_crenshaw\\_the\\_urgency\\_of\\_intersectionality](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality)

## **MICROAGGRESSIONS**

### **Microaggression writing exercise:**

See Lesson Plan for writing about microaggressions:

<http://teachersandwritersmagazine.org/using-claudia-rankines-citizen-to-prompt-writing-about-prejudice-2324.htm>

### **“What’s Up With That?”: unpacking everyday racism activity:**

(This activity is inspired by an April 2017 discussion with director Wendy Knox and actor Joe Nathan Thomas of the Frank Theatre production of *Citizen*)

The beauty of *Citizen* is that one can take a page, practically at random, and spend a class period exploring the implications of the poem. Take the microaggressions, particularly in the first or third section, and have students read them out loud. Ask them, “what’s up with that?” Have them use the question with each other to explore the ins and outs of the observations of Rankine’s text. Have them repeat the question (like the toddler who repeatedly asks, “why?”), until they feel they’ve exhausted the various aspects and permutations of the example.

Variation: have them bring examples from their own lives and/or the internet and do the same process with those.

### **Exploring Microaggressions:**

Have students explore a time period (the last week, the last month) on the website [everydaysexism.com](http://everydaysexism.com). (“The Everyday Sexism Project exists to catalogue instances of sexism experienced on a day to day basis. They might be serious or minor, outrageously offensive or so niggling and normalised that you don’t even feel able to protest.”) or The Microaggressions Project (<http://www.microaggressions.com/>) Have them describe how microaggressions operate in each case. This could be used in conjunction with the above activity.

## **ANTI-RACISM**

Here is a website with anti-racism resources with some very useful graphics for generating discussion (for example p. 5 has an excellent graphic of acts of racism and the omissions that constitute passive racism):

<http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/olcese.pdf>

### **Discussion Activity on Anti-Racism:**

"In a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist - we must be anti-racist." -- Angela Davis  
Explore with students what might constitute this distinction:

Watch this video: Non-racist vs. Anti-Racist, or why being non-racist isn’t enough (video):

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2016/jan/13/marlon-james-are-you-racist-video>

Evaluate their ideas, discuss the other insights in the video.

Note: Marlon James is a professor in the English Department at Macalester College in St. Paul and author of the 2015 Booker Prize winning novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.

### **Research:**

Have pairs of students assigned to research the list of names on p. 134. Who are they? What were the circumstances of their killings? What has been the public reaction? What was the outcome for the persons who killed them? What has been the public reaction?

As a class, map out patterns together.

### **Relevant Documentaries:**

A Class Divided: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/class-divided/>

*A Class Divided is a Frontline presentation of the classic documentary on third-grade teacher Jane Elliott's "blue eyes/brown eyes" exercise, originally conducted in the days following the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. [Frontline's teaching] guide is designed to help you use the film to engage students in reflection and dialogue about the historical role of racism in the United States, as well as the role of prejudice and stereotyping in students' lives today. What this film demonstrates is the subtle and unassuming ways in which people can easily come to engage in discriminatory behaviors without even being conscious of it. This is often a very powerful message for younger students.*

13th: [www.Netflix.com](http://www.Netflix.com)

*The title of Ava DuVernay's extraordinary and galvanizing documentary refers to the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which reads, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States." The progression from that second qualifying clause to the horrors of mass criminalization and the sprawling American prison industry is laid out by DuVernay with bracing lucidity. With a potent mixture of archival footage and testimony from a dazzling array of activists, politicians, historians, and formerly incarcerated women and men, DuVernay creates a work of grand historical synthesis.*

Note that The Common Reading Program will be hosting a public screening and discussion in October.

### **Additional Resources**

*Not finding enough of what you want here? Just want to explore a few more options? Here are some additional resources from across the web, directly related to Citizen:*

Graywolf Press resources page: <https://www.graywolfpress.org/resources/citizen-classroom-citizen-world>

Wilson Library guide for *Citizen* (under Articles and Books tab there is a reading guide):  
<http://laverne.libguides.com/c.php?g=532305&p=3641995>

### **Related Articles by and Interviews with Claudia Rankine:**

The Meaning of Serena Williams: On tennis and black excellence (New York Times Magazine)  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/30/magazine/the-meaning-of-serena-williams.html?\\_r=2](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/30/magazine/the-meaning-of-serena-williams.html?_r=2)

The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning (New York Times Magazine)  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html?_r=1)

Guardian Interview with Rankine (The Guardian)  
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/27/claudia-rankine-poet-citizen-american-lyric-feature>

NPR Interview with Rankine (NPR)  
<http://www.npr.org/2015/01/03/374574142/in-citizen-poet-strips-bare-the-realities-of-everyday-racism>

Interview with Claudia Rankine in *The Paris Review*  
<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6905/claudia-rankine-the-art-of-poetry-no-102-claudia-rankine>

Interview with Claudia Rankine in *The New Yorker*  
<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/seen-interview-claudia-rankine-ferguson>

Interview with Claudia Rankine in *Art Forum*  
<https://www.artforum.com/slant/>

### **Other media coverage of Citizen:**

“Why American publishing needs indie presses”, *The Atlantic* (features *Citizen* in its discussion)  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/07/why-american-publishing-needs-indie-presses/491618/>

Reading guide for those in despair about American politics, *The Atlantic* (features *Citizen* in its discussion)  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/10/a-reading-guide-for-those-in-despair-about-american-politics/504707/#Ai-Jen%20Poo>

Citizen in the News (story of a woman who was at a Trump campaign rally conspicuously reading a copy of *Citizen*)  
<http://www.businessinsider.com/woman-who-read-book-about-race-behind-trump-told-her-story-2015-11>