



## Racism: A Unique Point of View from a Young Black Actor

In June 2020, Lonnie Chavis, the twelve-year old actor who stars in *This Is Us*, wrote and published an essay called “America Needs to Change” about his experiences with racism. He wrote the essay in the wake of an ongoing public conversation and reckoning about the ongoing issue of police violence against Black people and systemic racism. Chavis has a unique point of view as a Black actor and as a young person who speaks directly to other young people and whose words may resonate more powerfully in that role.

This activity provides an opportunity for students to understand the definition of racism and reflect on specific examples of racism from Lonnie Chavis’ experiences as well as their own.

### Important Terms:

**Racism:** The disrespect, harm and mistreatment of one group of people because of a belief in the superiority of another.

**Bias:** A preference either for or against an individual or group that affects fair judgment.

**Prejudice:** Judging or having an idea about someone or a group of people before you actually know them. Prejudice is often directed toward people in a certain identity group (race, religion, gender, etc.).

**Stereotype:** The false idea that all members of a group are the same and think and behave in the same way.

Ask the questions: What is Racism? How would you define it?

Watch the video of the interview of Lonnie Chavis by Kelly and Ryan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZgG2FbzB4k>

You can start with a few questions:

1. How did you feel while watching the video?
2. Why did Lonnie Chavis write the letter to his Mom?
3. What does Lonnie Chavis hope happens because he wrote the letter?
4. How did you feel as Lonnie Chavis read parts of the letter aloud?



Next, read aloud the article, This Is Us Star Lonnie Chavis, 12, Shares His Experiences with Racism: 'America Needs to Change'. <https://people.com/human-interest/voices-against-racism-lonnie-chavis/>

For upper elementary (grades 3-5), read the whole essay aloud. For lower elementary (grades K-2), read a few excerpts and explain some of the vocabulary and concepts as you read, as needed.

After reading, engage in a Race Talk with the family discussing and asking some or all of the following questions:

- How did you feel while you were listening to the essay?
- Why did you feel that way?
- What happened to Lonnie Chavis?
- Could you relate to any of the situations he shared?
- If you could ask Lonnie Chavis a question, what would you ask?
- What does Lonnie Chavis say about what needs to change?
- What do you think needs to change?

Finally, do something with what you've learned: Share the article with a friend. Write your own essay. Learn more.