



Race & Fiction Writing
meetup.com/raceandfictionwriting
2015

Some guidelines for talking about race and fiction

Share the air: Look around the room and count how many people are present. Then divide the available time by that number. If you are one-fifth of the group, try to take up no more than one-fifth of the conversation. Also known as “**step up/step back**”: if you tend to talk a lot, say less. If you tend to be quiet, say more.

Oops/ouch/um: If you hear or read something that seems problematic or makes you uncomfortable, use “ouch” to point it out. If you realize you’ve said or written something potentially harmful, use “oops.” And if you’re not sure what’s going on but something’s not right, use “um.”

Snap: On the other hand, when someone has said or written something that totally resonates with you, give them a snap!

Stay on topic: We all love words, and a lot of us love to talk. Let’s have fun being together but remember the focus of our discussion.

Also, be aware of intersectionality—the connections between racism, sexism, cissexism, classism, ableism, and so on—but remember the focus of this group is on race.

Don’t write the story for the writer: Respect that the author may not welcome all suggestions.

Be aware of power dynamics: Racial, gender and other dynamics can influence who speaks, who is heard, and who holds power in the group. Try to stay mindful of this.

Lean into discomfort: It can be challenging to discuss race and racism. Try to keep an open mind, even if it feels weird or uncomfortable sometimes.

Both/and: Sometimes tough discussions can ease up when we remember that most things aren’t either/or. More than one way of thinking can touch the truth.

Use I-statements: Speak about your own experience and try to avoid generalizations.

Assume good intentions: People generally mean well, so ask questions if you don’t know what someone meant to say. But at the same time . . .

Intent vs. impact: Even when we mean well, we can hurt someone. Respect that your words may have an unintended impact.



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Some concepts we will be talking about in this group

Race: A social construct, with no biological validity, that divides people into distinct groups by categorizing them based on arbitrary elements of physical appearance, particularly skin color. (Source: White People Challenging Racism, wpcr-boston.com)

Ethnicity: A social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as language, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base. (Racial Equity Tools, racialequitytools.org)

Racism: Discrimination based on racial stereotyping—conscious or unconscious, active or passive—that is backed by significant institutional power. Prejudice + power = racism. (WPCR)

Individual racism: The beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism in conscious and unconscious ways. (RET)

Cultural racism: Representations, messages and stories conveying the idea that behaviors and values associated with white people or “whiteness” are automatically “better” or more “normal” than those associated with other racially defined groups. (RET)

Institutional racism: The ways in which institutions—social, political, educational, financial, religious, medical; housing, jobs, criminal justice—create and/or perpetuate systems that advantage white people at the expense of people of color. (WPCR)

White privilege: The unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it. (RET)

White supremacy: The historically based, institutionally and culturally perpetuated system of domination and exploitation of people of color by white people in order to maintain white peoples’ position of relative wealth, power, and privilege. (WPCR)

Microaggressions: The everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBT populations or those who are marginalized experiences in their day-to-day interactions. (Derald Wing Sue)