

Name:

Block:

The Meanings of Race

Directions: Use **active reading strategies** to read and understand the four definitions of race that are listed below and on the back of this handout. After you have read through each definition, complete the following:

1. In your journal, write down which definition you *most agree with* – you do not need to write the whole definition, just the definition number – and **explain why** you chose this definition. Remember to date your entry!
2. **Create a visual** to represent what race means to you. Draw from your own ideas, beliefs, and understandings, as well as the definition that you just identified in your journal response.

***Possible visual ideas may include pictures, symbols, word splashes, word art, collage of magazine clippings, drawings (no stick figures), etc.*

***Please know that these visuals will be presented in class and hung up on our classroom bulletin board. Take pride in your work – use correct spelling (if applicable), plain/colored printer paper or construction paper, use markers or colored pencils (if applicable), write/draw/erase neatly, etc.*

Definition 1

“Mapping the DNA sequence variation in the human genome holds the potential for promoting the fundamental unity of all mankind.” – Dr. Harold P. Freeman

(American Museum of Natural History, “The Genomic Revolution,” 2001 exhibition.)

New data from the mapping of the human genome reveal that all humans are incredibly similar – in fact, we are 99.9% genetically identical. We are all members of one species, *Homo sapiens*. Scientists have confirmed, as they long suspected, that there is no genetic or biological basis for race.

Genetic variation between people within the same “racial” group can be greater than the variation between people of two different groups. Many people of African descent are no more similar to other Africans than they are to Caucasians. Genetic distinctions between Asians and Caucasians are less pronounced than those between groups from, for example, parts of East and West Africa.

No matter how scientists today scrutinize a person’s genes, they can’t determine with certainty whether an individual is from one “racial” group or another. Differences of culture and society distinguish one group from another, but these distinctions are not rooted in biology.

Definition 2

From the American Anthropological Association

In 1997, the American Anthropological Association issued a statement summarizing its own research and the research of others on race. After noting that race has no scientific meaning and that research based on racial categories has resulted in “countless errors,” the organization concluded that race is a social invention – “a worldview, a body of prejudgments that distorts our ideas about human differences and group behavior.” The Association noted, “At the end of the 20th century, we now understand that human behavior is learned, conditioned into infants beginning at birth and always subject to modification and change.”

Definition 3

Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary

race *n* a division of mankind possessing traits that are transmissible by descent and sufficient to characterize it as a distinct human type

Definition 4

Quoted from Claudine Chiawei O'Hearn, ed., Half and Half. Pantheon Books, 1998, pp. 209-210.

According to the poet Lori Tsang, race is the myth upon which the reality of racism is based, the wild card the racist always keeps up his sleeve. The racist has the power to determine whether the card will be a diamond or spade, whether a Chinese is black or white. Like water, race takes on the shape of whatever contains it – whatever culture, social structure, political system. But like water, it slips through your fingers when you try to hold it.