

# 10 SECONDS

By: Miriam Gonzales



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# 10 Seconds

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### LEARNING GUIDE:

This learning guide is a resource designed to enhance your theatre experience. Its goal is twofold: to nurture the teaching and learning of theatre arts and to encourage essential questions that lead to enduring understandings of the play's meaning and relevance.

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### PLAY CONTENT:

10 SECONDS is a modern drama that depicts events surrounding policing and young people.

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### AGE RANGE:

This learning guide is recommended for grades 8-12.

# Theatre for Change



A spotlight on Imagination Stage's Theatre for Change program and the creation of the play *10 Seconds*



Imagination Stage is dedicated to innovation and growing the ways in which we reach students, families, and communities as we strive to serve ALL young people. Using theatre productions and educational workshops to bridge cultural divides and lift up underrepresented voices, Imagination Stage's Theatre for Change program explores complex social justice issues to help build a new generation of compassionate, collaborative children who are capable of changing the world. Whether telling the story of refugee children fleeing violence in Central America, or developing positive relationships between children and police, Imagination Stage is answering the needs of the community.

*10 Seconds* had a very unique start. Starting in 2017, Imagination Stage began working with the D.C. Police Foundation on workshops with police and youth in D.C. The goal was to use theatre to build relationships and understanding between these two groups of people. Both police officers and youth participated in weekly workshops facilitated by Imagination Stage teaching artists. These workshops used theatre exercises, performance, and improvisational games to inspire bonding, understanding, and community building. Special guest artists were also brought in to introduce other art forms, such as spoken word and graffiti art. Officers and youth opened up to each other on a variety of topics. Much of the discussion and writing is referenced in the play *10 Seconds*.

Miriam Gonzales and project assistant Tyrese Rowe spent time interviewing students and officers, listening to discussions carefully facilitated by teaching artists, and sharing scenes as the years progressed with the officers and youth. In 2020, Imagination Stage workshopped the play (still in draft form) with Director LeeAnét Noble and received feedback from community members. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the play was workshopped with actors several more times over Zoom. We were thrilled to film the performance in early 2021 for groups to enjoy virtually and to now tour the show.



# ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



## Miriam Gonzales

Miriam Gonzales' works include: *The Smartest Girl in the World*; *Sunny and Licorice*; *Bertie, Maggie and the Magic Zero*; *Óyeme, the beautiful*; *The South Overlook Oaks* (adaptation); and *Girl Power!* (Kennedy Center, NSO youth concert series). Her work has been produced at Childsplay (Tempe, Ariz.), Imagination Stage (Bethesda, Md.), Arts on the Horizon (Alexandria, Va.), Atlas Performing Arts Center (Washington, D.C.), Columbus Children's Theatre (Columbus, Ohio) and Austin Playhouse (Austin, Texas). In addition to stage productions, her work has toured extensively into schools and communities throughout the D.C. area and Arizona. Her work has been developed and has received professional readings at the Write Now Festival, La Jolla Playhouse's DNA New Works Series, Northwestern University's PLAYground Festival, the AATE National Conference, Imagination Stage, Latinx Theatre Commons, Georgetown University's CrossCurrents festival and the TCG National Conference. Gonzales is a former teaching artist with Young Playwrights' Theater (YPT) in Washington, D.C., and served as YPT's board chair. She currently serves on the board of the Children's Theatre Foundation of America. Gonzales is the codeveloper of Imagination Stage's ¡Óyeme! project, which is a theatre arts program for Central American refugee youth. Gonzales is the recipient of the Write Now Award, the Aurand Harris Memorial Playwriting Award, the AATE Distinguished Play Award and Imagination Stage's Imagination Award. She is a graduate of Brown University and received her Ph.D. in education and M.A. in sociology from Stanford University. Gonzales hails from Corpus Christi, Texas, and currently lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband and two daughters.



# Creating the Play



An Interview with Miriam Gonzales

## **Q: What was the inspiration behind *10 Seconds*?**

"I was inspired by the young people and police participating in IStage's Police and Youth Program. Once young people believe you truly want to listen to them, and that you celebrate and applaud their honesty and self-expression — watch out! Their wisdom, truth, and brilliance comes shining through — it's a powerful and inspiring thing to witness. The students in our program felt safe sharing their feelings and perspectives about what it's like growing up as a young African American in D.C. The police who were engaged in the program matched them with their honesty, openness, and talent. One day in class, after an activity about trust, we had a conversation about assumptions and how we tend to react quickly (on average, in ten seconds) to each other based on our perceptions, fears, and biases. The energy in the room noticeably shifted as questions and opinions were shared about policing and the community. I left that day knowing the title of the play and, after weeks of gathering stories and conducting interviews with police and youth, I began the process of creating *10 Seconds*."

## **Q: How was it like constructing the beauty of the friendship between Ray and Jimi?**

"I'm moved by the power of friendship, especially during childhood and adolescence when friendship can be a crucial lifeline for many young people as they navigate the world. And when I was a teacher, I was always touched by how children and teens often looked out for one another. I observed this in the youth-police program as well. Creating the characters of Ray and Jimi was a joy. They, and the idea of their friendship, grew from the simple process of watching and listening. As our students played theater games together and enjoyed one another in our classrooms, and shared honest feelings with me in interviews, I gathered bits and pieces and wove them together to create Ray and Jimi's story. I was equally moved by the police officers who were motivated to participate in the program. Their reflections on why they chose to enter law enforcement, and their deep feelings for their families and the community they serve, were equally poignant. In the end, I wanted to stress how human we all are — to highlight the internal, to share stories of love and the need for belonging, respect, and compassion that we all share."

*Interview Conducted 1/29/21 by Rakeem Lawrence*

# Meet the Characters

## **Ray**

14 years old, Jimi's friend. Ray identifies as African American. Ray is a math nerd, actor, and playwright.

## **Jimi**

14 years old, Ray's friend. Jimi identifies as African American. His mom has left the household, and his relationship with his dad is strained.

## **Officer Samantha Kent**

Officer Kent is an adult and identifies as a white woman. She is the only employed member in her household, and her son struggles in school.

## **Officer Craig Leland**

Officer Leland is an adult and identifies as an African American man. He is a father with two young children.

## Safety Statistics for Black Americans in Washington, D.C.

- Source: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/317756/black-americans-less-likely-feel-safe-community.aspx>

# History of Policing in the U.S.A.

The origins of policing in the United States dates back to the American colonies. In 1704, a slave patrol began in the Carolina colonies. Their duty was chasing and hunting escaped slaves and releasing terror on slave communities to prevent riots. These slave patrols last until the Civil War.

By the mid 1800s, immigrants from Germany and Ireland moved into the Northern states and citizens from England and The Netherlands clashed with the new settlers. As the new immigrants are blamed for disorderly conduct and mobs, a "night watch" is created to keep order. In 1838, the first official police force was established in Boston. Their main duty is to prevent crime.

In 1865, shortly after slavery is outlawed, the first Black Codes are passed. These laws specify how and where freed slaves can work and how much they can be paid. The Black Codes essentially maintain the structure of slavery without calling it "slavery." Other Black Codes restrict Black Americans' rights to vote and dictate where they can travel and live. Many ex-Confederate soldiers' transition to policing where they could enforce these rules and continue to perpetuate the oppression of Black Americans. In the 1880s, Jim Crow Laws were enacted in the southern states and stayed in effect until 1965. These laws prohibit Blacks and Whites from sharing public spaces. Blacks who break the laws are met with police brutality.

In the early 1900s, federal and state police forces were created.

In 1964, after many peaceful protests and movements within the Black Church and community organizations there was announced the formal end to Jim Crow Laws and the creation of the new Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Act.

From the 1970s to the late 1990s, police departments attempted to make changes to instill community trust, including the concept of community policing: placing minority police officers in communities made up of people of color. By the early 2000s, two thirds of police forces across the United States implemented community policing policies.



# History of Policing in the U.S.A. continued ...

However, these more recent policing policies and legislation also contribute to the collective trauma around law enforcement in African American communities. For example, the 1994 Crime Bill was used to over incarcerate African Americans. The bill imposed harsher penalties for crack than for powder cocaine. *"The disparity in the treatment of crack and cocaine really was backed up by anecdote and stereotype, not by data..."* said Gertner, a lecturer at Harvard Law School. *"There was no data suggesting that crack was infinitely more dangerous than cocaine. It was the young Black predator narrative."* "Tough on Crime" political movements had long been fodder to subjugate African Americans, but during the 1980s and 1990s, the movements resulted in initiatives such as Operation Clean Sweep in Washington, DC.

The stated mission of the initiative was to rid the city of drug selling, but instead it resulted in the arrest of one in four African Americans in Washington, DC. These and other policies created a system where African Americans found themselves in a perpetual cycle of contending with the justice system and incarceration, often for misdemeanor offences or for issues surrounding substance abuse, which should have been treated from the lens of the disease model as opposed to criminality.

In 1991, Rodney King was video-taped being beaten by police. Riots break out in Los Angeles.

In 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement was founded after Trayvon Martin was killed.

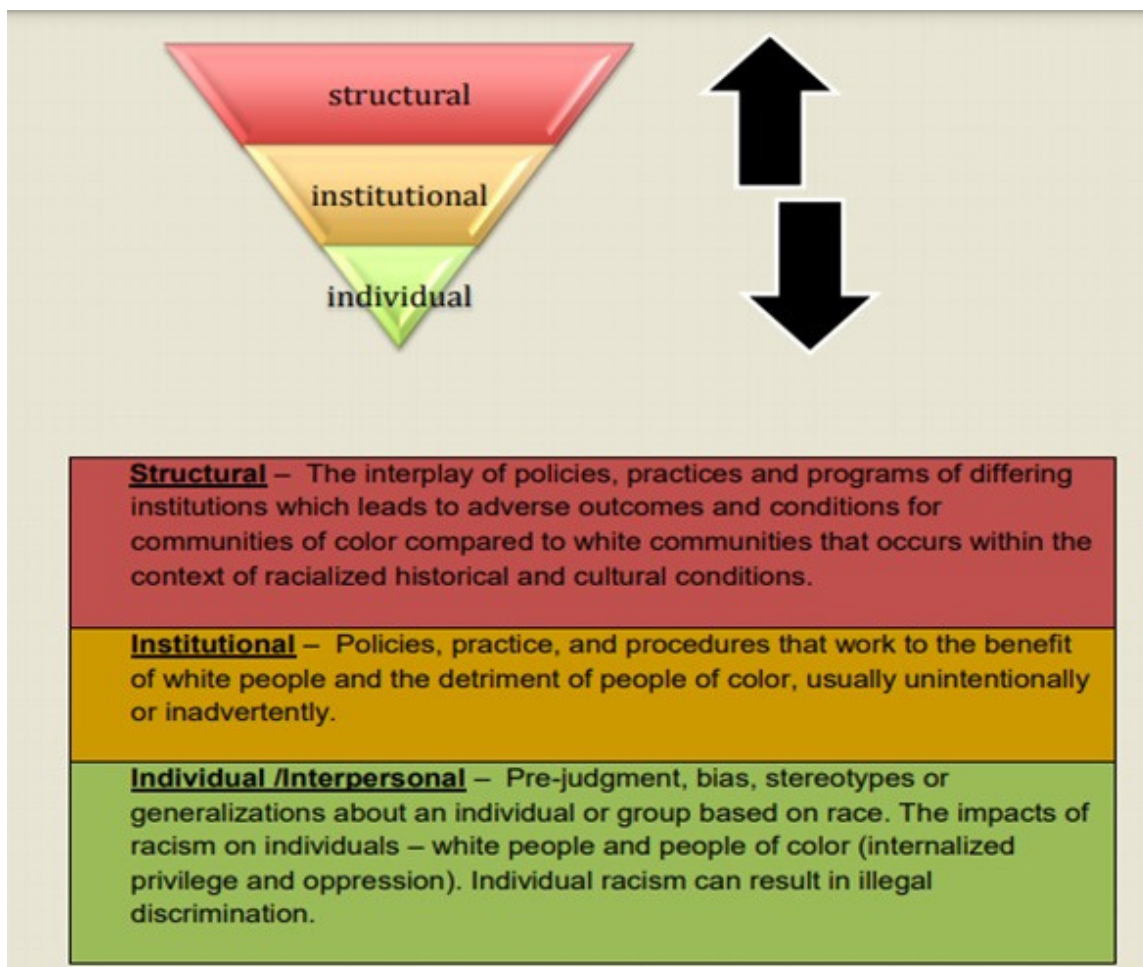
In 2016, almost half of the police forces in the United States implemented policies requiring body cameras for officers.

In 2020, George Floyd was murdered wrongfully after former police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on his neck for several minutes causing his death. Chauvin has been charged with third-degree murder and manslaughter. Today people are demanding changes within policing in America!

This brief history outline highlights the need to tell stories like this play *10 Seconds*.

**Discussion Questions: What reforms might you suggest? How might you reimagine policing? How does the past inform our future?**

# Spotlight on Racism



## Types of Racism

It is important to recognize and understand that there are multiple levels of racism in the United States that contribute to the inequities and injustices faced by people of color.

While **individual** racism (personal prejudice and biases) are most commonly understood in this country, emerging explanations of racism deem that individual racism is a symptom of **institutional** or **structural** racism: policies and practices on a large scale that routinely and repeatedly produce racially inequitable outcomes.

Some examples of systems where structural/ systemic racism is deeply rooted includes employment, housing, incarceration, and drug arrests.

**Discussion Question:** Can you name an example of structural, institutional, and individual/ interpersonal racism you can remember from *10 Seconds*?

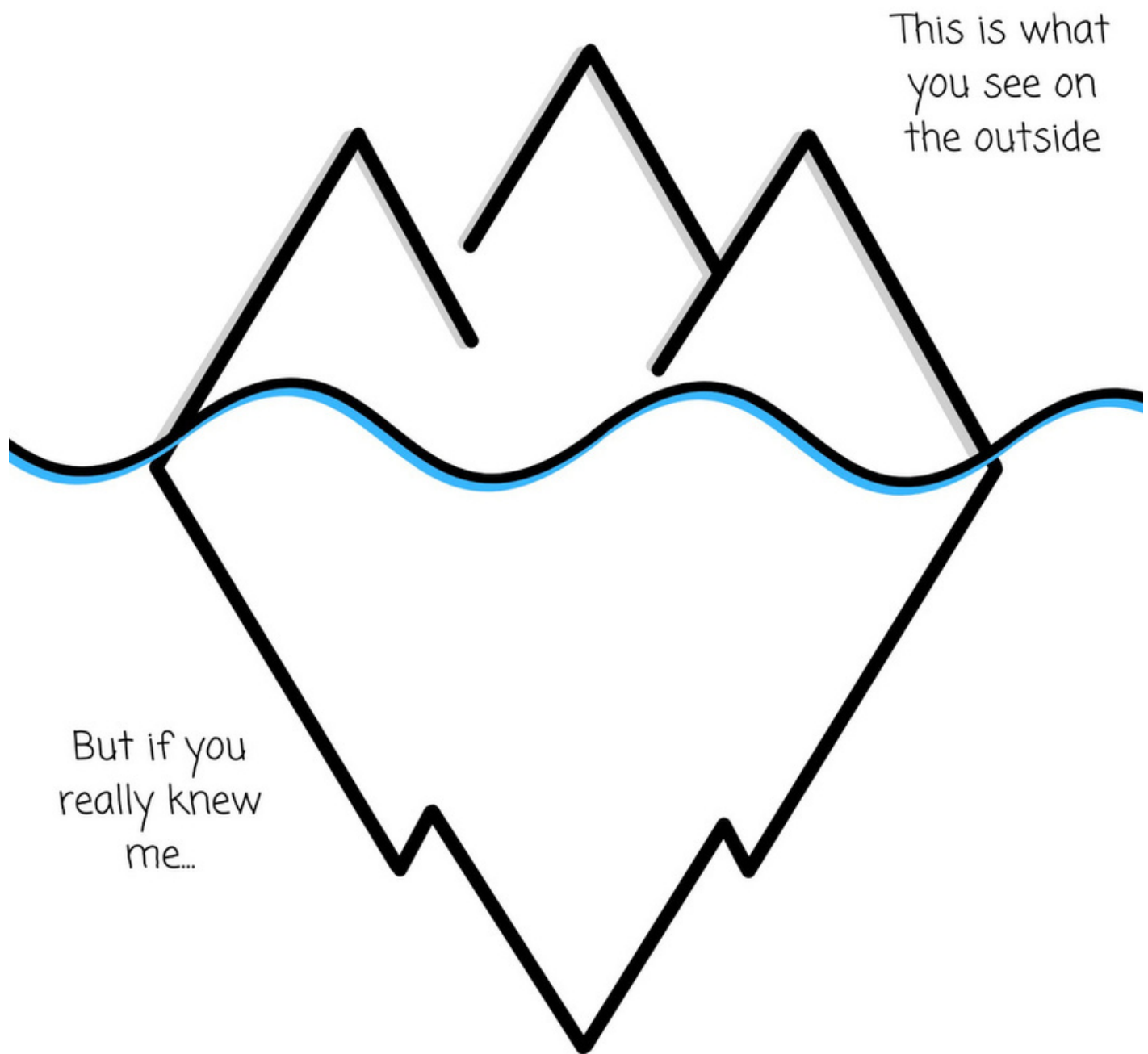
# Discussion Questions

After watching the performance of *10 Seconds*, use the following questions to start a discussion about the play with your students.

1. What was a moment in the show that stood out to you? Why did it stand out to you??
2. How would you describe Jimi's relationship with his father?
3. How would you describe the friendship between Jimi and Officer Leland? What did they have in common?
4. Did anything surprise you about Officer Leland or Officer Kent?
5. In what ways is systemic racism a factor in the outcome of the encounter between Officer Kent and Jimi?
6. Why did Officer Kent suspect Jimi? What evidence did she actually have? What assumptions did she make?
7. When are you most aware of your power? What is your reaction? When you lack power, what is your physical, mental or emotional reaction?
8. Who has the power to make a change is a theme in the play. There are many examples of youth activists making a difference. Can you think of any youth activists and how they are making a difference? What might you be able to do to have your voice heard? Can the arts help to change someone's mind?
9. Ray asks the audience to decide how the story ends. How might you end this story? This play provides an opportunity to reimagine the relationships between the police and the communities they serve. What is the current role of police? How might you reimagine policing?
10. What are some actions you can take to speak up against social justice issues? How can you advocate or support people in their fight for social justice?

# Identity Iceberg Activity

Throughout the play, Jimi and Ray talk about how people view them versus how they view themselves. In this activity, pick a character from the play and above the waterline, use one word, adjective, or short phrase to describe how others see them from the outside. Then, underneath the waterline, describe what that person may not know just by looking at the character.





# Write Your Own Ending



At the end of the play, we see Ray battling with himself about how to finish the narrative of his play. Ray looks at the audience and poses the question of “Is this the end, or is it the beginning?” We are left thinking about what happened to Jimi and what should have happened to Jimi. Now it's your turn to reimagine the scene. How would you end this play? Write the final scene thinking about how you would reimagine this interaction with Jimi. Think about what you would want to see to assist in reforming relationships between law enforcement and civilians. How would you want to use your power and will to change?

**ACTOR/JIMI**

What if we took the time to--

**ACTOR/KENT**

talk, listen,

**ACTOR/LELAND**

and reimagine the scene?

**RAY**

The great *What If* -- a place of possibility, *a chance* to heal --

**JIMI**

– to make some change.

**RAY**

Who has the power --

**ACTOR/LELAND**

--do we have the *will*

**ACTOR/KENT**

--to change?

**RAY**

(into audience)

Yea, we're asking you.

**ACTOR/KENT**

SCENE SEVEN.

**ACTOR/LELAND**

Is it the end,

**ACTOR/JIMI**

or is it the beginning?

**RAY**

You decide.

# For Educators: Spotlight on Trauma Affected Youth



We see both Ray and Jimi witness and experience many traumatic moments within the world of *10 Seconds*. Whether one witnesses a traumatic event second-hand or experiences it personally, it can have a large impact on a child's behavior after the event has occurred. It's important to acknowledge when someone you know is affected by or experiencing trauma and learn about ways to support them. All behavior is communication.

A traumatic event is a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that poses a threat to a student's life or bodily integrity. Witnessing a traumatic event that threatens the life or physical security of a loved one can also be traumatic. This is particularly important for young students, as their sense of safety depends on the perceived safety of their attachment figures.

Traumatic experiences can initiate strong emotions and physical reactions that can persist long after the event. Students may feel terror, helplessness, or fear, as well as physiological reactions such as rapid heartbeat, vomiting, or loss of bowel or bladder control. Students who experience an inability to protect themselves or who lack protection from others to avoid the consequences of the traumatic experience may also feel overwhelmed by the intensity of physical and emotional responses.

**Question for Reflection: How might a trauma informed educator have had an impact on Jimi's life?**

# For Educators: Trauma Informed Education in Practice



1. **Learn to notice and avoid (or lessen) “triggers.”** Find out what distracts or makes your student anxious. Work to lessen these things.
2. **Set up routines for your student** (for the day, for meals, for breaks) so they know what to expect.
3. **Give your student a sense of control** through simple choices. Respect your student’s decisions.
4. **Do not take your students behaviors as a finite thing that will not change.**
5. **Try to stay calm.** Find ways to respond to outbursts that do not make things worse. Lower your voice. Do not yell or show aggression. Do not stare or look directly at your student for too long. Some students see this as a threat.
6. **Remain available and responsive** when your students keep you at a distance.
7. **Avoid discipline that uses punitive measures.** This may cause panic and out-of-control behavior. Relationships and well-being should take priority over assignments and behavioral compliance.
8. **Let your student feel the way they feel.** Teach your student words to describe their feelings when they are calm, words they can use when they get upset. Show acceptable ways for them to deal with feelings. Then, praise them for expressing their feelings or calming down. Providing space for student voice is important. It can be through written reflection, art, or verbally. These activities can help an educator take cues from the student on how to best support them.
9. **Be consistent, predictable, caring, and patient.** Over time, this shows your students that others can be trusted to stay with them and help them. Connectedness can help a student. Having relationships to others who can understand and support you help someone build resilience. Educators can make time for connectedness in the classroom for students to build relationships with them and each other.
10. **Ask for help** whenever you have concerns, questions, or are struggling. There are proven therapies to help children and parents adjust to the effects of trauma. Pediatricians, developmental specialists, and therapists can suggest ideas about why your student reacts certain ways and effective responses. Sometimes medications, used appropriately, will help to manage symptoms and make learning new ways possible.

# Additional Resources



## **Police and Youth**

A resource exploring encounters between police and youth and how to reduce juvenile arrests.

[https://strategiesforyouth.org/\\_](https://strategiesforyouth.org/_)

## **Teaching for Change**

An educator's resource for building social justice in the classroom.

[teachingforchange.org\\_](https://teachingforchange.org_)

## **Learning for Justice (formerly known as Teaching for Tolerance)**

Another resource for building social justice in the classroom and beyond.

[learningforjustice.org\\_](https://learningforjustice.org_)

## **Tools for Talking about Race**

A variety of resources from the National Museum of African American History & Culture on how to discuss race, build community, understand bias, and choose to be anti-racist.

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>

## **Youth Activism in 2020 inspired by Black Lives Matter**

Interviews with and stories of young protestors across the country.

<https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/black-lives-matter-protests-new-generation-youth-activists-1099895/>

## **Trauma- Affected Youth - A Trauma Informed Teaching Resource**

An educator's resource for working with trauma-affected students.

[https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-and-why-trauma-informed-teaching\\_](https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-and-why-trauma-informed-teaching_)

## **Young Adult Novels**

A list of young adult novels that address race.

[All American Boys](#) by Jason Reynolds

[I Am Alfonso Jones](#) by Tony Medina

[The Hate You Give](#) by Angie Thomas