

Finding the right words to explore our shared history

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The background

- ▶ The death of **George Floyd** – a black man killed by U.S. police - sparked protests around the world in **2020**. These **protests** reignited discussion and highlighted the need for everyone to recognise the racial inequalities and injustices that are experienced by people of African descent. One way we can do this is to **explore our shared local history**.
- ▶ Teachers, educators and parents often express concerns over **finding the right language** to discuss history, the transatlantic slave trade in particular, and questions of race in general. This guide aims to equip you with appropriate terminology to promote understanding and facilitate respectful discussions.
- ▶ The **Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery (RAMM)**, in southwest England, presented an exhibition called In Plain Sight in 2022. It focussed on the documented links between the local region of Devon and the trade in enslaved people across the Atlantic. It combined objects from its collections with historical research, and responses by contemporary artists and communities. The exhibition team took great care with their language and committed “to not use any word that empowers the enslavers or dehumanises the enslaved”.
- ▶ You can read, listen and share the **voices of people from Devon’s diverse ethnic communities** discussing a variety of topics on the **exhibition’s online legacy page**: [In Plain Sight - Transatlantic slavery and Devon - Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery \(rammcollections.org.uk\)](https://rammcollections.org.uk)

Creating space for discussion

[The Understanding Slavery Initiative](#) (USI) is a UK project supporting education about the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies through the use of museum and heritage collections. It argues that any approach to teaching the topic should:

- ▶ **Establish a safe space** for discussion

- ▶ Provide **boundaries**
- ▶ **Explore issues as a class**

Through adhering to these three key principles, young people will be able discuss perspectives, raise concerns and challenge viewpoints in an informed way.

USI advises: “Explain how **language of the past may not be acceptable now** and how language rooted in history often carries with it meanings that were intended to create divisions which should now be **challenged.**”

Consider asking if **any voice is missing** in your debate and what it is that they might say. Ensure it is **not left to any particular student/s to stand up for a minority** viewpoint.

Language to talk about race

- ▶ Language use is always **evolving**. In order to communicate well in today’s society, it is important to recognise that words we might have used in the past are no longer relevant or respectful. The **language of the internet** has helped to merge British and North American terminology, but there are still differences based on local realities and histories.
- ▶ One term used increasingly on both sides of the Atlantic, as an empowering and deracialised description, is “**Global Majority**”.
- ▶ Various studies and authors disagree with use of the acronym **BAME (Black and Asian Minority Ethnic)**, arguing it has limited accuracy and makes people feel like statistical samples. The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities also recommended in 2021 that the government stop using the term BAME.
- ▶ A 2020 study by Sporting Equals of 150,000 service users and almost 40,000 volunteers found the most favoured terms of self-definition were **Diverse Ethnic Communities** or **Ethnically Diverse Communities**.

Further examples of appropriate terminology can be found in the following references:

- ▶ Reni Eddo Lodge, **Why I Am No Longer Talking to White People about Race**, 2017, Bloomsbury Circus
- ▶ [The Understanding Slavery Initiative](#)

Language to talk about the transatlantic slave trade

- ▶ The **University of Nottingham** worked with **local museums and educators** to produce a **2021 series of culturally sensitive, anti-racist educational materials** set in the context of the transatlantic slave trade and racism.
- ▶ It includes a thorough **glossary of terminology on slavery and racial terminology**. Terms are **colour-coded** to show what is acceptable (in green), never acceptable (red), and an orange background for terms that you might want to use if you have explained the context.
- ▶ The glossary explains the **reasons behind its rationale**, and gives **examples** of vocabulary in use.
- ▶ You will probably want to access the glossary directly, but its ethos is to **prioritise accuracy and appropriate humanity**.
- ▶ This means **avoiding the term of “slave”** and referring instead to **“enslaved people”**.
- ▶ The trade and related economy are referred to as the **transatlantic slave trade**.
- ▶ **Owners** of enslaved people are **not dignified with the term of “masters”**.
- ▶ Make use of the full glossary here:
[**A Glossary of Terminology for Understanding Translatic Slavery & Race**](#)

Learning and acknowledgement of Britain's involvement in the transatlantic chattel slavery can be **uncomfortable and difficult**. Through education we become better informed to share the facts of **our shared history**.

As **language evolves**, some of these terms may change over time. Please let RAMM know if you think something needs **updating**.

We hope you have enjoyed these activities and we would be grateful for your [**feedback**](#).