



Hidden Hurts

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Each of these sentences carries a racist message in addition to its more obvious meaning. For each, brainstorm what the racist message is, how it is conveyed. Consider the assumptions, the language, the context, and the implications of each sentence.

Don't spend too much time on any one.

1. The railway in Canada was largely constructed by coolie labour.

“Coolie” is a derogatory word. It suggests indentured labour, like slavery. It carries the stereotype of Chinese men who were coming to Canada not intending to remain.

2. Let's buy some Jap oranges.

“Jap” is a derogatory term for Japanese or Japanese Canadian people. To describe a fruit in racialized terms is demeaning to the people who carry that name.

3. Women got the vote in Canada in 1917.

No. Only white women got the vote then. People of colour got the

*vote at different times, depending on what country they were from.
“Status” aboriginal people got the vote in 1960.*

Whenever you see a word like “mankind”, “woman”, etc., look for an over-generalization which hides the experience of marginalized women.

4. Plato is the greatest philosopher the world has ever known.

Who is doing the assessing here? Who is taking up the right to judge which philosopher is the greatest in the whole world?

Who is in “the world”? This is a judgement being made within a western paradigm, which leaves out the experience and intellectual histories of most of the peoples of the world.

Many peoples have had their intellectual histories lost or destroyed by the impact of colonialism

5. Let's have a student Christmas concert.

Only some students are Christian or celebrate Christmas. Having a “Christmas concert” elevates Christian celebrations over winter celebrations of other faiths – Hanukkah, Kwanza, etc.

This is a problem of exclusion: when you give privilege to one group but not others, it has the effect of discriminating against those left out.

The connection to race here is that the dominant religion of this white culture is Christianity, so that people left out of “Christmas” concerts are more likely to be people of colour.

6. The ESL students hold everyone back.

Who is “everyone” in this statement? The non-ESL students! So the

assumption is that the non-ESL students are the norm, the ESL students are the aberration.

This is a classic example of scarcity of resources resulting in the marginalized group being re-targeted. Marginalized people have had less privilege than mainstream people; then mainstream people criticize programs or policies which take account of that marginalization are criticized for being a “waste of taxpayers’ money”, or “extras” that should not be funded. Then, though the real problem is actually underresourcing, the marginalized people bear the brunt of resentment.

7. Our educational system should make room for the customs of other cultures.

When you see the word ‘our’, consider who is the ‘we’ of the piece.

In this sentence, ‘our’ is constructed as members of the dominant group; everyone else is a member of ‘another culture’.

Frequently members of the dominant group do not think of themselves as having a culture: they are the norm. “Other” people have cultures!

The word ‘other’ is a clue to locating the norm of the speaker.

The words “make room for” suggest that we should “move over” for “other” people, rather than that all of us have an equal right to have our lives reflected in the educational system.

8. Those dirty lo fun think they are always right. [spoken by a Chinese Canadian about a white Canadian]
9. "O Canada, our home and native land..."
10. Women and visible minorities often suffer discrimination.
11. Everyone is equal here. We treat everyone the same.

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