

If These Halls Could Talk

Classroom Edition: Film Vignettes & Guide (2 hours/45 min)

Written By Lee Mun Wah



Meet the Cast:

Back Row: Jahmelia, Jon, Julie, Will, Marilyn, Maiv Ntxhiav (Sia) & Marc
Front Row: Joe, Tyanne, Leif, Lee Mun Wah, Vera, Carmela — in Berkeley, CA.

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Chapter Two: Introductions



1. What do you think Lee Mun Wah meant when he said that diversity is getting to know each other, developing an authentic, real, transparent relationship with each other that would require taking the time, not just with people who look like us, but with people we are taught to be afraid of? What's good about that and what's hard?
2. What did Lee Mun Wah mean when he said that this generation has not been taught by its instructors and administrators how to have a conversation on diversity and cultural differences? Do you agree or disagree?
3. Do you think white instructors are limited in their knowledge of racism because of 'white privilege'?
4. In what ways do whites not have to think about race/racism?
5. What does racism mean to you? How have some of your experiences or lack of experiences affected your relationships with others?
6. Jon says racism means 'self-preservation' to him. What does he mean? Can you relate or not?
7. Why did Lee Mun Wah say, "I'd like you to share your real name?"
8. Why did Lee Mun Wah want the students to pronounce each other's names correctly and with the same beautiful accents they were born with?
9. What did Will mean when he said he wanted to be 'investigated'? Why?
10. Leif says prejudice is a 'human trait'. Is that true? Why or why not?
11. What did Jon mean by, "I have to be over qualified to be barely qualified"? Can you relate? In what ways?
12. Carmela states that race and racism are seen by anti-racist whites as experiences for 'the other', when in fact it's a system we are all part of. Do you agree with her?

Classroom Discussion: What's good and what's hard in talking about racism?

Journal Exercise: Who helped you get to this room? In what ways did you or others use their privilege to help you?

Chapter Three: Checking In



1. What would it be like for you if you were asked in class, “How are you? No, how are you *really* feeling?”
2. What did Jon mean by, “There are a lot of people counting on me.” What is familiar about what he said?
3. How does society keep minorities like Jon from expressing his anger?
4. Why do you think African American men have the highest blood pressure?
5. What is it like being a minority on a predominantly white campus?
6. What do you think is missing on most campuses for minorities? How do you think that affects them? Why or why not?
7. What would it mean to you if your fellow classmates cared whether or not others were in class? Why or why not?
8. Why was Vera so moved that Joe asked how she was really feeling?
9. What did Vera mean by, “It’s too much to deal with on my own.” (Referring to the danger and the feelings around experiencing the Middle East conflict)? Can you relate? In what ways?

Classroom Discussion: What is the cost of telling the truth about racism for you in class? Why or why not?

Journal Exercise: How much of your life is impacted by racism? In what ways? How does that affect you personally and in this community?

Chapter Four: Joe's Secret



1. What is Joe's secret? In what ways do gays have to keep their identity hidden? Why?
2. What are some of the stereotypes that you've learned about gays?
3. On most campuses, what is the stigma of having AIDS?
4. Lee Mun Wah comments on the 'interconnectedness' or similarities of feelings that emerged in everyone's responses to Joe's story. Can you relate to those feelings from your own life story?
5. Where do you think Leif learned his fears of gays?
6. What do you think is good/hard talking about gay issues?
7. What do you think it will take to end discrimination towards gays?

Classroom Discussions: How can classes hold conversations on gay issues? What do you think it will take?

Journal Exercises: Interview three students and ask their opinions and feelings about gays.

Chapter Five: Unknown Territory



1. What's unfinished in your life as it relates to race/racism?
2. How has racism impacted the life of your siblings, parents, grandparents?
3. In what ways have you been able to avoid racism? In what ways can't you avoid racism?
4. How young were you when you learned about racism? What were you told? How did it affect you?
5. As Jon was talking, what did you notice was Leif's reaction?
6. How does Jon know when someone doesn't want to learn about racism?
7. Why do you think Jon is so afraid when he is faced with 'unknown territory'? Can you relate or not? Why?
8. How deep do you think racism is embedded into this country's institutions? How does that affect you?

Classroom Discussion: What makes it safe/unsafe to talk about racism with whites? With people of color?

Journal Exercise: Interview a student that has an ethnicity different from yours and ask them how 'deeply' racism has affected their lives.

Chapter Six: What Makes It Unsafe



1. What does Jon mean by, “People only focus on exceptions.”? Why do you think that might shut down a conversation about racism? What’s familiar about this for you?
2. What kinds of struggles did Marilyn go through as a student? What would be some good questions to ask her?
3. Have you ever had a faculty member or counselor not expect you to succeed? How did that affect you? If you’ve never had that experience what do you attribute that to?
4. Marilyn mentions that many professors didn’t even remember her name. Do you think that’s important? Why or why not?
5. What does Marilyn mean by, “I felt unpredicted”?
6. What did Marilyn say she needed?
7. Maiv Ntxhiav (Sia) talks about the Asian stereotypes she has had to face. What were they? What was familiar about this for you?
8. Vera brings up that teachers lack the experience to talk about diversity. How do you think this impacts the students when they try to talk about it?
9. Will brings up his frustration with folks who believe that are absolutely right. What is he asking for instead?
10. Joe talks the fear of reprisals if diversity is brought up in and out of the classroom. What do you think is the anger/fear if diversity issues are brought up?
11. What was your reaction to Maiv Ntxhiav (Sia)’s story about her instructor correcting her paper?
12. What was your reaction to Marilyn’s anguish and hurt being told, “Don’t take it personally”?

Classroom Discussion: What kinds of stereotypes do you have to face/overcome?

Journal Exercise: How can instructors be more supportive of students of color and whites around diversity issues?

Chapter Seven: Trust



1. What are some things that Will says that keeps him from trusting whites? What was familiar to you about what he shared?
2. Why was Will uncomfortable with Tyanne's request to use 'I' statements?
3. Why does Will say he can't trust Tyanne?
4. What does Will say he needs from Tyanne?
5. Why does Tyanne say she's often in her head and not connecting from her heart? What was Will's response to her?
6. What did Will mean by, "I want us to get to a point where we can finally start to have other conversations in a way in which we're both really looking at each other."?
7. What are some mindful facilitation techniques Lee Mun Wah used to mediate between Will and Tyanne?
8. What is missing in our discussion of diversity issues in this country?
9. Jon talks about how fear leads to self-preservation. What does he mean by that?
10. Leif says, "You finally said that you both didn't trust each other, and it was okay. I never would have thought that would happen." Why not? What do you think is the fear of telling each other the truth?

Classroom Discussion: In what ways do you think minorities adapt to the dominant culture? What are some of the rewards/costs to them?

Journal Exercise: What are some of the things you keep in secret because you aren't sure if they will be understood and acknowledged?

Chapter Eight: Outsiders



1. What does it mean to you when someone says, “I’m so glad you’re not like those people (Chinese, Latino, gay, etc.)”? Why do you think that might be hurtful?
2. In what ways have you lost yourself? What parts of yourself do you leave at the door?
3. In what ways have you been taught to blend in? How has that affected you?
4. What is the ‘prophecy of being an American’?
5. What is it like to be gay on most campuses today?
6. What is ‘heterosexual privilege’?
7. What came up for you when Vera said, “Americans are not emotional. We Arabs are emotional. You need to be not emotional to belong. So I will leave my emotions at home and just work and be rational and be the way they want me to be—the way they are.” Is this familiar? Why or why not?
8. What came up for you when Vera said, “This is their place, their rules, and their game.”?
9. What came up for you when Vera said that this is the most racist country in the world? Why or why not?
10. Jon says that having an identity as a black man is synonymous with being a rebellion. What does he mean? Can you relate? In what ways?
11. Why do you think whites sometimes change the subject away from racism? How does that affect you? In what ways?

Classroom Discussion: List some of the ethnic stereotypes that you’ve learned from others, books and the media.

Journal Exercise: How have the stereotypes you’ve learned affected how you relate or don’t relate to certain groups?

Chapter Nine: Breaking Our Stereotypes



1. What kinds of stereotypes do you hold about Palestinians, Muslims and Puerto Ricans?
2. How do your stereotypes affect how you relate or don't relate to the above groups?
3. Some say that even positive stereotypes are harmful. Why do you think that might be true?
4. Marilyn says she didn't have the 'guts' to come up and ask Vera about the Muslim boys in her neighborhood and what happened at 9/11. What do you think were some of Marilyn's fears of approaching Vera? What would be some of your fears?
5. Why do you think Jon was more comfortable talking to the white women rather than the white men? Is that true for you, too?

Classroom Discussion: What do you think it will take for us to break our stereotypes of each other?

Journal Exercise: What did your parents teach you about minorities?

Chapter Ten: What Stands Between Us



1. Why do you think Marc is not ready to connect with Leif?
2. What makes it unsafe to tell the truth to whites? To people of color? Why or why not?
3. How have stereotypes affected how you see yourself? How have you internalized those stereotypes?
4. How do you think being of 'slave descent' might affect African Americans today?
5. Do you think there are different forms of slavery going on today? In what ways?
6. What did Marc request of Leif? Why?
7. What did Marc mean when he said to Leif, "You do this shit for free, *slave descent*."?
8. What percentage of your life is impacted by racism? Share some experiences.
9. Share why Marc says he can't trust Leif and other whites. What are your thoughts?

Classroom Discussion: What kind of neighborhood did you grow up in? How do you think it affected how you see others who are different from you?

Journal Exercise: Do you think we will ever elect a Muslim President? Why or why not?

Chapter Eleven: Guilt and Shame



1. Leif says, “I feel your anger, but I don’t feel it.” What does he mean by that? Can you relate? Why or why not?
2. Leif says he doesn’t know how to know the feelings of people of color. Do you think that is true? In what ways do you think he could find out? What’s missing in his question?
3. What does Leif mean by, “I learned about the horrible things my people did to blacks, but I never saw them as my people. I saw them as people of the past that did that. I never understood that I am that.” What does he mean by that to you? What is the disconnect he is talking about? How does that ‘disconnect’ exist today and do you think that impacts the relationships between whites and people of color?
4. Leif says, “I can’t take responsibility and I don’t know why I can’t just say that I’m so sorry.” Why do you think he can’t?
5. What does Marc say about why Leif can’t take responsibility or say “I’m so sorry.”?
6. What was Joe’s reaction to Leif? To Marc?
7. What does Marc mean by, “You don’t want to upset massa.” What are the consequences he is alluding to? Is this true today? In what ways is this true in your life?
8. What does Marc mean when he says to Joe, “You’ve got to accept the shame and guilt.” What came up for you?
9. Why do you think Joe is afraid of being made to feel ‘guilty’?
10. Why is Jahmelia irritated with Joe? What does she notice is missing?

Classroom Discussion: In what ways does guilt and shame keep whites ‘stuck’?

Journal Exercise: How have minorities learned to play the ‘game’ with whites?

Chapter Twelve: What Relates to Me



1. Why did Marc have an issue with Tyanne trying to relate to him through her own experiences? Have you ever done this? In what ways could this be detrimental to establishing a connection?
2. Why is Maiv Ntxhiav (Sia) upset with what Tyanne shared? How is Maiv Ntxhiav (Sia) affected?
3. What does Tyanne mean by, "I get up here (in my mind) because I can see how it affects people still today, but not here (in my heart). What's familiar about this for you?
What is the disconnect?
4. Why does Marc 'go away' when Tyanne says, "I've read about it."?
5. Why do you think whites say, "It happens to us, too!"? Why do you think it is so upsetting to people of color?
6. Why do you think Tyanne didn't ask the people of color any questions after they shared their reactions to what she shared? Is this familiar and how does it affect you?

Classroom Discussion: How can whites learn more about the experiences of minorities? What will it take?

Journal Exercise: In what ways have whites been able to avoid talking about racism?

Chapter Thirteen: Catering to Whites



1. Jon says to Tyanne that the people of color were catering to the whites and didn't even know it. What is he referring to? Why didn't the people of color know they were doing that?
2. In what ways do you cater to whites? To people of color? Why or why not?
3. Why was Marilyn angry at Vera? What came up for you?
4. How was Vera taking care of Tyanne?
5. How is Marilyn 'stuck in the middle'? In what other ways are multi-ethnic folks caught in the middle? How do you think that affects their self-esteem and self-image?
6. How do you think whites keep people of color from fully expressing themselves?
7. What does Marilyn mean by, "Whites aren't denied anything and they never cry about anything!"? What's familiar about what she said?
8. What does Marilyn do to survive? Can you relate? Why or why not?

Classroom Discussion: How do you overcome someone's denial that racism exists?

Journal Exercise: In what ways do you leave a part of yourself at the door?

Chapter Fourteen: Painful Experiences on Campus



1. Maiv Ntxhiav (Sia) mentions 'feeling used' in class. What does she mean by that? Can you relate? Why or why not?
2. Why doesn't Maiv Ntxhiav (Sia) trust white people? What's familiar about this for you?
3. Why are Jon and Maiv Ntxhiav (Sia) so angry about doing diversity events on campus? Do you agree or disagree?
4. Why do you think whites are hesitant/disinterested to attend diversity events?
5. Why does Jon say, "I don't need your help."? What do you think he is not saying?
6. What is Jahmelia observing about Jon and Will? What came up for you?

Classroom Discussion: How knowledgeable are whites about their European roots? Why or why not?

Journal Exercise: In what ways do we not respect 'differences' in the United States?

Chapter Fifteen: Fear of Whites' Reactions



1. Why does Jahmelia, as a black woman, not feel safe with white men?
2. Why do you think Leif never noticed the tension that black women might feel towards white men?
3. What came up for you when Jon talked about the fear he feels when white people walk towards him?
4. How real is the feeling that ‘whites can make up a story and it will be believed’?
5. Lee Mun Wah asks, “Can any person of color change a textbook in America?” What do you think? Why or why not?
6. Jon talks about President Obama not being able to say what he wants to say because he’d get kicked out. What do you think he’s not saying? What can’t you say and why?
7. Jon also talks about President Obama having to hide so much of himself. How much do you hide and why?

Classroom Discussion: In what ways are black men stereotyped?

Journal Exercise: In what ways are black women stereotyped?

Chapter Sixteen: The Numbness



1. What came up for you when Will says to Leif, “You only talk about what you can’t do; what you don’t feel.” Did you notice that? Why or why not? What’s familiar about that for you?
2. What does Will mean by, “You’ve lost a piece of yourself as a human being--that’s why you’re numb.” What came up for you? What’s familiar about this?
3. Have you ever felt ‘numb’? What happened and why?
4. Will says, “I was assimilated to whiteness.” What does he mean by that? How much have you assimilated and why?
5. What is it like to have to deal with ‘white numbness’? How does it affect you?
6. What did Lee Mun Wah mean when he said that whites were ‘blaming the people of color for making them feel this way’?
7. In what ways do whites stay in ‘control’? What happens when whites feel ‘out of control’? How does that impact minorities?
8. What does Lee Mun Wah mean when he says ‘get out of yourselves’ to the white students?
9. What came up for you when Joe said we still can’t see people of color as human? Where do you think Joe learned that from? What was Marc’s reaction?
10. Why do you think Joe did not see how fully racist he was? What’s familiar about that?

Classroom Discussion: What are some ways to stop a diversity conversation?

Journal Exercise: What are some diversity situations that you aren’t sure how to deal with?

Chapter Seventeen: Why Can't I Cry?



1. Why do you think Leif can't cry? Can you relate? Why or why not?
2. Why doesn't Marc believe Leif?
3. Where do you think Leif learned not to cry? How is that mirrored in the larger society and in our institutions?
4. How do you think 'numbness' has affected whites and people of color?
5. Why did Jon start to cry? Identify three things he was upset about.
6. Why do you think Leif can wear t-shirts and sandals and still be seen as the president of the company? How is that different for people of color? Why or why not?

Classroom Discussion: In what ways is being numb a privilege?

Journal Exercise: What do you think it will take for people of color to trust whites?

Chapter Eighteen: Losing Our Humanity



1. Why did Will say, “Sometimes I have the thought of killing white people.”? What came up for you? What was familiar?
2. Will says that Marc and he can’t focus on both their anger and their pain. What do you think he is talking about?
3. What is Jahmelia’s sorrow about Will? What’s familiar about her observation?
4. Why do you think whites don’t see people of color as people?
5. What does Will say he needs from whites who feel people of color are less than humans?
6. What do you think it will take for Will to safely access his feelings again?

Classroom Discussion: How do you benefit from racism?

Journal Exercise: What do you think keeps whites and people of color apart?

Chapter Nineteen: Noticing What Isn't Being Said



1. Why do you think Leif hasn't noticed his white privilege?
2. What do you not notice because of your privilege?
3. Do you think you will see the end of racism in your lifetime? Why or why not? What do you think it will take?
4. Do you think your children will also experience racism in their life?

Classroom Discussion: In what ways can we unlearn racism?

Journal Exercise: What are some of your hopes/fears about discussing racism with whites and people of color?

Chapter Twenty: The Privilege of Not Knowing



1. What does it mean 'seeing things through a white lens'?
2. Why does Carmela not see other whites as 'fully human'?
3. What is the luxury of 'not knowing' for whites?
4. What does Lee Mun Wah mean by, "It's not those white people over there, it's you.?"
5. What does Lee Mun Wah mean by '...your guilt and 'I don't know' is not the ticket out of this room.'?"

Classroom Discussions: How does guilt get in the way of whites taking responsibility?

Journal Exercise: What do you think you don't see/hear/understand when it comes to racism?

Chapter Twenty-One: Looking at Whiteness



1. What is rare about whites sitting together to talk about their numbness, their whiteness, their silence and their confusion?
2. Why do you think Carmela was so scared to sit with the other whites? If you are white, what would have been your first feelings?
3. Leif says it's hard sitting in front of everyone and have every word he says being analyzed. What do you think is familiar about this for minorities?
4. Why is Tyanne so upset with the other whites?
5. How did you feel listening to the whites talking to each other? What was hard/good about it?
6. What does Tyanne mean when she says, "Don't go away!"?
7. Is it realistic when Leif says, "I've got to change every single aspect of my life in order to have this experience mean anything to me!"? Why or why not?
8. What can the white students do to unlearn their racism?
9. Joe says, "Racism isn't something we have to address in our daily lives." What does he mean? Is that true in your life? Why or why not?
10. What does Will need from Leif?
11. What does Joe want from other whites?
12. Why does Marc not think that Leif will come through?
13. What do Marc and Jon need from Leif in order for them to believe him?
14. Do you think Leif will come through? Why or why not?

Classroom Discussion: What do you think it will take for whites and people of color to come together?

Journal Exercise: What are some things that you could do with your friends and family to end/unlearn racism?

Chapter Twenty-Two: Closing Statements



1. Whose closing statements did you most identify with? Why?
2. What did Will say he needed from white folks? How was that answer linked to what he needed for himself?
3. How can Joe take responsibility?
4. Why does Marilyn ask that whites need to look into another's eyes?
5. What is worthwhile about confronting racism?
6. What came up for you when Marc said, "I won't take your hand. I'll slap it down." What did he mean? What did he first want from America?
7. Why does Jon say, "My hand is stretched out, but you'll have to walk over here and take my hand, and it's going to be hard."?
8. Lee Mun Wah says that whites and people of color have lost the very best part of themselves. What does he mean?
9. Lee Mun Wah says, "This is the foundation." What does he mean?
10. What does Lee Mun Wah mean when he says, "This wasn't easy and it wasn't clean, and it shouldn't be."?

Classroom Discussion: After seeing this film, do you think there is hope that we can work and live together?

Journal Exercise: What do you think are some major obstacles that we will need to deal with if we are ever to end racism?