Establishing A Safe Space & Setting Up Discussion Guidelines

1. If time allows, start by asking students to respond to written prompt: "I mostly feel _____ when discussing race, because _____." Make it clear that this a private writing exercise and they will not be asked to share it with anyone.

2. Ask students – what feelings do you think may be in the room when discussing race and racism? Record answers on the board. Ask students to refrain from making "I" statements or sharing what they wrote. Focus at first on listing feelings as a group without commenting on them.

3. When everyone has had a chance to share, ask students – what do these words have in common? (Are they mostly negative?) What else do you notice? Where do these feelings come from? (Lived experiences, stereotypes) Which feelings are valid? (All) Acknowledge that these feelings can be scary or uncomfortable, but we need to walk through that discomfort together in order to have meaningful conversations about race.

4. Create group guidelines by asking students – what do you need to have a safe yet courageous conversation about race? Record student answers on the board. Important guidelines to include are:
   - Speak in "I" statements, avoid speaking on behalf of your group (we feel) or another group's (they think) identity.
   - Listen to understand, not to respond.
   - If something is said that hurts or offends you, acknowledge that the comment (not the person) hurt your feelings and explain why.
   - Stay engaged, it's okay to feel frustrated but don't drop out.
   - Practice putting down the mic (allow others room to speak).
   - Practice picking up the mic.
   - If you're not sure how to say something, write it down and come back to it later.
   - Don't expect complete agreement. This is a discussion, not a debate.

Make sure to gain group consensus and buy-in on the guidelines before moving on.