

## Educators Transcript

C. Janet Banks, Antonitte Mosley, and Maria Rivera are all teachers at a junior high school in Jamaica, Queens. They candidly share their stories on how they approach students when they hear them using the word nigger in and outside of the classroom.

CJ: Have you ever had to correct a student for using the n-word?

AM: We were having a discussion in class about the history of African Americans, and one boy was talking about, you know he was just joking around, he called out "Nigger, something" to somebody passing by and the other kids were saying to him, "You can't say that, You can't say that!" Of course, the boy was not African American. They were really upset, I had to speak to them about it, and I had to quiet them down. I said, "Well, who here uses the n-word?" They all raised their hand.

JB: I usually ask the kids to come over to me if I hear them use the n-word in the hallway or in my class. Then I ask them, "What does this mean to you?" Usually they say, "We're just joking," but then I say, "But what does it mean, do you know the meaning of that?" and they say, "we're sorry!" then we get a little bit deeper, and then they say, "Well, it's a black person, someone that's stupid?" and I say, "Why would you call your friend stupid?"

MR: When I hear a student or a teenager saying the word even if it's playing or their angry, I tell them "Abolish the word, abolish it!" and they stop and they look at me but the best part is that they seem to listen.

AM: When I saw so many of the kids, African American kids raise their hands in recognition of themselves. I was appalled, I was surprised, so many emotions went through, and I just really wanted them to understand where that word came from.

JB: I give them a little assignment sometimes and I tell them to look it up, they come back to me, we talk about it and they say, "I'm sorry Ms. Banks." Sometimes, I actually tell them that this is a word that's really derogatory to you and they say they are sorry.

AM: I have pictures of African Americans up in the classroom, Martin Luther King, I ask the kids, "Would you have wanted to walk up to Martin Luther King and say "Hey, My Nigger, What's Up? Do you think that was appropriate?" They said no. I said, "Then why would you say "Hey my "N" to anybody else?"

JB: The approach to the student is not to reprimand them but to get them into a conversation.

AM: Are you saying that only you can use the word? It's like saying only you can call yourself by your name. If you don't want anyone else to use it then you cannot use it yourself. Are you in fact Niggers? Do you know what the word means? They were like

“No.” I said, “Okay, let’s look it up, let’s define what it is.” When they heard the definition. They said, “No we’re not that.” I told them, “I didn’t think you were, I didn’t think you were ignorant, shuffling around and just worthless people otherwise you wouldn’t be here trying to get your education, you do such wonderful work for me, I don’t think that describes you.” They had to take into perspective what they were doing. They could no longer condemn the person who used it because they had used it themselves. This one class decided they wouldn’t use that word anymore to either describe them selves or anybody else. I told them once you put something out into the world, then you have to expect that it will come back and you don’t know in what fashion it will come back, so you have to be careful.