Virtual Reality Series

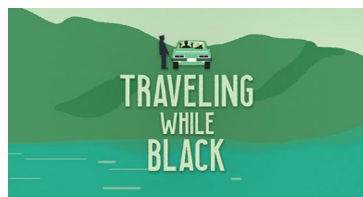# Equity & Diversity

Exploring
Equity & Diversity in VR

Virtual Reality is an immersive medium through which one can experience how it is to 'walk' in another person's shoes or 'see' through their eyes. Therefore, it is a perfect medium to build empathy and create understanding between diverse people and cultures. Witness the world through a blind person's eyes in **Notes on Blindness**, or understand the hurdles an African American person would encounter in America of the 1960's in **Travelling While Black**. Be immersed in the modern racial justice movement in **In Protest**, or get in the mind of a someone who has mental health issues in **Depression**. Uncover the story of a wrongfully convicted man in **Send Me Home**. Stories of hope, perseverance and dignity of the human spirit abound in Virtual Reality.

Access Content

Download Apps

Go to the device's App Store and download the following free Apps:

Creating an Equity & Diversity themed program for libraries is easy with our resources. The following section has a curated list of Titles, their profiles along with user reviews. Other resources include:

- Steps to designing your program - Appendix A
- Setting up headset for easy access to content - Appendix B
- Video guides and more
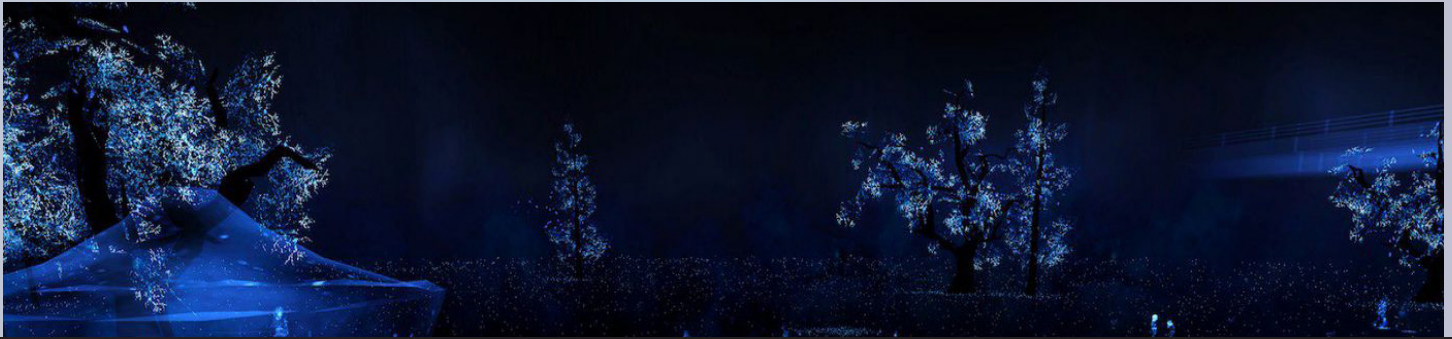
Notes on Blindness

Producer: ARTE France | App: Oculus TV | Duration: 7 mins
Genre: Narrative / Documentary | Platforms Supported: Oculus Quest, Oculus Quest 2

OVERVIEW

In 1983, after decades of steady deterioration, John Hull became totally blind. To help him make sense of the upheaval in his life, he began documenting his experiences on audio cassettes. These original diary recordings create the basis of this interactive non-fictional narrative which is a cognitive and emotional experience of blindness. Storytelling, art direction and graphical universe form a unique and singular immersion, completed by movement tracking, spacialized sound and controller interactions.

How To View:
- *In the headset, go to Apps*
- *Open the App 'Notes on Blindness'*

TITLE REVIEW

by Maxine Flasher-Duzgunes

The weather introduces sound to a space, sound reveals the space's volume, volume is what illuminates who and what is important to us, and within that sphere of understanding can we acknowledge ourselves – sight or no sight – as unchanged.

This intellectually compelling biopic, Notes on Blindness: Into Darkness, produced by iEx Nihilo, ARTE France, and AudioGaming travels through the cassette-taped memories of British theologian and scholar John M. Hull, who became blind mid-career and describes how he navigated the unfamiliar landscape of the un-sensed.

The experience is organized into five chapters, each with a distinct interactive element. The opening segment places the viewer (or rather, listener) in a park and uses ghost-blue 3D animations to hint at the presence of the subjects the narrator describes. For instance, Hull details the different walking patterns he hears from a park bench and a succession of different figures appears: a woman in heels, a boy running, a bicyclist…each floating by in an oceanic cloud. While the sight of them is barely recognizable, the crystal-sharp sound of each figure validates Hull's description, as if they are thoughts materializing in his head. This occurs similarly when he outlines his own kitchen: the sounds of the pans on the stove top, the water dripping from the sink, the kettle boiling – the ordinariness of such a room becomes extraordinary upon the depletion of sight from the viewer's experience.

I was most mesmerized by the second chapter in which you use the oculus controller to cue bursts of wind and autumn leaves. The gusts make a bird fly 360 degrees around you, perching on tree branches and swingsets only revealed upon the wind's contact with them. When pointing the cursor at the water, the wind hits the surface and you hear soft ripples and waves.

It becomes a meditative experience beyond just Hull's words, he wants you to feel what he feels, that to delete one sensory organ heightens another and that there's nothing to fear.

At one point, Hull travels back to the panic he once encountered when he first went blind. This chapter uses an eye-tracker to have you literally retrace his steps as his vision blurs and the world seems to collapse around him. There is a disorientation, a floorless-ness that the VR experience mimics to increase one's empathy towards Hull and others who share his disability. A morphed version of a dog approaches in an attempt to console him, yet he is for a moment caught motionless in his tracks.

Notes on Blindness increases an awareness towards people with different abilities, and with that awareness comes a desire for accessibility, that we might create communities in the future that invite all to share their stories and their differences. With physical differences comes creative differences and a few steps closer toward collaboration.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- What are some equitable changes or solutions that can be made in today's society to not only accommodate for, but nurture and collectively value the visually impaired?

- What are some other ways that you can imagine the blind collaborating with visual artists to make meaning and a mutual understanding out of their experience?

Send Me Home

Producer: Lonelyleap Film | App: Within | Duration: 14 mins
Genre: Crime / Documentary | Platforms Supported: Oculus Quest, Oculus Quest 2

OVERVIEW

In the years most of us spend growing, learning, making a home, making a family, Rickey Jackson was serving time in a 6'x8' cell for a crime he did not commit. Rickey Jackson is the embodiment of resilience. "It was important for me to...try to maintain the sense of the person I was on day one when I first got arrested." His contributions during years incarcerated exemplified this: Rickey became an avid reader, mentored young inmates, earned his horticulturist license and taught First Aid classes. He refused to let lost time be a lost opportunity. At the time of his release, Rickey Jackson was the longest-serving exoneree in U.S. history. Rickey is not alone in his experience of injustice. Untold numbers have suffered within our criminal justice system—a system based largely on systemic inequalities.Rickey seized his opportunity to build a new life. His settlement from the state of Ohio provided one form of stability, but he also found love, got married, started a business, and helped raise three step-children.

How To View:
- *In the headset, go to Apps*
- *Open the App 'Within'*
- *In the Within app, click on the Documentary tab*
- *Find 'Send Me Home'*

by Tiani Jadulang

The 14-minute virtual reality experience titled *Send Me Home* tells the story of Rickey Jackson who was wrongfully convicted of murder at 18 years old. Jackson spent 39 years in prison, some of it on death row, before being exonerated and released in 2014. Narrating the film, Jackson gives viewers a glimpse into his life in prison, his experiences there and his life after release.

Throughout the film there are emotions of sadness, helplessness and injustice but also relief and hope. "I felt as if I went to sleep at 18 and woke up at 60" was a particularly poignant quote from the film.

The film highlights the problem of wrongful imprisonment and how the victims are deprived of their freedom, their lives stolen and changed forever. It shows the stark contrast between prison life and the world outside.

One of the sad moments of the story was when Jackson described hearing the news of his mother dying and feeling numb and not being able to grieve because he had learnt to bury all his emotions in prison.

However, the story of Rickey Jackson shows the cases where justice prevails, albeit delayed. In the end, Jackson was able to walk free and pick up the pieces of his life. Viewers enter Jackson's home and witness his life as he cherishes his freedom and tries to make the best of the time he has left. He is shown enjoying his family and his home and doing the things he loves.

The film made me realize the value of life and freedom, of being able to make your own choices and build your own future. "In the long run, I choose to forgive." Jackson says. "My time is the most precious thing I have."
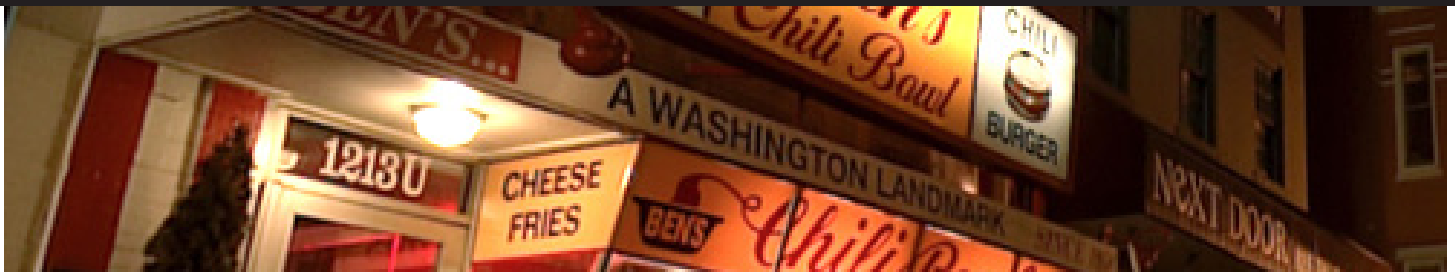
DISCUSSION TOPICS

- What are some possible solutions or changes that can be made to the criminal justice system so that people like Rickey Jackson are not wrongfully convicted and imprisoned?

- Put yourself in Rickey Jackson's shoes - what are some of the things you would do after being released from prison after 39 years?
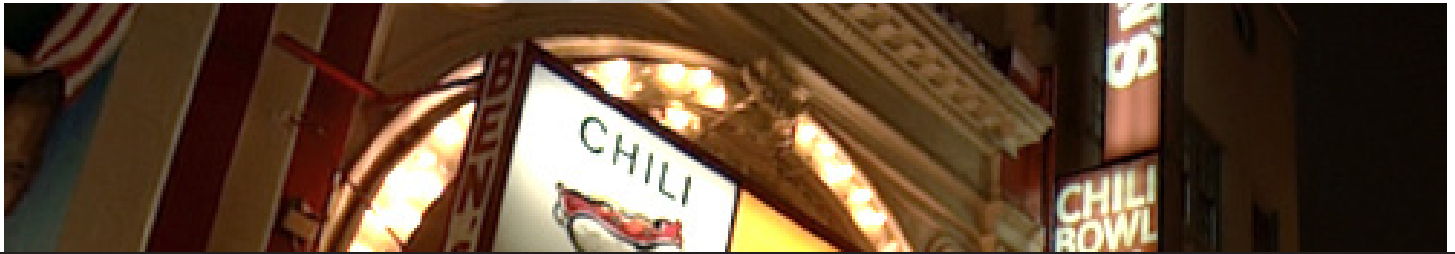
Travelling While Black

Producer: Felix & Paul Studios | App: Travelling While Black | Duration: 20 mins
Genre: Narrative / Documentary | Platforms Supported: Oculus Go, Oculus Quest

OVERVIEW

Travelling While Black is a cinematic VR experience that immerses the viewer in the long history of racial discrimination as well as the restriction of movement and freedoms for black Americans in the Jim Crow era.

Academy Award winner Roger Ross Williams and Emmy Award-winning Felix & Paul Studios' film transports you to historic Ben's Chili Bowl in Washington DC. The viewer shares an intimate series of moments with several of the patrons of Ben's as they reflect on their experiences of restricted movement and race relations in the U.S.

Confronting the way we understand and talk about race in America, Traveling While Black highlights the urgent need to not only remember the past but to learn from it, and facilitate a dialogue about the challenges minority travelers still face today.

How To View:
- *In the headset, go to Apps*
- *Click on the App 'Travelling While Black'*

by Maxine Flasher-Duzgunes

"There will be a day, sometime in the near future, when this guide will not have to be published," says Victor Hugo Green, author of *Green Book*, a travel guide for African-Americans written during the era of Jim Crow and rampant segregation laws. Despite their ability to buy automobiles, African-Americans at the time faced challenges including arbitrary arrests and being refused services as simple as food and lodging.

The Emmy-nominated documentary short, *Travelling While Black*, situates the viewer at Ben's Chili Bowl in Washington DC, which was historically a "safe space" restaurant for African-Americans while many food venues remained "white only." What this film uncovers is that the civil rights movement did not relieve or repair the relentless fear ingrained in black folks who travel by bus, car, even by foot. It still exists today, and often not just the fear of civilian violence, but police brutality.

"They treated the dogs better than they treated us," details fifth-generation Washingtonian, Sandra Butler-Truesdale, as she sits on a bar stool at the counter of the restaurant. They weren't allowed to try on clothes in stores because they were told their make-up was too dark, she couldn't fight back when she was called the N word – black freedoms, it seemed, were cherry-picked to accomodate for the white people in power. This placed minorities in difficult positions, where even roadtripping did not mean being "free."

At one point, Samira Rice, the mother of Tamir Rice, who was fatally shot and killed by a police officer on November 22, 2014, sits at a booth detailing the events of that day. The viewer sits beside the interviewer as across the table, Samira twiddles a napkin and claims she wasn't even allowed to see her son in the ambulance before he passed. And when the surveillance footage was finally released, she says, it showed her son scared by the police cars that showed up, shrugging his shoulders as if to ask "what did I do?"...and then never having a chance to explain.

The film places the viewer in the shoes of Americans who over generations have been denied the same basic privileges as others: here we are, worrying about where to sit on the bus, where to use the bathroom, debating whether we can reach into our pockets, or step into a car for fear of being pulled over on the freeway.

But as these stories quiet the walls of this Washington diner, it reveals the centuries-long resilience that has amounted out of these tragedies and challenges, and the capacity for all community-members and viewers of this film, to make change.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- If there were to be a *Green Book* written today, what similarities and differences would it bear to the Jim Crow Era *Green Book*?

- What are some examples of "safe spaces" - what ways can we as individuals help to make homes, businesses, and communities "safe spaces" for BIPOC?

IN PROTEST: Grassroots Stories from the Front Lines

Producer: GRX Immersive Labs | App: Occulus TV | Duration: 5-8 mins
Genre: Docu-series | Platforms Supported: Oculus Go, Oculus Quest

O V E R V I E W

*I*N *PROTEST: Grassroots Stories from the Front Lines* is a VR film docu-series that chronicles the racial justice and equality movement. It features a constellation of Black voices that are challenging systemic racism. Each volume of IN PROTEST shines a spotlight on a different American city, profiling modern activists as they move beyond street protests to confront inequality and injustice in everyday life. The power of virtual reality allows everyone to experience the Black Lives Matter movement and what it is like to be on the ground at the racial justice protests happening around the country. The creators aim to visualize the importance of community and activism to inspire change.

How To View:
- *In the headset - Go to Apps*
- *Open the Oculus TV App*
- *In the Oculus TV menu, click on 'Saved' videos*
- *Look for 'IN PROTEST' videos*

by Tiani Jadulang

"This experience goes inside the August 2020 march in Washington D.C. with protestors fighting against wrongful inequality and racial injustices. The video juxtaposes the March of 2020 to the one in 1963 in Washington D.C. fighting against the same exact issues.

Fifty-seven years ago, tens of thousands of Americans gathered in Washington, D.C. demanding social justice and racial equality. In August 2020, crowds again rallied to the March on Washington, protesting racial injustice. Similar to the generation before, this March bonded protestors from across the country as they agitate for policy change. The narrator is journalist Sandra Rattley who recounts marching with her father in 1963, a day that inspired her to devote her life's work to be a conduit for underrepresented voices.

The film made me feel even more strongly for the need for equality within this world, a world we believe should be constantly evolving. I think the message the film was trying to get across is the urgent need of change within this country and throughout the world as well.

I was completely unaware that more than 57 years ago there was a racial justice march at the exact same location as the one mentioned in the film. It seemed mind-blowing to me that in many ways, we as a country, are still struggling against the same issues after all these years.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- What has changed and what has not changed between the March on Washington in 1963 and March on Washington in 2020 for racial justice?

- What do you feel about the status of racial equity in America?

Depression

Producer: VERE360 | App: YouTube VR | Duration: 4 mins
Genre: Mental Health / Narrative | Platforms Supported: Oculus Go, Oculus Quest

OVERVIEW

Many who suffer from mental health illnesses report that they feel misunderstood. Step into the shoes of a university student who suffers from depression and get one step closer to demystifying the experience. Produced by VERE360, an educational platform bringing VR to K-12 classrooms and curriculums, this YouTube VR film, *VR Experience of Depression*, simulates the coma-like state of a mental illness that many undergo throughout their adolescent years. From a recent study, The Centers for Disease Control estimates that the number of children ages 6 to 17 diagnosed with either depression or anxiety has increased from 5.4% in 2003 to 8.4% in 2012 (CDC, 2020). The effects of the pandemic have heightened depression-related symptoms, and now more than ever it is important to understand how this disease can take a toll on you, your loved ones, colleagues, and community members. This film contains scenes that may be disturbing to viewers who have experienced depression, anxiety, or suicide first hand.

How To View:
- *In the headset, go to Apps*
- *Open the App 'YouTube VR'*
- *Find 'VR Experience of Depression'*

TITLE REVIEW

by Maxine Flasher-Duzgunes

A faint ringing pierces the black, nothing lit but the white streams of the oculus controllers. A heartbeat fades in to reveal a cubicle-sized bedroom, and the form of a teenage girl laying motionless under the sheets. An iPhone snooze alarm blares, but she turns it off. Her phone continues to chime with text messages reading, "Are you ok?" "Just wanted to check in," "Do you want to hang out next week?" from worried friends. She begins to type replies but can't seem to land on anything except "Sorry. Sorry. Sorry." – in the end, she doesn't respond to any of them.

The girl's internal monologue induces the short, four minute experience with feelings of existential worry and fatigue. The way the camera is at first angled in the room sets the viewer inside the mind of a girl experiencing troubling thoughts.

The bedsheets wrap around her like a monstrous mass, the towering white walls cave in like a slowly receding dome – there is no escape.

At around the film's halfway point, the girl's classmate enters her room and picks up some loose pieces of clothing strewn over the floor. She offers to share her notes on a recent assignment, she wants to help out – but she is met with little to no answer from our character. As her thoughts rage throughout her head in the efforts of forming a reply, our character again responds with nothing, faced with the worried look of her classmate sitting on the edge of the bed.

In depression, there is no silver lining, there is no "hanging out will make me feel better," just a wall between you and the world and nothing to bridge the distance.

This film immerses the viewer rather than places them on the outside of the experience. The pressure of the escalating heartbeats against your ears traps you in a young girl's world that for the moment is confined to her mind.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Discuss what could be done by local schools to combat depression and mental illness in their student populations

- Was there ever a moment where you felt like the girl in this film? Could you think of others who have gone through this experience, and if so, how does their experience compare to what you just witnessed?

5 STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING A SUCCESSFUL VR PROGRAM

Step 1: Preview Virtual Reality Experiences

A good first step in designing and implementing a VR program is to view the content for the theme you are offering. This will inform the design of the program, how best to offer it, and the resources needed to support the program.

Step 2: Assign Staff

Designate a point person or leader to oversee the programming. At least one staff member would be needed to facilitate the VR sessions and to help participants with the equipment and navigation. It may be possible to find a member of the staff who has specific interest or knowledge about the topic. The use of volunteers is also a good solution for VR programming. Some libraries enlist teens, college students, tech savvy patrons or VR enthusiasts as volunteers. Staff members and volunteers can be trained to get them comfortable with the equipment and how to conduct the program. The XR-Learn learning portal has online Tutorials and Training videos that can be accessed to help with training.

Step 3: Determine Schedule and Format

Your VR Program can be offered to fit your library's requirements and capabilities. It can be offered a weekly scheduled event e.g. every Saturday from 2 - 5 pm, bi-weekly or any schedule that meets your needs. Consider the target audience, staffing and space availability. It can be offered as a stand-alone program or as part of an existing scheduled VR program. Determine the duration that the program will be offered, for e.g. 1-month, 3-month or 6-month long program. Please see the Sample Program.

Step 4: Promote the Program

Promoting the program prior to the launch will help garner participation and spark interest. Promotional material like flyers, posters, postcards, bookmarks and online posts can be designed. Posters can be posted in a visible location to inform patrons visiting the library. Another means to amplify the outreach is to partner with local environmental organizations to help get the word out. In addition, experts can be enlisted as speakers or to help lead/facilitate discussions after the VR sessions.

Step 5: Prepare the Space and Equipment

Prepare the space for the VR program. This can be a dedicated VR space, such as a 'VR corner' or a meeting room. A basic setup can also just consist of an open, unobstructed space (minimum 6' x 6 ') with some seating and a table for equipment. Headsets can be prepared by downloading the required Apps and titles. A good idea is to also have a display describing the Program and showing the content being featured. Casting from the device can be set up, if desired, so that the view on the device can be displayed on a computer monitor or TV for others to see.

SETTING UP YOUR HEADSET FOR EASY ACCESS TO CONTENT

Oculus TV and Apps such as Within have a wide range of immersive videos, documentaries, short films, and cinematic VR content. You can search for Titles, Creator or Genre by entering it in the Search box.

Occulus TV

Titles on **Oculus TV** can be saved to make it easier to access them for subsequent viewing or to create a VR 'playlist'. To save titles in the Oculus TV App:

- Click on any 'letter' button on the hand controller to bring up the Title menu.
- Click on the three dots next to the title to get a menu. Click on 'Save'
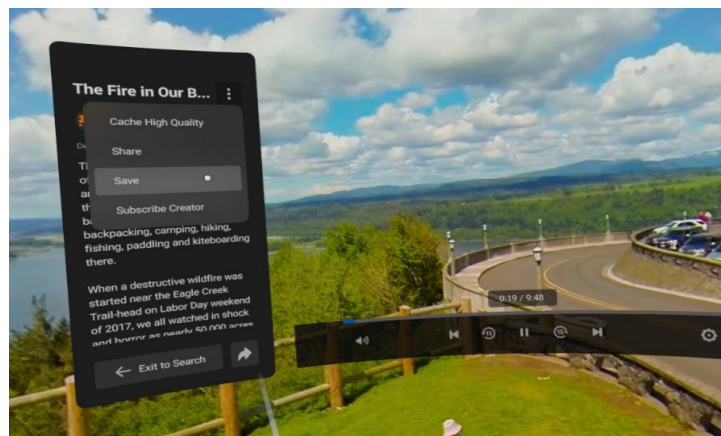
Within App

Titles in the **'Within'** App can be saved to the 'Downloaded' part of the App to make them easier to access them for subsequent viewing. This will also allow for higher quality playback. To save titles in the Within App, click on the Title. A pop up will ask you whether you want to Download or Stream. Select Download.
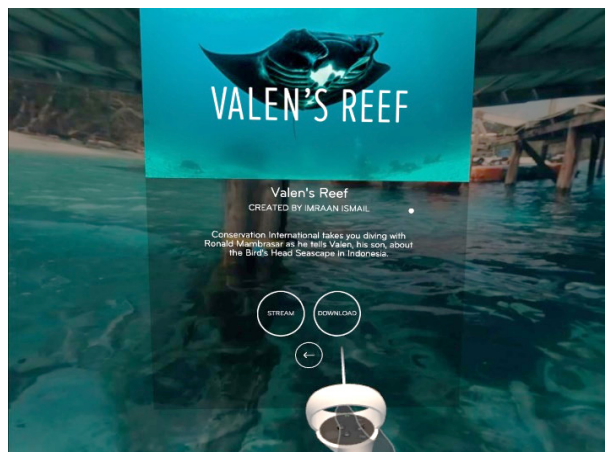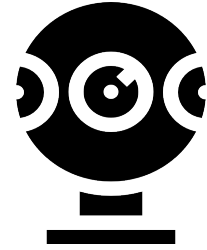
Video Links

The following videos offer important information on how to safely use virtual reality along with visual demonstrations:

Introduction to Virtual Reality
https://vimeo.com/554490055/9faa29b8f3

This video is intended as an introduction to the medium of Virtual Reality for those who've never used VR before. It explains what VR is as well as instructions for the use of an untethered VR headset. This video particularly focuses on how to use a VR controller.

How to Set up an Oculus Quest 2
https://vimeo.com/5113493

This video goes over how to set up a brand new, unopened Oculus Quest 2, including using the oculus app. If you've received an Oculus Quest from XR Libraries, your headset will most likely have already been set up prior to shipping. If your Quest headset has not already been set up, you will receive login credentials.

How to Use virtual reality safely
https://vimeo.com/502326324

This video offers important information on how to set up to use virtual reality in a new environment, including how to prevent sun damage to the display, what a user should do if they experience simulation sickness, and other tips.

How to clean and sanitize a headset
https://vimeo.com/497009771

This video offers a visual demonstration of how to sanitize a virtual reality headset. While this video focuses on the Pico Neo 2, the steps it demonstrates actually apply to all virtual reality headsets.

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