



# Let's Talk About Race: Centering Representation, Black Joy, and Activism

**Train the Trainer**



THE  
KRESGE  
FOUNDATION



A photograph of a man holding a baby, overlaid with a teal filter. A yellow rectangular box is positioned on the left side of the image, containing the text "Welcome and Introductions" in black, bold, sans-serif font.

# Welcome and Introductions



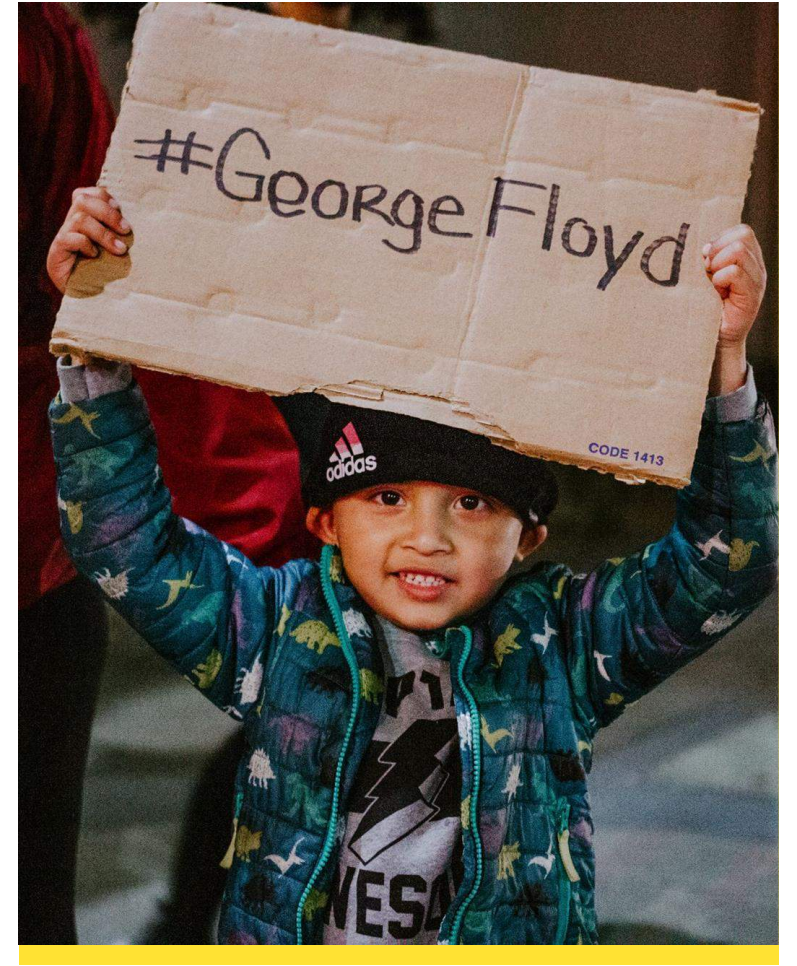
# Where are we going?



Representation



Black Joy



Activism

# How are we getting there?



**Grounding & Preparing  
for Dialogue**



**How did we  
get here?**



**Breakout Rooms &  
Small Group Discussions**



**Reflections &  
Next Steps**

# Community Agreements

- Speak your truth without blame or judgment.
- Listen attentively, with your eyes, ears, and heart.
- Notice moments of discomfort, and stay curious.
- Create space so everyone can share.
- Keep personal information shared confidential.



# What is top of mind as we enter into this time together?

Add your thoughts to the chat





Things to know  
before we start



# Did you know?

## Racial Awareness in the Early Years



AT 3 MONTHS...	AT 9 MONTHS...	AT 2 YEARS...	AT 3 YEARS...	AT 5 YEARS...
<p>Infants who are shown pictures of faces can visually categorize them by race. They often show a preference for faces reflecting the race they see most often, which is typically their own race.</p>	<p>Infants are unable to distinguish the facial features of people from racial groups other than their own unless they frequently see books and images featuring racially diverse people.</p>	<p>Children make strong associations between racial features and human behavior, and begin to use racial categories to understand behavior. Children are observing and internalizing power dynamics among children and adults.</p>	<p>Children of all races demonstrate social biases primarily by attributing positive traits to the dominant (white) race. Children can respond to positive messaging about their own and others' racial identities.</p>	<p>Children of all races demonstrate social biases primarily by attributing negative traits to non-dominant (non-white) races. Children are capable of recognizing and acting against racial injustice.</p>

Source: Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education: Understanding PRIDE in Pittsburgh <sup>2</sup>



## What could positive racial identity mean for children? Here are some examples...

### For children who are white...

Acknowledgement of their racial identity as a white person, and accurate language to define theirs and others' racial identities.

Openness to friendship and inclusiveness across racial difference, and recognition of the positive qualities of others both similar and different from themselves.

A growing recognition of oppression on the basis of race, and a growing sense of responsibility to stand against it.

### For children of color...

A sense of pride in being connected to their families and communities through racial identity.

A positive sense about their attributes, including name, skin tone, hair type, eye color, etc.

A growing recognition of oppression on the basis of race, and preparedness to respond to victimization with critical thinking, personal resilience, and the support of community.

# The Importance of Storytelling



## What is storytelling?

- Young children usually start telling stories between the ages of 2 and 3
- Being able to tell a story from beginning to end, in ways that others understand
- Can be done with the use of props such as books, photos, puppets, dolls
- Important skill in early language and literacy development



# The Importance of Storytelling



## Recent research

- Drs. Iheoma Iruka and Nicole Gardner-Neblett conducted research focused on young children's storytelling skills across racial identities
- Overall, children's language skills at 2 years old predicted their early literacy skills at 5 years old
- For Black children, their storytelling skills at 4 years old, predicted their early literacy skills at 5 years old. This did not apply to other children in the study.

# The Importance of Storytelling



## Why does this matter?

- Storytelling skills for Black children are very important to later early literacy skills.
- Through storytelling, children gain practice in using the same type of language that is used in written text, which can help them as they learn to read and write independently
- Storytelling skills do not receive as much attention as experiences such as reading books and alphabet awareness.
- Programs and schools may not acknowledge, celebrate, and the storytelling skills children bring to the classroom.
- It is important for adults to model and encourage children's storytelling skills.



Windows

Sliding Glass Doors

Mirrors



Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.”

— Rudine Sims Bishop





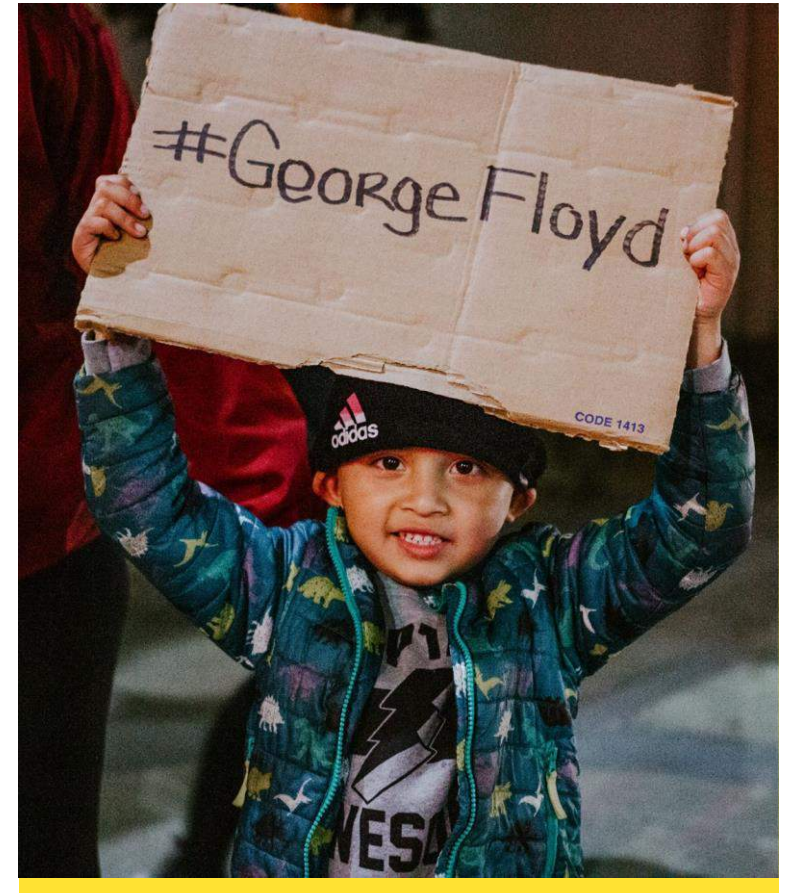
# Breakout Rooms



**Representation**  
Infants and Toddlers



**Black Joy**  
Preschoolers



**Activism**  
School Age





# Representation

Infants & Toddlers

# Overview of Representation



## Messages about identity

### are everywhere

The media has the power to reinforce stereotypes about race, gender, and other parts of our identities



## Children notice difference early and often

Noticing differences in skin tones, hair types, eyes shapes is a part of typical child development



## If she can see it - she can be it

Early experiences help children shape what they imagine to be possible



## Language matters

It's never too early to talk with your baby about the physical traits that make people similar and different!



# Dialogic Reading

Dialogic reading is the process of having a dialogue – or conversation - with your child as you read a book. This helps children explore the text at a deeper level, including learning new words, making connections to their lives, and becoming the storyteller.



**Instead of just reading the words on a page, ask your child questions and point out interesting things.**

“What color are his eyes?”

or

“The daddy has beautiful brown eyes just like yours.”



**Repeat and expand on what your child says.**

“Yes, I see that little girl has such wonderful curly hair.”

or

“You both have lovely hair. Yours is short and curly and hers is longer and wavy.”



**Offer feedback and praise.**

“That's right! You just touched your strong knees.”

or

“You touched your strong arms- that's great. Here are your strong knees.”

## Your baby may be...

Absorbing culture through daily experiences, senses and interactions.

Noticing and curious about different physical characteristics – like skin color and hair texture.

Beginning to point out the differences they see in people, and may mention those differences aloud. Similarly, pre-verbal toddlers may be showing discomfort and/or curiosity around people who look different from them by staring, pointing, or giggling.

Internalizing the verbal and nonverbal messages of their closest adults (e.g., parents, relatives, teachers) about their own and others' attributes. Developing feelings of pride, acceptance, superiority, or inferiority accordingly.

## You can...

### POINT IT OUT!

Use books, dolls, toys, etc. to call attention to skin tone, hair texture, eye color and other features using the language with which you feel most comfortable.

### TALK ABOUT IT!

There are many skin tones that don't match the common descriptors, "black," or "white." Help your baby develop accurate words to describe skin tone like caramel, brown, golden, chocolate, sand, peach, or ivory. Use positive or neutral language to talk about racial characteristics and other human differences.

Try not to shame or silence your child when they ask or comment about human difference. This can send the message that differences are bad or "taboo". Instead, use accurate language to gently add to or correct children's ideas.



# Tips for Selecting Books



## **Base your selection on quality**

Books should not just teach a lesson but should have a good story, high-quality text, and engaging illustrations.



## **Choose books that help children see themselves**

Include books that mirror different aspects of your child's identity (race, setting, beliefs), so that they can imagine themselves in the story.



## **Choose books that help children understand the world**

Include books that introduce children to new people, places, and concepts that they may not yet have encountered.



## **Look widely for texts**

Expose children to differing perspectives and consider reading books whose authors represent a variety of racial and cultural groups. The library can be a great source for diverse titles that appeal to children.



## **Watch out for stereotypes**

Many books that feature diverse characters could be portraying people of color (or women, people with disabilities, etc.) in negative, tokenizing, or stereotyping ways. Look for books where children and adults of color have prominent and positive roles.

# Modeled Reading How To

1

## **Selecting a Book & Preparing to Share**

Read through the book first on your own and think about the words, images, and connections to your experiences with your child.

2

## **Model Read Aloud**

Read the book with children and families, demonstrating the process.

3

## **Reviewing the Experience**

Allow time for questions from families.



# Modeled Reading



# Reviewing the Experience



**What did you like about this strategy? What parts would work well with the families you work with?**



**How would you prepare families to use this book in support to help families talk about Representation with their children?**



**What do you need in order to share this process with families? What questions do you have?**



# Black Joy

Toddlers & Preschoolers



# Overview of Black Joy



**The need for balance**  
Not to erase important history but the importance of sharing beauty and resilience too



**Resisting racist messaging**  
Magnifying joy in support of resisting implicit racist messaging and Eurocentric teachings



**Joy as an act of liberation**  
Black joy is what our ancestors fought for

# Dialogic Reading

Dialogic reading is the process of having a dialogue – or conversation - with your child as you read a book. This helps children explore the text at a deeper level, including learning new words, making connections to their lives, and becoming the storyteller.



**Instead of just reading the words on a page, ask your child questions and point out interesting things.**

“Look at the dancers! They are wearing brightly colored clothes and have ribbons in their hair. This is a special celebration of \_\_\_\_.”



**Repeat and expand on what your child says.**

“Yes, we celebrate Kwanzaa and wear brightly colored clothes too. What is your favorite part of our celebration?”



**Offer feedback and praise.**

“Being a part of our family is special. We love that Kwanzaa is a celebration of African-American culture and a way to show how proud we are!”

## Your preschooler might be...

Showing an understanding of the family's cultural ways of being (e.g., language, behavior, gender norms, emotional expressions, etc.)

Making assumptions about groups of people, or creating their own explanations for human differences, based on their limited experience and learned bias

Showing evidence that societal messages affect how they feel about themselves/their group (i.e., internalized superiority or internalized oppression)

Hearing negative messages from their peers about human difference, such as "She can't be your mom - She's white and you're black!" or "only girls with blonde hair can play with us."

Expressing a strong interest in fairness, and the ability to consider justice, and think critically about hurtful language and images

## You can...

### TALK ABOUT IT!

With lots of language, a range of experiences, and supportive adults to help them, many preschoolers are ready for sophisticated conversations about race. Continue to respond positively to their questions and ideas, but this may also be a time to initiate discussions that will shape your child's impressions about race.

### EXPERIENCE IT!

Use books, toys, events, and everyday experiences to explore diversity. Show and discuss examples of people from multiple racial groups (especially people of color) in a variety of positive and non-stereotyping roles. Positive experiences with a variety of people can help children think critically and challenge biases.

### ACT ON IT!

Preschoolers can be highly motivated to act for justice and equity. They might show interest in writing a letter that challenges authority, joining in a protest or demonstration, or learning strategies to stand up for themselves or a classmate against discrimination.



# Tips for Selecting Books



## **Base your selection on quality**

Books should not just teach a lesson but should have a good story, high-quality text, and engaging illustrations.



## **Choose books that help children see themselves**

Include books that mirror different aspects of your child's identity (race, setting, beliefs), so that they can imagine themselves in the story.



## **Choose books that help children understand the world**

Include books that introduce children to new people, places, and concepts that they may not yet have encountered.



## **Look widely for texts**

Expose children to differing perspectives and consider reading books whose authors represent a variety of racial and cultural groups. The library can be a great source for diverse titles that appeal to children.



## **Watch out for stereotypes**

Many books that feature diverse characters could be portraying people of color (or women, people with disabilities, etc.) in negative, tokenizing, or stereotyping ways. Look for books where children and adults of color have prominent and positive roles.

# Modeled Reading How To

1

## **Selecting a Book & Preparing to Share**

Read through the book first on your own and think about the words, images, and connections to your experiences with your child.

2

## **Model Read Aloud**

Read the book with children and families, demonstrating the process.

3

## **Reviewing the Experience**

Allow time for questions from families.

# Modeled Reading





# Reviewing the Experience



**What did you like about this strategy? What parts would work well with the families you work with?**



**How would you prepare families to use this book in support to help families talk about Black joy with their children?**



**What do you need in order to share this process with families? What questions do you have?**





# Overview of Activism



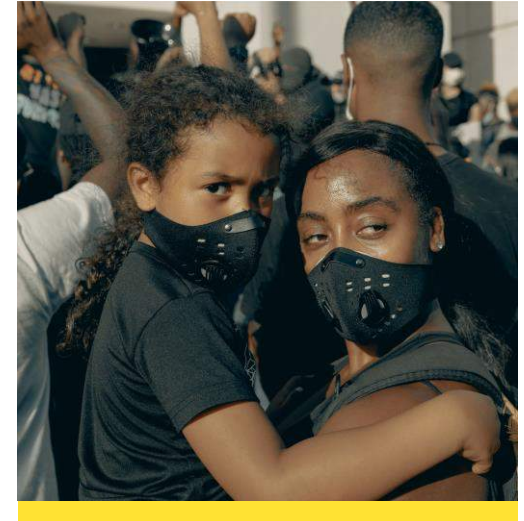
## Children understand injustice

Children as young as toddlers are able to understand equitable treatment



## Children are experiencing injustice

Young children are already aware of racial dynamics, representation, and have likely noticed challenges and differences in their community



## Activism teaches important skills

Children who take up activism learn real-life social skills, like teamwork, planning, strategy, and communication across differences



# Dialogic Reading

Dialogic reading is the process of having a dialogue – or conversation - with your child as you read a book. This helps children explore the text at a deeper level, including learning new words, making connections to their lives, and becoming the storyteller.



**Instead of just reading the words on a page, ask your child questions and point out interesting things.**

“I noticed the family in this book all have blond, straight hair. Does this look like the people in our family? What do you think about that?”



**Repeat and expand on what your child says.**

“It is unfair that person did not have a place to sit on the bus. How do you feel about that?”



**Offer feedback and praise.**

“Writing a letter to the Mayor is a great idea. How can I help you?”

If your child experiences...	You might say...
Belonging to, or wondering about, a multi-racial family	Have you noticed that Cameron has a different color of skin from his mom? Families can look many different ways, and we don't know what relationship people have with one another without asking. You can't know which person belongs to another just by looking at them.
A book or movie in which all of the characters are white	It's interesting that all the people in this book have pale skin that we call 'White'. This doesn't look like where we live, where there are people with all different shades of skin. What do you think about that?
Noticing protests against police violence toward people of color	Eric Garner was a black father and grandfather who was hurt and killed by the police. His last words were 'I can't breathe.' ...By saying 'I can't breathe,' the people are saying that it was wrong that Eric Garner was hurt and we are standing up for justice for him and his family. They are telling the police it is not OK to hurt people, and we will keep working together until everyone is treated fairly.
Witnessing poverty or homelessness	The world we live in is unfair. Some people have a lot more than they need – and because of that, other people don't have enough of what they need. This man is asking for money because he doesn't have enough of what he needs: food, a home, etc.

# Tips for Selecting Books



## **Base your selection on quality**

Books should not just teach a lesson but should have a good story, high-quality text, and engaging illustrations.



## **Choose books that help children see themselves**

Include books that mirror different aspects of your child's identity (race, setting, beliefs), so that they can imagine themselves in the story.



## **Choose books that help children understand the world**

Include books that introduce children to new people, places, and concepts that they may not yet have encountered.



## **Look widely for texts**

Expose children to differing perspectives and consider reading books whose authors represent a variety of racial and cultural groups. The library can be a great source for diverse titles that appeal to children.



## **Watch out for stereotypes**

Many books that feature diverse characters could be portraying people of color (or women, people with disabilities, etc.) in negative, tokenizing, or stereotyping ways. Look for books where children and adults of color have prominent and positive roles.



# Modeled Reading How To

1

## **Selecting a Book & Preparing to Share**

Read through the book first on your own and think about the words, images, and connections to your experiences with your child.

2

## **Model Read Aloud**

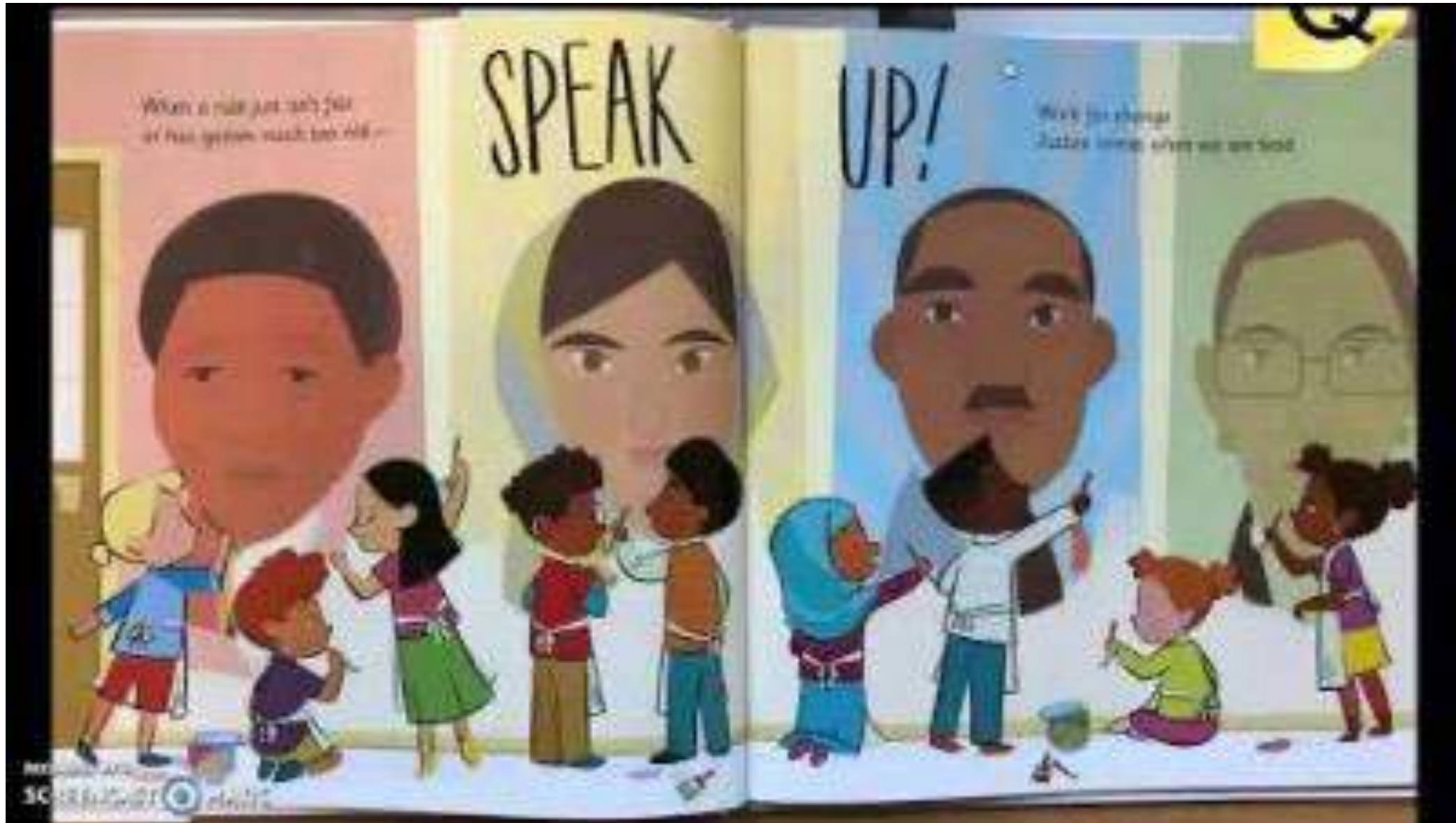
Read the book with children and families, demonstrating the process.

3

## **Reviewing the Experience**

Allow time for questions from families.

# Modeled Reading



# Reviewing the Experience



**What did you like about this strategy? What parts would work well with the families you work with?**



**How would you prepare families to use this book in support to help families talk about Activism with their children?**



**What do you need in order to share this process with families? What questions do you have?**




A young girl with glasses is smiling broadly, looking towards the camera. She is wearing a white shirt. The background is a classroom setting with a whiteboard and a metal railing. The entire image has a teal overlay. A yellow rectangular box is positioned on the left side of the image, containing the text "Reflections from Breakouts".

# Reflections from Breakouts

A young girl with dark hair in a bun, wearing glasses, a white t-shirt, and a denim jacket, stands with her arms outstretched against a blue background. The background is a gradient of blue, with a darker blue horizontal band across the middle. The text 'Next Steps' is overlaid on a yellow rectangular box on the left side of the image.

**Next Steps**



A young girl with curly hair is smiling, looking slightly to the right. The image is overlaid with a teal filter. A yellow rectangular box is positioned on the left side, containing the text "Closing and Words of Gratitude" in black, bold, sans-serif font.

# Closing and Words of Gratitude



# Resources

- [Diverse Book Finder](#)
- [8 tips for choosing “good” picture books featuring BIPOC](#)
- [Black Joy Book List](#)
- [Webinar: Supporting Positive Racial Identity Development](#)
- [Kids of color being themselves book list](#)
- [Children's Books To Support Awareness And Anti-Racist Activism](#)
- [Why Storytelling Skills Matter for African-American Kids](#)
- [Story Online](#)
- [Open Library](#)
- [Bookmarks: Celebrating Black Voices](#)
- [Black Men Read: Facebook Page](#)

# Resources

## Book Suggestions

- [King of Kindergarten](#)
- [Bedtime Bonnet](#)
- [Who Will You Be?](#)
- [I Love Us](#)
- [A is for All the Things You Are](#)
- [Counting on Community](#)
- [Speak Up](#)
- [Kamala and Maya's Big Idea](#)
- [What do you do with a voice like that?](#)
- [Additional Books Shared by Katina](#)



# TOOLS FOR HOPE

Equipping and Elevating Detroit's Early Childhood Professionals

