

LET'S TALK ABOUT RACE!

A FAMILY GUIDE TO POSITIVE RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Presented by School Readiness Consulting and
the Equity in Early Learning Initiative (EELI)



JANUARY 2019

Dear Families,

Every day, you are watching your children grow and learn about the world around them. As your children grow, you might have noticed that they are becoming aware of similarities and differences between themselves and others. This is a perfectly normal part of their growth and development! In fact, lots of child development research shows that young children notice and talk about different skin tones, hair types, eye shapes, and other racial characteristics represented in their diverse communities. Meanwhile, their developing minds are absorbing ideas about what it means to have certain characteristics in our world, and they are drawing conclusions about themselves and others.¹

As your child's first and most important teacher, you have the power to promote a deep appreciation of self and others, including the racial features they are noticing. However, if you're like many parents, you may not feel entirely comfortable with this topic, or know exactly where to start. This guide is to help you contribute positively to your child's learning about human difference with the information, resources, and confidence you need. You will find the following and more in this guide to help you get started!

- Opportunities for you to learn more about race and equity and why it matters for young children
- An overview of typical racial awareness development, and what you can do to support children at all stages
- Suggested books, activities, and conversation starters to help you along the way

Organized by age, the resources and activities included here are a starting point - a place to begin thinking about what might work best for your family. We hope that as you move through this guide, you find yourself becoming more comfortable making race and human difference a regular topic of conversation in your household, helping your child form positive ideas about themselves and others.

Best Wishes,

The School Readiness Consulting Team

On behalf of the
Equity in Early Learning Initiative



A partnership of Wonders Early Learning, The Campagna Center and School Readiness Consulting, generously supported by the Washington Area Women's Foundation Early Childhood Education Funders Collaborative



TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 PART 1: WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO... WHY RACE? WHY NOW?

Did you Know? Racial Awareness in the Early Years

Racial Identity Development and Why it Matters

Go Deeper! “What’s the difference between self-esteem and racial identity development?”

Quick Read: The N-Word and my Daughter, by Martha Haakmat

Stop and Think (racial identity development for yourself and your child)

GREAT READS (positive racial identity development)



10 PART 2: STARTING STRONG... INFANTS AND TODDLERS

Racial Identity Development for 0-2 year-olds

Point it Out! During Daily Routines

Talk about it! While Exploring Books and Dolls

Quick Read: Why I Talk About Race when I Read with my Toddler, by Sachi Feris

Go Deeper! “But I was taught to be colorblind... What’s so wrong about that?”

Stop and Think (supporting children when they notice human difference)

GREAT READS (exposing infants and toddlers to diversity)

17 PART 3: LEARNING THE WAY... PRESCHOOLERS

Racial Identity Development for 3-5 year-olds

Talk About It! With Proactive Conversation Starters

Experience It! Through Books, Activities, and Events

Act On It! Through Advocacy and Activism

Quick Read: How to Introduce Children to Activism

Stop and Think (understanding and acting on injustice)

GREAT READS (advocacy and activism)



21 PART 4: CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS... MANAGING HOW OTHERS INTERACT WITH YOUR CHILD

Discussions with Friends and Family

Talking with Your Child's Teacher or Program Leader

Stop and Think (engaging in critical conversations)

27 PART 5: WANT TO LEARN MORE? ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN & ADULTS

Tips for Selecting Diverse Children's Literature

Books for Infants and Toddlers

Books for Preschoolers

Articles, Books, and Online Videos for Adults





PART 1:

WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

WHY RACE? WHY NOW?

IF YOU'RE LIKE MANY PARENTS, YOU MAY BE THINKING...

Why should I introduce my kids to the topic of race?
This is an adult issue!

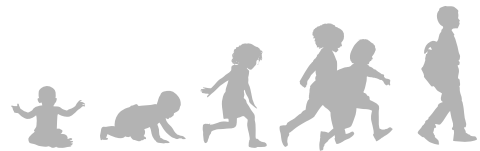
OR

Because I don't teach prejudice to my children, they will not learn or experience it.

But the truth is that children absorb messages about race from all around them – from what people say (or don't say) to one another, non-verbal messages between people, books, TV shows, and other media. Like it or not, these messages are everywhere!

DID YOU KNOW?

Racial Awareness in the Early Years



AT 3 MONTHS...	AT 9 MONTHS...	AT 2 YEARS...	AT 3 YEARS...	AT 5 YEARS...
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.	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.	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.	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.	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.

Source: Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education: Understanding PRIDE in Pittsburgh²

race [rās]

A social construct that falsely categorizes and ranks groups of human beings on a random basis such as skin color and other physical features. The scientific consensus is that race in this sense has no biological basis in the human species.



ra·cial i·den·ti·ty [ˈrāSHəl ɪˈden(t)ədē]

Each person's awareness of and sense of belonging to their own racial group. For young children, a positive racial identity means a growing awareness of themselves as racial beings, and a sense of connection to their history, heritage, and physical attributes.

As you might realize, racial identity development looks different for members of the dominant racial group (i.e., children who are white) and non-dominant racial groups (i.e., children of color). **Without intentional support from trusted adults, all children are likely to internalize negative and harmful ideas about race.**³ For example:

Children of the dominant racial group may be...	Children of non-dominant racial groups may be...
Observing what group is in power (i.e., who holds the majority of privilege, rights, status, and resources)	Observing what group holds privilege and status
Noticing that members of the group in power share their racial and cultural characteristics	Noticing that group members who are like him or her are not in positions of power and privilege
Internalizing stereotypes about self and others	Observing or experiencing prejudice, discrimination, and internalizing stereotypes about self and others
Assuming that because they are like members of the group in power, they have the same rights and will achieve similar accomplishments and power	Assuming that because he or she is like members in the minority group, he or she has the same limited rights, and will be limited in achievements, position, and status

Source: Seven Tasks for Parents: Developing Positive Racial Identity ⁴

However, with the support of informed adults, children can develop a productive sense of connection to their own racial group. They can also begin to know how racism affects their own and/or others' racial groups, as an important foundation for understanding their ability to act against racial injustice. This is called **positive racial identity development**.



per·son of col·or

[ˈpɜrs(ə)n əv ˈkɒləɹ]

An inclusive term used to describe people of African, Latinx, Native American, Asian, and Pacific Island descent.

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

For children who are white...	For children of color...
<p>Acknowledgement of their racial identity as a white person, and accurate language to define theirs and others' racial identities.</p> <p>Openness to friendship and inclusiveness across racial difference, and recognition of the positive qualities of others both similar and different from themselves.</p> <p>A growing recognition of oppression on the basis of race, and a growing sense of responsibility to stand against it.</p>	<p>A sense of pride in being connected to their families and communities through racial identity.</p> <p>A positive sense about their attributes, including name, skin tone, hair type, eye color, etc.</p> <p>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.</p>

GO DEEPER!

“What’s the difference between positive racial identity and self-esteem?”

Self-esteem means feeling good about oneself – and that’s a good thing! But racial identity is much more than that.

For children who are white, positive racial identity development is about learning that their whiteness does not make them “the norm”, and those who look different from them, “the others”. They can learn to accept their whiteness and use it to counteract injustice and contribute to a more equitable society.

For children of color, positive racial identity is vital. This could include practiced self-love, a positive association with a community of color, and consistent positive messaging about their physical and cultural attributes. These measures have long-term positive impacts on their self-efficacy, relationships, and success in school and life.

Go to YouTube and check out these videos to learn more!

- Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education: Understanding PRIDE in Pittsburgh
- How can I have a Positive Racial Identity? I’m White!



QUICK READ

THE N-WORD AND MY DAUGHTER

by Martha Haakmat

I woke up this morning thinking about what it means to raise race conscious children, and how some of us have no choice. I am sure this is on my mind heavily because I am being allowed to read my middle daughter's college essay today after a couple of months of her agonizing over it.

Georgia, who is now applying to colleges and will have applications due within the next few weeks, chose to write about being called the N-word in third grade. I cannot say exactly how this incident continues to resonate with her now. It is not something that makes her stir in the night; in fact, the classmates responsible for the incident continue to be among Georgia's friends now at school. The fact that Georgia can recall so vividly what happened and how she felt, and that the subject continues to be one that poses a dilemma for her is significant.

It happened in third grade with the introduction of an email address for Georgia to communicate with her family members who lived far away. She would write back and forth with her grandparents from North Carolina and Virginia, and with a great aunt from California. Georgia does not remember when she began sharing this address with her classmates, but she and I are both clear about the evening that she read a short message from two of them all in caps, that declared she was a nigger.

Georgia had read the email alone in her room, and I wasn't there to see her first reaction. What I remember is Georgia, usually quick witted and sure of herself, standing at the top of the stairs to her bedroom, looking very scared and telling me that something was wrong and that she had gotten a scary email and wasn't sure what to do.

I think my husband and I did all the right things. We dropped everything, first calmed Georgia, read the email together, and explained how sometimes messages got scrambled or came from someone trying to pose as someone else. I remember telling her that we would figure out why such an email would be sent to her from her friend's address. We were clear that this was not a joke, and that we would work with her school and with the parents of the kids involved to settle the matter.

I remember Georgia pausing tearfully, I think she had pajamas on, blue satiny ones that hung a bit on her because they were hand-me-downs from her bigger sister. She looked up from the email message and wanted to know what a nigger was. She said she knew it was a bad word, but did not understand why it was used in reference to her.

My husband and I took a deep breath, and I tried my best to check the anger that hit me like a ton of bricks. I was all at once furious. Racism had crept into my eight year old's world, and I had had no control over protecting her from it.

I spoke first and said as simply as I could: "The N-word is a terrible, horrible name used against Black people. It is a powerful insult meant to treat Black people as less than human."

I remember trying to tie this treatment to what Georgia had already learned from a school unit about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks...I did not have a lot of good examples from her own schooling to pull from, and this too made me angry and sad. Had I not prepared my child enough? I felt myself fumbling through and hot under the collar. I had a million thoughts run through my mind in that two-minute moment about whether we had chosen the right school, the right neighborhood, the right life for our children, so they could be strong and whole.

Had I talked enough about race? Had I surrounded Georgia enough with positive messages about who she is racially? With the help of the school administration and the parents of the children involved, we learned that during a play-date, the children who wrote the message, Georgia's friends, thought it would be funny to send a scary email. I don't care to think about how and why calling my daughter a nigger ended up being the chosen words for this "prank." The two children responsible each blamed the other, and we never did learn the truth about how the idea originated. I am sure that is not important for us to know.

"What did this incident teach you?" I prompted Georgia, as she struggled to write her college essay.

"I don't know," she answered for weeks before she finally wrote about the incident as a beginning of her own racial identity development.

"I always thought of myself as just like everyone else...like I fit in," Georgia wrote, "I remember going back to school after reading that email feeling like I didn't fit in anymore."

In the seven months until Georgia walks across the graduation stage with this classmate who will have also accompanied Georgia on her senior spring break trip, maybe Georgia herself will finally have the will to talk about this incident again with her friend. I know that Georgia is stronger for having had to process this.

I hope this prepares her better for a world where racism is a fact of life that she will need to know in order to navigate through college and her adult life successfully.

Adapted from: <http://www.raceconscious.org/2015/12/1020/>

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Children will 'naturally' grow up to be non-racist adults only when they live in a non-racist society. Until then, adults must guide children's antiracist development."

*– Louise Derman-Sparks in
Children, Race and Racism: How
Race Awareness Develops*



STOP AND THINK

Use these questions to discuss these topics with other adults, or to reflect individually on your own attitudes and experiences.

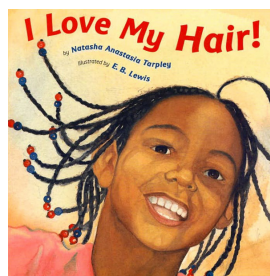
Reflect on a time in childhood when you were aware of race (i.e., your own or someone else's racial identity or characteristics). What thoughts and emotions do you associate with that moment?

What did you notice about the words, actions, and attitudes of others about race during your childhood? What messages did you get about yours or others' characteristics, especially racial identity? How have these messages impacted your life?



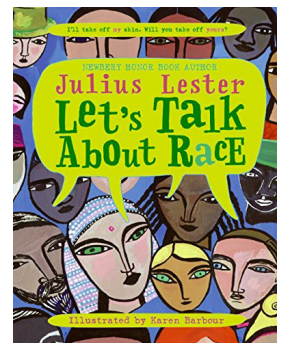
I Love My Hair!

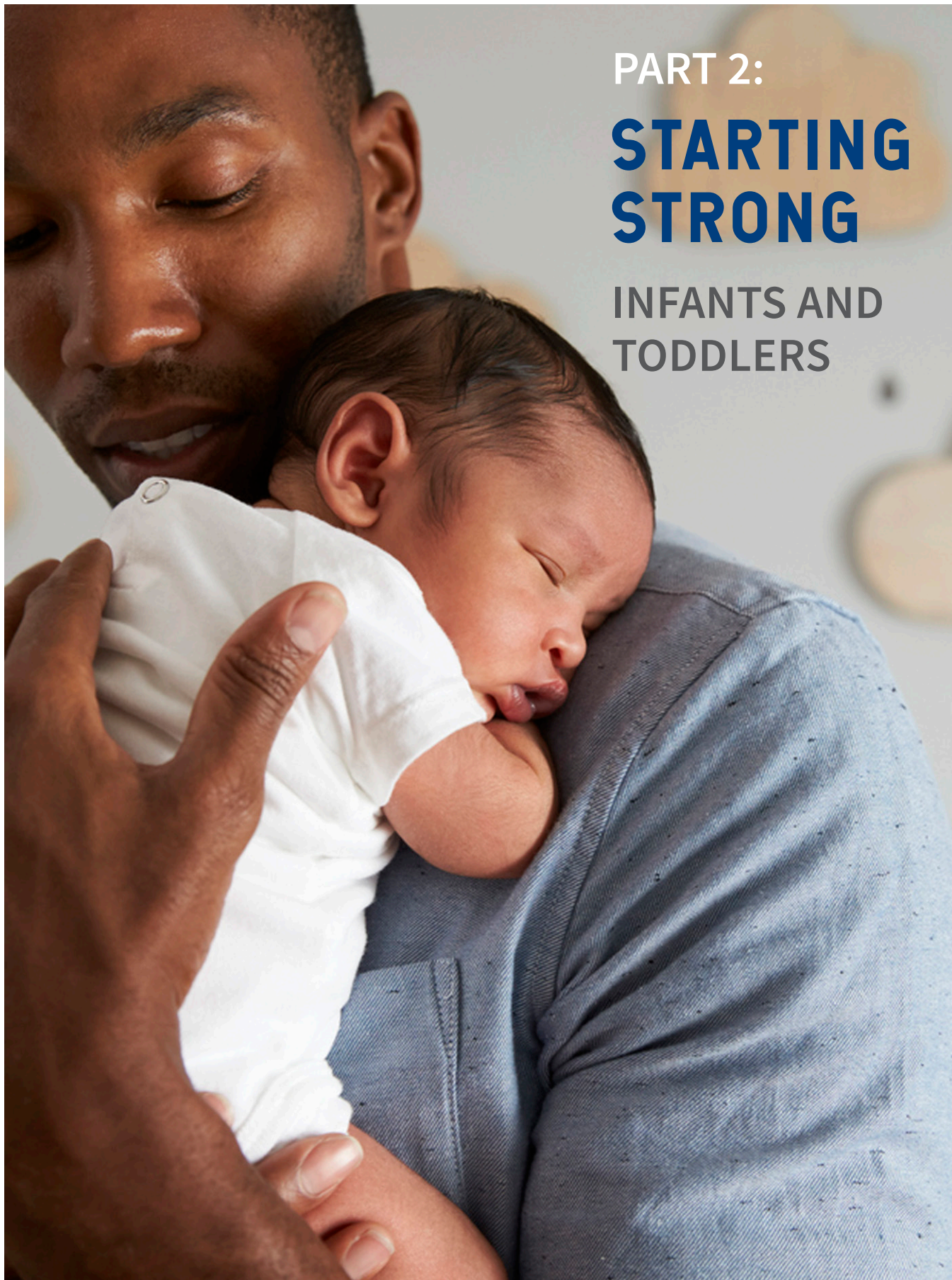
By Natasha Anastasia Tarpley
Illustrated by E. B. Lewis



Let's Talk About Race

By Julius Lester
Illustrated by Karen Barbour





PART 2:

STARTING STRONG

INFANTS AND
TODDLERS

INFANTS AND TODDLERS (0-2 YEARS)

Your baby may be...	You can...
<p>Absorbing culture through daily experiences, senses and interactions.</p> <p>Noticing and curious about different physical characteristics – like skin color and hair texture.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

Source: Stages of Racial Identity Development ⁵



HINT

Language matters, even with very young babies. Did you know that babies can understand and process the majority of words that are used around them before they even say their first words? It's never too early to talk with your baby about the physical traits that make people similar and different!

Source: *Before Children Talk . . . They Understand A Lot!*⁶

POINT IT OUT!

During daily routines

Every day your baby plays, takes a bath, accompanies you on errands, and more – these are all wonderful opportunities to respond to your young learner in positive and affirming ways. Take a moment to point out the amazing things your baby is noticing about their own features and the features of others.

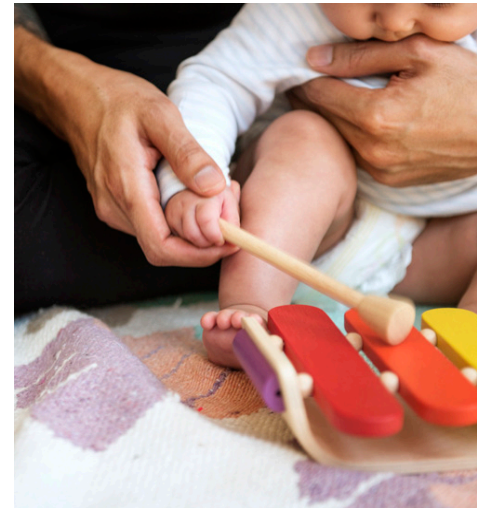
You're pulling on your soft hair! Your hair is like your daddy's hair.

Are you reaching for my hand? Your hand is caramel and my hand is chocolate.

I see you are curious about Mr. Steven's hair. He has long, brown locks.

Are you looking at Ms. Ameera's scarf? That is called a hijab, and she is wearing it to cover her hair.

Look at your eyes in the mirror, and look at Mommy's eyes. My eyes are brown and yours are blue. You are my baby and I love you!



When helping your toddler get dressed, or during bath time, use songs and rhymes to help your child learn and celebrate their physical attributes. This is a great opportunity to use positive language to describe their traits.



I Love My Toes!

*Everybody knows I love my toes
Everybody knows I love my toes
I love my nails, my knees, my neck and my nose
But everybody knows I love my toes!*

*Everybody knows I love my eyes
Everybody knows I love my thighs
I love my legs, my lips, my neck and my nose
But everybody knows I love my toes!*

*Everybody knows I love my feet
Everybody knows I love my seat
I love my skin, my chin, my knees and my nose
But everybody knows I love my toes!*

*Everybody knows I love my toes
Everybody knows I love my toes
I love my nails, my knees, my neck and my nose
But everybody knows I love my toes!*

Source: Sense of Self Activities for Infants and Toddlers⁷

TALK ABOUT IT!

While exploring books and dolls

Board books that feature a variety of faces are a wonderful opportunity to talk about eyes, noses, hair, and skin color while introducing positive and affirming language to describe physical features. Similarly, dolls allow your baby to touch and see physical features, and develop empathy. Having dolls of different skin colors and hair textures allows you to begin talking with your baby about similarities and differences.

This book has pictures of many children on it. Look how they all have different skin, eyes, lips and hair!

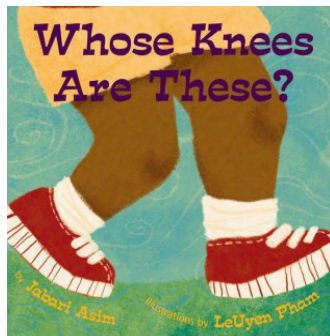
The child's knees in this book are "brown and strong". Where are your brown, strong knees?

Your baby doll has curly hair just like me! Can you stroke your baby's hair?

{READ...}

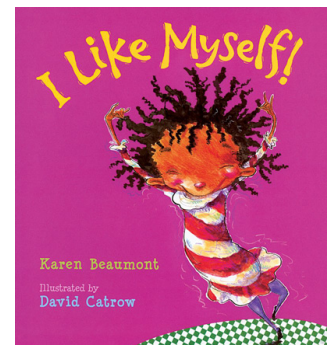
Whose Knees Are These?

By Jabari Asim
Illustrated by LeUyen Pham



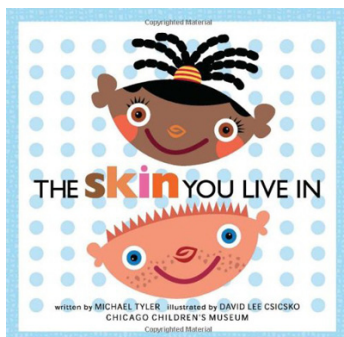
I Like Myself!

By Karen Beaumont
Illustrated by David Catrow



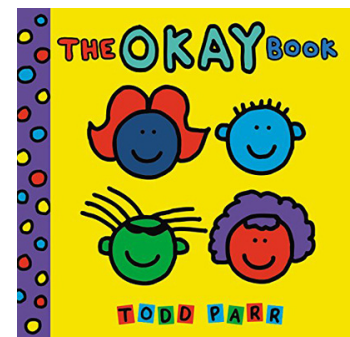
The Skin You Live In

By Michael Tyler
Illustrated by David Lee Csicsko



The OKAY Book

By Todd Parr



HINT

For a quick description of all recommended books and more info on selecting great books to promote positive racial identity development and help children counteract bias, check out [Tips for Selecting Diverse Children's Literature](#) at the back of this resource!

QUICK READ

WHY I TALK ABOUT RACE WHEN I READ WITH MY TODDLER

By Sachi Feris

Sometimes, I sit down to read a book with my two and half-year-old, and I ask myself if my race-conscious talk is overkill. “Do I have to talk about race every single time we read?” And I don’t. Not every single time, not on every single page. But I do quite frequently—by which I mean on a daily basis.

I open Vera B. Williams’ beautiful and diverse book “More More More,” Said the Baby and say: “Look, this baby has peachy skin that people call White, like us. This baby also has blonde hair like your friend Sienna.” Or: “This baby has brown skin that people call Black. Our neighbor Sally is Black, too.”

When I imagine the alternative, I understand why I talk race every single day. The alternative looks like this: I open “More, More, More” and I don’t see race. In fact, I pretend it doesn’t exist. Or maybe I don’t completely pretend, maybe I say, “Isn’t it wonderful how each baby is different?” Is this talking about race? No. At least it isn’t ignoring race, but the truth is that being “different” in the United States still carries the repercussions of both historical and ongoing racial discrimination... which is definitely not “wonderful.” This color-blind approach reinforces this legacy of discrimination.

This is why I choose to interrupt this legacy of discrimination by being race-conscious. This is why I talk race every single day. The School Library Journal review of “More, More, More” calls William’s presentation of diversity “natural and unforced.” Naming race, which might at first feel forced and unnatural, is what I do to ultimately make talking about race feel “natural and unforced.” (For examples of children’s books that explicitly name race, see Taye Digg’s *Chocolate Me!* and Karen Katz’ *The Colors of Us* and Monica Brown’s *Marisol McDonald Doesn’t Match/Marisol McDonald No Combina*) As I always have shared, this is just about saying words that are strung together to form sentences. We can all talk race.

Adapted from: <http://www.raceconscious.org/2015/01/whyitalkracewithmytoddler/>

GO DEEPER!

“But I was taught to be colorblind... What’s so wrong about that?”

A “colorblind” perspective might be well-intentioned, but race in America holds a great deal of social, cultural, and historical significance. To deny this would be to erase the lived experiences of people of color, and would leave our children without the tools to identify and act against injustice. There is a lot of good research that contradicts the “colorblind” narrative. Check out this podcast to learn more!

[How to Not \(Accidentally\) Raise a Racist: The Longest Shortest Time, Episode 116](#)



STOP AND THINK

Use these questions to discuss these topics with other adults, or to reflect individually on your own attitudes and experiences.

Has your baby ever shown discomfort or curiosity about someone who looked different from them? What did your baby do? How did it make you feel, and how did you respond?

What messages do you think your child may have gathered from your response? Would you like to try anything different next time?

What are 3-4 messages that you want your baby to get from you and other family members about theirs and others' racial identities?



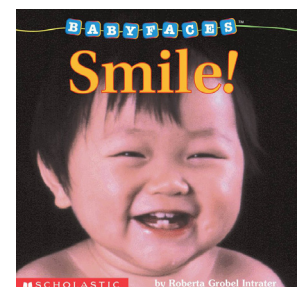
Global Babies/Bebes Del Mundo

By The Global Fund for Children



Smile!

By Roberta Grobel Intreter





PART 3:

LEARNING THE WAY

PRESCHOOLERS

PRESCHOOLERS (3-5 YEARS)

Your preschooler might be...	You can...
<p>Showing an understanding of the family's cultural ways of being (e.g., language, behavior, gender norms, emotional expressions, etc.)</p> <p>Making assumptions about groups of people, or creating their own explanations for human differences, based on their limited experience and learned bias</p> <p>Showing evidence that societal messages affect how they feel about themselves/their group (i.e., internalized superiority or internalized oppression)</p> <p>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."</p> <p>Expressing a strong interest in fairness, and the ability to consider justice, and think critically about hurtful language and images</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

Source: Stages of Racial Identity Development

HINT

Exploring racial identity might lead children to some questions and ideas about their ability to speak and act on behalf of racial justice and equity. You can guide them to do so in the ways that are right for your family. This section will identify some supportive, age-appropriate opportunities for you and your child to get involved



eq·ui·ty

[ˈekwədē]

Treatment that is fair and just, considering the capacities of individuals, while not discriminating because of racial identity, ethnicity, gender, religion, ability, or any other aspect of identity. Equity goes beyond equality, which implies equal treatment of individuals or groups despite their differing needs.

TALK ABOUT IT!

With Proactive Conversation Starters

During the preschool years, you can continue to name and speak positively about your child’s racial identity all facets of human difference they are noticing. In addition, there are many opportunities to start a conversation about race, human difference, or injustice with your preschooler. Based on your child’s readiness, you might want to use one of these prompts below. Discussions will be most effective when they are connected to children’s experiences, or things they have noticed.

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.

Source: 100 Race-Conscious Things you can Say to your Child to Advance Racial Justice ⁸

HINT

These are just a few examples of conversations you might have with your preschooler. For more, check out 100 Race-Conscious Things you can Say to your Child to Advance Racial Justice, and other resources online at www.raceconscious.org.



EXPERIENCE IT!

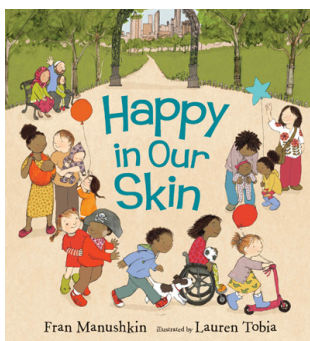
Through Books, Activities, and Events

The everyday experiences that children have – their interactions with books, media, and people – have an impact on their own racial identity development, and the breadth of their understanding about people who look different from them. These opportunities can also spark children’s thinking about their role to recognize and act against injustice. Adults who care for children can carefully select books, toys, and other opportunities that send a consistent message to children.

{READ...}

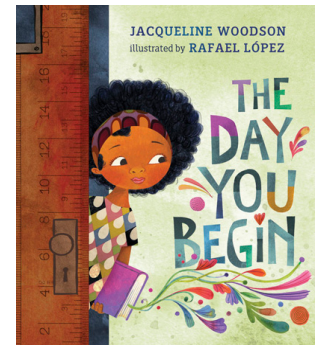
Happy in Our Skin

By Fran Manushkin,
Illustrated by Lauren Tobia



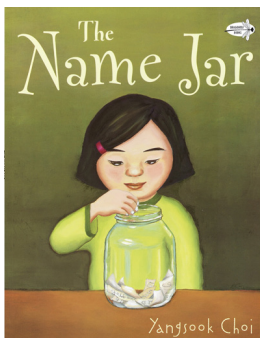
The Day You Begin

By Jacqueline Woodson
Illustrated by Rafael López



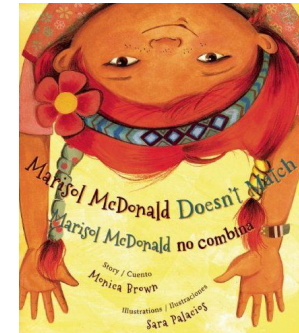
The Name Jar

By Yangsook Choi



Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match/ Marisol McDonald no combina

By Monica Brown
Illustrated by Sara Palacios



HINT

For a substantial listing of children’s books reviewed with a diversity and equity lens, check out See What We See: Children’s and Young Adult Book Reviews, and other resources through Social Justice Books: A Teaching or Change Project at <https://socialjusticebooks.org>



{PLAY...}

Create portraits of self, family members, and friends using People Colors crayons or paints. Take time to discuss all the facets of identity that your child is representing on paper.



Give your child access to dolls representing multiple racial identities. Encourage imaginative play that explores physical features and a variety of cross-racial relationships

{EXPLORE...}

Many cities and towns offer opportunities to engage with a variety of people and cultures. Below are some examples of places you can go with your preschooler. Use the opportunity to talk about how the people, places, and circumstances you experiences about are familiar or unfamiliar, and the meaning and significance they hold.

If you have the opportunity to...	You might ask/say...
Attend public cultural events that celebrate a particular ethnic group, holiday, For instance, participate in a Latinx Festival, Reggae Event, Chinese New Year, or Holi – the Hindu festival of lights.	Look at the dancers! They are wearing brightly colored clothes and have ribbons in their hair. This is a special celebration of _____. What are some of the special days we celebrate in our family?
Create signage for and/or attend a protest or demonstration for the rights and fair treatment of people of color.	We are standing here/making these signs/saying these words to show that we don't think it's okay for children to be taken away from their parents. We are using our voices to say that we want it to STOP!
Visit a museum or historical site that portrays human injustice (e.g., The African American or Native American History Museum, etc.)	There have been many times that people in power have done very cruel things to those who look/behave/believe differently from them. It is important for us to remember these things that have happened and understand why, so that we can stop them from happening again.

HINT

Considering exploring museums with your preschooler? Check out the **Family Guide to the National Museum of African American History and Culture** for advice on visting this and similar museums with young children at <https://www.mommynearest.com/>.

ACT ON IT!

You may have heard your preschooler say, “That’s not FAIR!” This growing sense of justice is a natural part of development, and you can build on it to help children make connections to racial injustice. As your child observes the ways in which individuals or groups of people are treated, you can help them understand racism in terms of fairness. Preschoolers can learn strategies and habits of standing up for justice on behalf of themselves and others.

Help your child write a letter to a company or their congressional representatives to bring attention to the, erasure, misrepresentation, or discrimination they are noticing.



Help them understand when they notice biased or hurtful speech and actions from their peers. Use role-play, dolls, or puppets to help them practice speaking up for themselves and others as they are ready.

You can help your child notice and speak up against injustice in the forms of:

e·ra·sure

[ə'ráSHər]

The practice of collective indifference that renders certain people and groups invisible – the tendency to dismiss inconvenient facts and people, and blotting out certain people groups’ history, pain and achievements.

bi·as [ˈbiəs]

An attitude, belief, or feeling that results in and helps to justify unfair treatment of a person because of their identity.

dis·crim·i·na·tion

[də'skrimə'nāSH(ə)n]

Action by an institution or individual that denies access or opportunity to people based on their social identity (such as gender or racial identity).

QUICK READ

HOW TO INTRODUCE CHILDREN TO ACTIVISM

By Bethany M. Edwards

We dream that our children will be compassionate, loving people. We want children to care about their own families and friends, as well as their communities. As we think about how to raise global citizens, many of us also think about the impact our kids can make beyond our own backyards, to how they can change the world.

There are lots of things that we can do to help our children become loving change makers. One of those things is introducing kids to activism at a young age.

WHO CAN BE AN ACTIVIST?

An activist is someone who works to bring about political or social change. When you think about “activism”, you might visualize people who were arrested for trying to change an unjust law. Maybe you think of folks who join in marches, pickets, or protests.



Activism also includes behind-the-scenes actions that may not make the news. As a community organizer for an economic justice organization, I learned that lots of people who cared about a living wage weren’t comfortable holding a sign or chanting slogans. Say it with me; that is ok! There are so many different kinds of activism that are needed.

Whether you write a letter to your member of Congress or march in the streets, if you’re working to solve the root cause of a problem, you’re an activist.

We also tend to assume that all activists are adults. Some of the people working for change who I admire most are kids or teens.

HEALING THE WORLD REQUIRES BOTH CHARITY AND JUSTICE

Think about any of the big problems plaguing your community or the world. Often, our first response to these problems is charity: meeting people’s immediate needs, usually on a short-term basis. Most of the things we think about as “community service” or “giving back” are acts of charity.

Examples of acts of charity are:

- Donating food to a food bank
- Serving at a homeless shelter
- Tutoring children or
- Assisting a refugee family

Social justice is getting to the root, structural causes of issues like homelessness, poverty, or the refugee crisis. Rather than just looking at the individual who has needs, social justice takes a step back. This step allows you to look at the social, political, or economic factors that are affecting whole groups of people in crisis.

Examples of acts of social justice are:

- Lobbying lawmakers to provide more affordable housing
- Calling on employers to pay a living wage
- Pressing your local school board to stop racial bias in how kids are disciplined

Clearly, if we're going to solve big problems, we need justice. We also need charity because we can't ignore the suffering that people are facing right now. Charity allows us to take action even while we work for long-term solutions.



It's definitely simpler to introduce children to charity than to justice. We as parents or educators cannot afford to wait until children are teenagers to teach them about activism and justice. If we do this, the likelihood is that in turn, they will grow up with a warped understanding of why these systemic problems exist.

ACTIVISM TEACHES CHILDREN THAT THEY ARE NOT “THE RESCUERS”

I've been an activist for more than twenty years. I can tell you it can be disheartening if there aren't immediate lasting changes. The result of our activist efforts are often unclear.

However, there is one thing I know I've learned from engaging with social justice.

I am not the hero, nor should I strive to be.

There is not a group of people out there waiting for me to rescue them. My role is to listen to the solutions of people directly affected by the problem. Then, I need to figure out how, with my particular gifts and personality, I can support those solutions.

I recently received an email from the fantastic organization Doing Good Together about how to avoid raising a “rescuer.” They pointed out that one unintended consequence of teaching kids to be in service to others can be that children see themselves as “givers” and others as “receivers.”

To introduce children to activism models to them that we all have a responsibility to work together to solve our community's problems.

ACTIVISM HELPS COMBAT STEREOTYPES THAT AFFECT CHILDREN

The racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia that are present in our culture impact all children, though in different ways. For kids who are part of a marginalized group, they are continually receiving subtle and not so subtle messages. These micro-aggressions tell them they are unworthy on a daily basis.

However, these systems of oppression impact all children. Oppression hurts every child, period. Marginalized children are hurt, and so are their allies. My white middle-class 5-year-old boy is receiving all kinds of messages that he is more worthy than others who don't share his race, gender, or wealth.

I don't want my child to grow up thinking and acting like he is better than others. I certainly don't want other children to grow up thinking that their lives are not as precious or valued. Engaging in action for social justice gives children the chance to stand up for what is right. This explicitly teaches them to see our common humanity. So, I talk to my son about social justice. Usually, that means simplifying it to the concept of fairness.

Ways I teach activism in normal and everyday life:

- Invite him to write simple messages to our Congressman about immigration reform
- Read him books about people who worked for change
- Talk to him about race and skin color
- Tell him about the activism that I engage in, even when he doesn't go with me to an event

THE DO'S AND DON'TS TO INTRODUCE CHILDREN TO ACTIVISM

Do:

- Think about what opportunities for learning and action fit best with your child's personality. If your child loves participating in marches, wonderful. Use alternative strategies for children who are overwhelmed by noise and crowds. For example, stuffing envelopes for a social justice organization. You can use it as an opportunity for learning as you talk through the purpose of the letter.
- Take plenty of time to talk through what you're doing and why you're doing it. Your child may remember a moment in your conversation even more than what you actually did.
- Notice what topics or issues that your child is enthusiastic about. Our five-year-old is a budding environmentalist. His questions and concerns have raised our awareness of how to engage in environmental activism.
- Read these interviews with every day women who are fighting for basic human rights in their every day careers (human rights, mental health, education, and healthcare)

Don't:

- Force your child to take part in something that doesn't want to. Extend the invitation to go with you to an event or take part in an activity at home. If your child says no, honor that in the same way you would an adult saying no. This prevents resentment building up that can harm your efforts to raise a compassionate child in the long run.
- Feel that you have to do everything at once. We have conversations about the same social justice topics at our house over and over. If I feel like I didn't quite get it right in one conversation, I try again on another day.

Adapted from: <https://www.biracialbookworms.com/introduce-children-activism/>

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“Activism is never achieved successfully on your own . . . changing the world is almost always a function of human collaboration. Also, one has to learn how to communicate in a civil way with figures of authority. We shouldn't be teaching kids how to fight. We should be teaching them how engage.”

*– Caroline Paul, author of *You Are Mighty, a guide to activism for kids.**

STOP AND THINK

Use these questions to discuss these topics with other adults, or to reflect individually on your own attitudes and experiences.

Has your child ever noticed discrimination, erasure, or bias? If so, what were the circumstances, and how did your child express this?

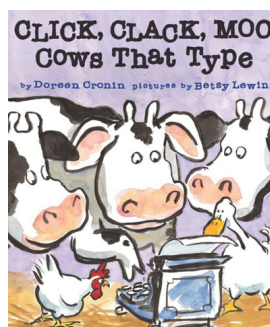
If not, or you are unsure, what are the likely sources from which your child might encounter bias and discrimination? What media does your child consume that fails to represent the full spectrum of human diversity in a positive way? Who in your child's life might be giving voice to bias and discrimination?

Of the suggested activities, conversation starters, and strategies above, which do you think you and your child might be ready to try together?



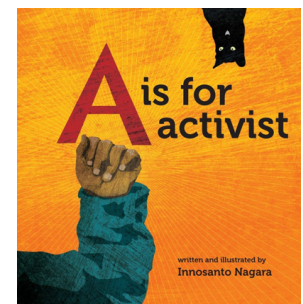
**Click, Clack,
Moo Cows
That Type**

By Doreen
Cronin
Illustrated by
Betsy Lewin



**A is for
Activist**

By
Innosanto
Nagara



CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

Managing how others interact with your child

Your child comes into contact with many different adults on a regular basis. As a parent, you can't control everything that your child sees, hears, and experiences. However, you can take advantage of opportunities to engage the primary, trusted adults in your child's life in conversations about sending the right messages to your child.

Discussions with Friends and Family

Everyday experiences are opportunities for us to bravely step into challenging, but necessary conversations. You can use the following strategies to start conversations with the adults in yours and your child's lives:

Describe your family's values. Your visiting relatives may well accept bigoted "humor" as part of family culture, but that doesn't mean you have to: Principles like tolerance and respect for others guide our immediate family's words and attitudes, and I expect that all of the adults that care for my children will help to model these.

Set limits. Although you may not be able to change others' attitudes, you can set limits on their behavior in your own home: I will not allow those kind of 'jokes' to be told in my home.

Challenge statements with a lens of empathy. When another adult says or does something that reflects bias or embraces stereotypes, point it out. Guide the conversation toward empathy and respect: How do you think our neighbor would feel if he heard you call him a terrorist?

Expand horizons. If appropriate, allow your child to see you question others' stereotyping or negative ideas. Create more empathy and normalcy by making personal connections to others' experiences: Our neighbor is a Sikh, not a terrorist. He practices his religion just as we practice ours. Challenge other adults to spend time with and learn about people who are different from them.

Anticipate and rehearse. When you know bias is likely to arise, practice initiating discussions or responding to others in front of a mirror beforehand. Figure out what works best for you, and what feels the most comfortable. Become confident in your responses, and use them.



HINT

These tips are selected and adapted from *Speak Up: Responding to Everyday Bigotry*.⁹ For more, check out the full article from Southern Poverty Law Center at <https://www.splcenter.org>.

Talking with Your Child’s Teacher or Program Leader

It can be equally challenging to address these concerns with your child’s teacher or school, but it could be an important conversation to have. With the many responsibilities and priorities that teachers and program leaders have to consider, it might be helpful for you to offer reminders, requests, and “food for thought” about how the classroom environment is supporting racial identity development. Here are some tips for engaging in that discussion.

Start with the positive, acknowledging what is going well:

..... My child loves coming to school, and I feel really good dropping her off here. I can see all that you do to create a great learning environment with a variety of toys and materials.

..... I appreciate that this school prioritizes diversity, and that my children are able to attend school with so many children who look, speak, worship, etc. in ways that are different from them.

Address your intention for partnership:

..... It is important to our family that our baby develops a positive sense of self as well as an appreciation for others who look different from her. We think that by working together with you and the school, we can build a strong foundation for that.

State your concern or question:

..... In addition to attending a diverse school, it’s very important to me that my child has guidance to help them develop positive ideas about race and other facets of human difference. Are there ways that you talk/offer learning activities about differences?

..... What materials do you have (posters, books, dolls), either out now, or for rotating into the classroom that show people of different skin colors and other racial features?

..... Yesterday, my child tried to wash the brown off of a doll saying it was dirty. I notice all the dolls in the classroom are light-skinned. Do you have other dolls with different shades of skin?



Share any contextualizing information you have about your child or your family's interest in this topic:

..... It is important to our family that our baby develops a positive sense of self. We think working together with the school can build a strong foundation for that.

..... We have been reading lots of books that feature children from lots of different backgrounds. I find that books are a great way to start conversations about the different racial and cultural characteristics that children are noticing.

..... My sister recently adopted a child from Guatemala, and my daughter is very curious about her new cousin and others she meets who have brown skin like him.



Offer ways to be part of the solution:

..... I wonder if there are any ways I could support you in requesting diverse materials for your classroom.

..... If you are open to it, I would be happy to lead a conversation about this to help brainstorm ideas during our next parent meeting.

..... I know of some good resources for selecting diverse children's literature. Can I share some of these with you?



Be prepared to listen, take notes, do not feel the need to have a solution during one conversation.

STOP AND THINK

Use these questions to discuss these topics with other adults, or to reflect individually on your own attitudes and experiences.

With whom do you feel it is important raise these topics, and why?

How might differences in cultural background and experiences contribute to my difference of opinion with this other adult? Is there more I need to know about their actions, beliefs, or intentions before engaging in this discussion?

How would you like the conversation to go? What questions, concerns, requests or boundaries would you like to express? Write down your thoughts and practice in front of a mirror, or with a friend or partner.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“Parents are the ultimate role models for children. Every word, movement, and action has an effect. No other person or outside force has a greater influence on a child than the parent.”

– Bob Keeshan, children’s television producer and actor



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Additional Resources for Children and Adults

Tips for Selecting Diverse Children’s Literature

Regularly reading children’s books with strong representation of characters of color can help start conversations about race and difference, and build positive racial identity. Here are some tips for selecting and using books with your infant, toddler, or preschooler.



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 expand their understanding of others in this multicultural 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.

Source: *Guide for selecting Anti-Bias Children’s Books*¹⁰

HINT

If you have books that represent people in less than ideal ways, this too can be an opportunity to build your child’s knowledge and critical thinking skills. As you read, you might mention:

I don’t like that picture. It makes me feel uncomfortable because all of the characters have light skin except for the “bad guy” who has dark skin. A picture like this can send the message that people with dark skin are bad – but we know that’s not true.

I don’t like that the child has on a feathered headband and is carrying a bow and arrow around. That is not a costume and I don’t think it is funny.

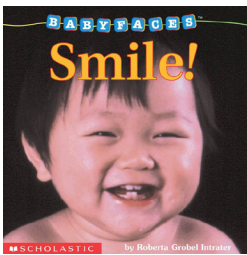
Some of Our Favorite Books for Infants and Toddlers



Global Babies/Bebes del Mundo

By The Global Fund for Children

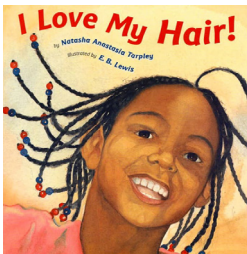
Appealing photos of babies from sixteen cultures from around the globe are woven together by simple narration. Diverse settings highlight specific differences in clothing, daily life, and traditions, as well as demonstrate that babies all over the world are nurtured by the love, caring, and joy that surround them.



SMILE!

By Roberta Grobel Intreter

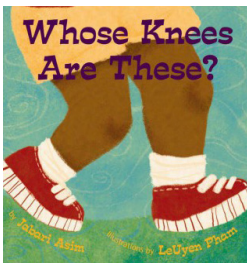
This engaging book features appealing photos of multicultural babies and toddlers and a brief, rhyming text.



I Love My Hair!

By Natasha Anastasia Tarpley, E. B. Lewis (Illustrator)

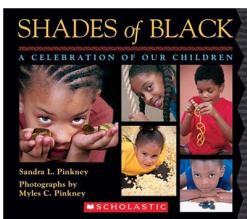
A young African-American girl describes the different, wonderful ways she can wear her hair, in an empowering board book that encourages African-American children to not only feel good about their special hair, but to also feel proud of their heritage.



Whose Knees Are These?

By Jabari Asim, illustrated by LeUyen Pham

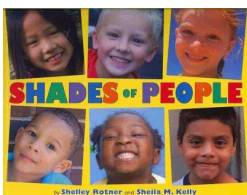
"Knees like these, so brown and strong, to whom do these fine knees belong?" asks this delightful rhyming board book for toddlers.



Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children

By Sandra L. Pinkney, Myles C. Pinkney (Photographer)

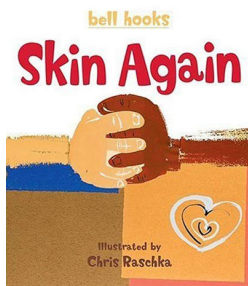
Using simple poetic language and stunning photographs, Sandra and Myles Pinkney have created a remarkable book of affirmation for African-American children. Photographic portraits and striking descriptions of varied skin tones, hair texture, and eye color convey a strong sense of pride in a unique heritage.



Shades of People

By Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly

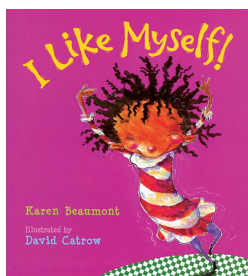
A celebration of the diversity of everyday life, this exploration of one of our most noticeable physical traits pairs simple text with vibrant photographs. At school, at the beach, and in the city, diverse groups of children invite young readers both to take notice and to look beyond the obvious.



Skin Again

By Bell Hooks, Illustrated by Chris Raschka

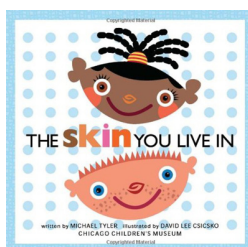
This book offers new ways to talk about race and identity. Looking beyond skin, going straight to the heart, we find in each other the treasures stored down deep. Learning to cherish those treasures, to be all we imagine ourselves to be, makes us free.



I Like Myself!

By Karen Beaumont, Illustrated by David Catrow

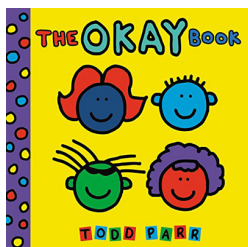
High on energy and imagination, this ode to self-esteem encourages kids to appreciate everything about themselves – inside and out. Messy hair? Beaver breath? So what! Here's a little girl who knows what really matters.



The Skin You Live In

By Michael Tyler, Illustrated by David Lee Csicsko

Themes of with social harmony, such as friendship, acceptance, self-esteem, and diversity are promoted in simple and straightforward ways. This book offers a wonderful venue through which parents and teachers can discuss important social concepts with their children.

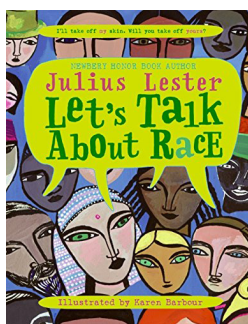


The OKAY Book

By Todd Parr

Bold and bright, funny and reassuring, this book promotes acceptance of all expressions of self.

Books for Preschoolers

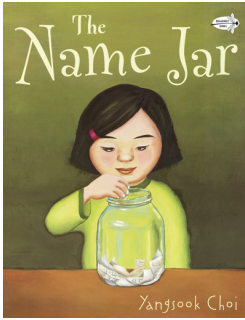


Let's Talk About Race

By Julius Lester, illustrated by Karen Barbour

As Lester discusses how we all have a story, he brings up questions about why we think race is important and what it means to have a racial identity. This gorgeous book – great to read with kids of any age – allows for open-ended conversation and questions.

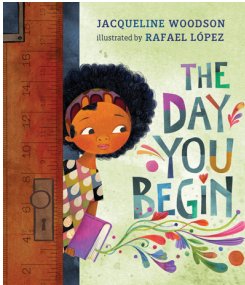
(All book images and descriptions are adapted from www.amazon.com)



The Name Jar

By Yangsook Choi

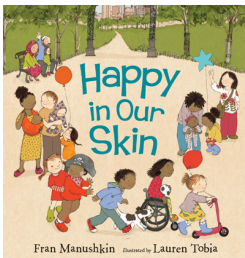
Eager to fit in upon her arrival in America, Unhei announces that she'll choose an "American" name to use in place of her own. Her whole class gets involved, but ultimately, Unhei sees the power and joy of sharing a bit of her true self with her community.



The Day You Begin

By Jacqueline Woodson, Illustrated by Rafael López

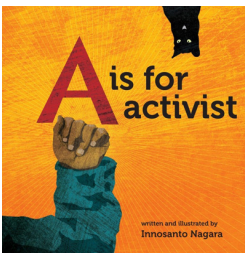
This lyrical text and Rafael López's dazzling art reminds us that we all feel like outsiders sometimes-and how brave it is that we go forth anyway. And that sometimes, when we reach out and begin to share our stories, others will be happy to meet us halfway.



Happy in Our Skin

By Fran Manushkin Illustrated by Lauren Tobia

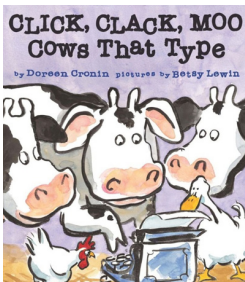
Is there anything more splendid than a baby's skin? For families of all stripes comes a sweet celebration of what makes us unique – and what holds us together.



A is for Activist

By Innosanto Nagara

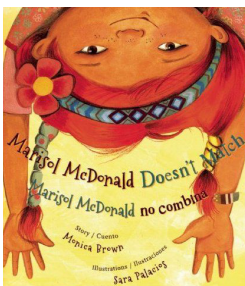
A is for Activist is an ABC board book written and illustrated for the next generation of progressives: families who want their kids to grow up in a space that is unapologetic about activism, environmental justice, civil rights, LGBTQ rights, and everything else that activists believe in and fight for.



Click, Clack, Moo Cows that Type

By Doreen Cronin, Illustrated by Betsy Lewin

The animals make their needs and grievances known to the farmer by writing letters in this silly, engaging story.



Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match/Marisol McDonald no combina

By Monica Brown, Illustrated by Sara Palacios

Marisol McDonald has flaming red hair and nut-brown skin. Polka dots and stripes are her favorite combination. She prefers peanut butter and jelly burritos in her lunch box. To Marisol McDonald, these seemingly mismatched things make perfect sense together.

Articles for Adults

What Is White Privilege, Really? Recognizing white privilege begins with truly understanding the term itself.

By Cory Collins

Having white privilege and recognizing it is not racist. But white privilege exists because of historic, enduring racism and biases. Therefore, defining white privilege also requires finding working definitions of racism and bias.

Seven Tasks for Parents: Developing Positive Racial Identity

By Joseph Crumbley, D.S.W.

Because children from minority groups (Asian, Latino, African American, or Native American) who experience prejudice or discrimination are subject to developing negative racial identity, they require monitoring, with attention paid to their perception of racial identity. Parents can provide support and reinforcement through 7 tasks.

“See Baby Discriminate”

Newsweek, an excerpt from Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman’s book *NurtureShock: New Thinking About Children*.

This abridged chapter focuses on racial identity development of children from birth through the early elementary years. You may want to read the full book chapter, which is called “Why White Parents Don’t Talk about Race.”

Books for Adults

Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?

by Beverly Daniel Tatum

Tatum explores the ways that all of us express racial identity, and addresses head on the fears and anxieties that prevent parents from having honest conversations about race with their children. “Whites are afraid of using the wrong words and being perceived as ‘racist’ while parents of color are afraid of exposing their children to painful racial realities too soon.”

Between the World and Me

by Ta-Nehisi Coates

In the form of a letter to his adolescent son, Coates shares the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences, from Howard University to Civil War battlefields, from the South Side of Chicago to Paris, from his childhood home to the living rooms of mothers whose children’s lives were taken as American plunder.



When Race Becomes Real

Edited by Bernestine Singley

This is a collection of first person essays about how each writer realized the important role race played in his or her life.

Online Videos for Adults (Search these titles on YouTube!)

Something Other than Other

This video by two parents explores their newborn child's multi-racial identity.

A Conversation on Race: A series of short films about identity in America.

This series of short films by the New York Times features everyday people as they discuss issues of race and identity in America.

CITED RESOURCES

- 1 Derman-Sparks, L., Edwards, J. O., & National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2010). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- 2 White, A., & Young, C. (2016). *Positive Racial Identity Development in Early Education: Understanding Pride in Pittsburgh* [PDF file]. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh. Retrieved from www.oed.pitt.edu/Files/Publications/RaceScan-FullReport12.pdf
- 3 Olsen, K. R. (2013, April). Are Kids Racist? (Not Talking about Race with your Children [Editorial]. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved January 8, 2019. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/developing-minds/201304/are-kids-racist>
- 4 Crumbly, J. (1999, February 13). Seven Tasks for Parents: Developing Positive Racial Identity [Editorial]. *North American Council on Adoptable Children*. Retrieved January 8, 2019, from <https://www.nacac.org/resource/seven-tasks-for-parents/>.
- 5 Derman-Sparks, L. *Stages of Racial Identity Development*. <https://www.earlychildhoodwebinars.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Stages-of-Childrens-Racial-Identity-Development.pdf>
- 6 Hollinger, P. C. (2012, January 31). Before Children Talk.. They Understand A Lot! [Editorial]. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/great-kids-great-parents/201201/children-talk-they-understand-lot>.
- 7 Herron, R. (2017, April 18). Sense of Self Activities for Infant an Toddlers [Editorial]. *How to Adult*. Retrieved January 8, 2019, from <https://howtoadult.com/sense-self-activities-infants-toddlers-7392361.html>.
- 8 100 Race-Conscious Things you can Say to your Child to Advance Racial Justice [Web log post]. (2016, June 2). Retrieved January 8, 2019, from <http://www.raceconscious.org/2016/06/100-race-conscious-things-to-say-to-your-child-to-advance-racial-justice/>
- 9 Speak Up: Responding to Everyday Bigotry. (2015, January 25). *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Retrieved January 8, 2019, from <https://www.splcenter.org/20150125/speak-responding-everyday-bigotry>.
- 10 Derman-Sparks, L. (2013). Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books [Editorial]. *Social Justice Books: A Project of Teaching Tolerance*. Retrieved from <https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books/>

