

# An Educator's Guide to

PICTURE BOOK

OUR SKIN

A FIRST CONVERSATION™ ABOUT RACE

MEGAN MADISON, JESSICA RALLI, & ISABEL

BOARD BOOK

OUR SKIN

A FIRST CONVERSATION™ ABOUT RACE

MEGAN MADISON, JESSICA RALLI, & ISABEL ROXAS



# Dear Educator or Caregiver,

The **First Conversations** series is developed by experts in the fields of early childhood and activism against injustice. This topic-driven board book series offers clear, concrete language and beautiful imagery that young children can grasp and adults can leverage for further discussion. While young children are avid observers and questioners of their world, adults often shut down or postpone conversations on complicated topics because it's hard to know where to begin. Research shows that talking about issues like race and gender from the age of two not only helps children understand what they see, but also increases self-awareness and self-esteem and allows them to recognize and confront things that are unfair, like discrimination and prejudice.

With this in mind, this guide for ***OUR SKIN: A FIRST CONVERSATION ABOUT RACE*** is designed to equip educators with some additional tools to introduce this topic responsibly. The book is a valuable resource, but it is up to the skilled educator to apply their expertise in **anti-bias curriculum and pedagogy** so that this first conversation with young readers will be beneficial for all. In this guide, you'll find:

- **Testimonials and practice for *OUR SKIN***
- **Tips and resources for family engagement**
- **Resources for educators**
- **Conversation starters and sample activities for the classroom**
- **Tips and resources for handling pushback**

Thank you so much for sharing ***OUR SKIN: A FIRST CONVERSATION ABOUT RACE*** with your young readers and for doing the work to help make these important conversations happen. You are helping to build a more equitable future for all.

Sincerely,

**PENGUIN YOUNG READERS SCHOOL & LIBRARY TEAM**



This guide was written in collaboration with **Vera Ahigya** (née Corbett). Vera was born in Germany and raised in El Paso, Texas, with her wonderful mother and amazing grandparents. Originally a pre-med student, Vera realized her calling as an educator at Austin College in Sherman, Texas, where she majored in history and psychology and earned her MA in education. Vera has taught kindergarten and first grade for the last sixteen years in Austin, Boston, and Brooklyn. Vera's online presence is dedicated to influencing other educators by spreading her vast knowledge and love of diverse children's books. Vera's unwavering commitment to social justice and diversity is also the focal point of her professional development presentations for other educators. Vera lives in Portland, Oregon, with her husband, Lonell, and her dog, Mozi.

## PRAISE FOR OUR SKIN

### FROM EDUCATORS:

“Babies, toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary-aged children can use this book to begin or continue conversations about race . . . It provides developmental insight by using direct language to explain the ‘why and how’ of having conversations about race, race-related observations, family diversity, identity terms, stereotypes, as well as prejudice, race, racism, empowerment, and activism.”

–MAKAI KELLOGG, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR  
AND EQUITY AND DIVERSITY COORDINATOR AT SCHOOL FOR  
FRIENDS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

“Reading *Our Skin* to my grade 2s has **transformed my reading aloud sessions** into a phenomenal race conversation. The easy examples of stereotypes and prejudice gave my students ideas to learn and speak up against unfair practices in a form of activism. I had such an **empowering** discussion with them!”

–SHAMEER @SHAMEER\_READS, 2ND-GRADE TEACHER

“One question I’ve encountered this school year is ‘Why is there racism?’, which this book has a clear and concise answer to. The book dives deep into a variety of topics, from skin color to combatting racism, while encouraging readers to embrace their skin and race and actively participate in antiracist efforts. This book is **clear and easy to understand**. It will answer many questions you or your readers have about race, but you should be prepared to answer new questions that may arise from the book, as well!”

–GABRIELLE BRUNK @MRS.BRUNKSREADALOUDS, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR

### REVIEWS:

★ “This accessibly written, adroit primer prompts the youngest readers to consider how skin tone relates to race and ethnicity, societal treatment, and justice. **An ideal conversation starter for any child.**”

–PUBLISHERS WEEKLY  
(STARRED REVIEW)

★ “An accessible, **important** addition to any anti-racist bookshelf.”

–KIRKUS  
(STARRED REVIEW)

★ “This timely book is **essential** for all collections.”

–SCHOOL LIBRARY  
CONNECTION  
(STARRED REVIEW)

★ “Children and adults can come together over this book, which takes apart the meanings of race and skin color at the foundational level. It’s **a stepping stone on the path to understanding what it means to be human**, with cheerful art and easy language.”

–SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL  
(STARRED REVIEW)

# Family engagement tips:



Proactive, ongoing communication with families is essential to equitable anti-bias educational practice.

1

**Don't assume any prior knowledge.** In every community, there is a wide range of experience with anti-racist theory and practice. And it can be helpful to remember that most adults in the United States have not had access to full and accurate information about race and racism in their homes or schools, even in communities with high levels of socioeconomic and educational privilege. It is your responsibility as the educator to get to know your community and provide families with the information they need to understand your anti-bias teaching practices. To best support children and families in deepening their understanding, start by reflecting on your own learning. How did you learn about anti-racism? What has that process felt like? Where do you go to support your ongoing learning?

2

**Communicate.** In an ideal world, we are proactive and consistent in our integration of anti-racism into our practice as educators—from curriculum to pedagogy, classroom management, and family engagement. We don't wait for Black History Month or a high-profile news story to begin talking about race. That's why it's important to start engaging families in these conversations early and often. This will help to build trust and shared understanding and prepare you for more challenging conversations later in the year.

3

**Empower families as collaborators.** Families can be fantastic advocates for and contributors to high-quality anti-bias education. Get to know the families in your community. Who has experience, expertise, and/or passion around social justice? How can you work together?

4

**Take good care of yourself.** Talking about race and racism can be joyful and healing; it can also be stressful and challenging. We know from history and our own experience that when doing anti-racist work, we can expect a degree of conflict, emotion, and resistance. And we know that growth and change takes time; one brave conversation is just one touchstone in an ongoing developmental journey. As a leader in your classroom and school, you have a responsibility to know and communicate your own boundaries with clarity and kindness. You can only be an excellent educator for the children in your classroom when your own needs are met. Build a supportive community around you. Treat yourself with love and care when things are easy and also when they are hard. Remember that the work is ongoing and that you are never alone.

5

**Ground and reflect.** Leadership is challenging. It entails taking strategic risks in our personal and professional lives, and that can feel scary. For example, if you are experiencing pushback from families, it can be helpful to breathe deeply and put the feedback in perspective. How many families in your classroom feel that way? How many families in your classroom support your approach? How does race play into it? Which families is your school responsive to? Why? What are the real stakes for you personally and professionally? What are the stakes for the children in your classroom? What are you afraid of? Why? How can you gather the support around you that you need so that you can feel confident about doing the right thing, even if it's still very scary?

Establishing a two-way conversation with parents and caregivers on the goals of your classroom is a great way to build community. Below is an example of what that kind of communication might look and sound like. Please feel free to edit this letter as needed. You know your community best.

[CLICK HERE](#) FOR AN EDITABLE VERSION.

## DEAR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS,

This school year is off to a fantastic start. I am very grateful for the opportunity to get to know your child this year. I have already learned that CHILD'S NAME loves SOMETHING THAT CHILD IS INTERESTED IN. That's so cool!

I believe that children thrive when there is a strong relationship between home and school. That means that I am committed to working together. I will be honest with you about what's happening in the classroom and I will answer any questions you have about what we teach, how we teach it, and why. I care about your family's values and will always make time to listen. I promise that I will apply my professional expertise in child development to being the best teacher I can be for your child.

Our school mission statement says . . . INSERT TEXT RELEVANT TO DEI COMMITMENTS

That means I have a responsibility to help my students grapple with topics like race and racism in developmentally appropriate ways. Research shows that most young children in the United States begin internalizing our society's pervasive pro-white/anti-Black biases before they even enter kindergarten. As a NAME YOUR RACIAL IDENTITY teacher, I've been reflecting on the messages I got about race when I was a child. My earliest race-related memory happened when I was X years old. I remember feeling NAME 1-3 FEELINGS.

*What do you remember learning about race as a child? How old were you?*

Here are some resources that I've been using to learn more:

- [This infographic](#) created by The Children's Community School summarizes that long research article and indicates the developmental readiness of young children to have conversations about race.
- [This PBS Kids website](#) has tons of helpful videos and articles to support us grown-ups in learning how to have those conversations. I also really love the resources provided by [the National Museum of African American History and Culture](#).
- Because these conversations will sound different in each of your families, [this NPR article](#) focuses specifically on how white parents can talk to their kids about race, and [this one](#) talks about why all of us should be talking to children about social identities.

Throughout the year, we will engage in these important conversations through the use of art, lessons, and books. One important book that we will use to anchor our conversation is *Our Skin* by Megan Madison and Jessica Ralli. We have chosen this book because it aligns with our school's approach to anti-bias education and the position of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. There are copies available at our library, and I am available to talk about any questions that come up as we read it together as a community. I know that big feelings may arise during these conversations, too, and that is okay.

Please join us for a community read-aloud and discussion on: INSERT DETAILS

With love always,

**YOUR NAME**



# Why is it important to talk about race and racism with young children?

**Racial “colorblindness”** is a dominant approach to parenting and education in the United States. This framework perpetuates the status quo of white dominance by enlisting whole communities to participate in the act of refusing to “see” or recognize someone’s race. In a school community, it can sound like “Oh, I don’t see you as a Black person, I don’t see your color at all.”

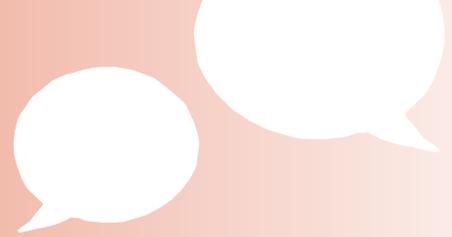
The problem is that communities can’t address what they can’t acknowledge. We cannot end racism when we are unwilling or unable to see the brilliance of people of color, the legacies of resistance and resilience that we are a part of, and the real harm that racism has caused—both structurally and intimately—in the lives of the people we love and in our own. It is simply unethical to pretend as if the issues that happen to people of color are nonexistent or not important.

Furthermore, when we don’t talk about race and racism from an early age, children come to their own conclusions, which often include bias and stereotypes because of the world we live in. Many families, particularly Black, brown, or Indigenous families or families of color, do not have the privilege of not talking about race. They cannot go a day in America oblivious to the ways that race is affecting them. In order to have students better understand the world they live in, it is a necessity that we talk about race. As a trusted grown-up in their life, your role in this conversation is so important! Here are some reasons why:

- **Children are noticing skin color, race, and racism.** Babies notice differences in skin color just like they notice all kinds of human differences. Research also shows that most children begin to experience the impact of systemic racism well before they enter kindergarten.
- **We can help prevent them from developing racial bias.** Without thoughtful intervention, it’s likely that children will internalize the pro-white/anti-Black bias that characterizes the dominant culture in the United States.
- **Children deserve support to navigate their feelings about race and racism.** These conversations can bring up a range of feelings—from joy and pride to confusion and anger. We can help children process these emotions in healthy ways.
- **We need their great ideas on how to change the world!** Our movements for racial, social, and economic justice need the clarity, curiosity, courage, and imagination that young children have to offer.

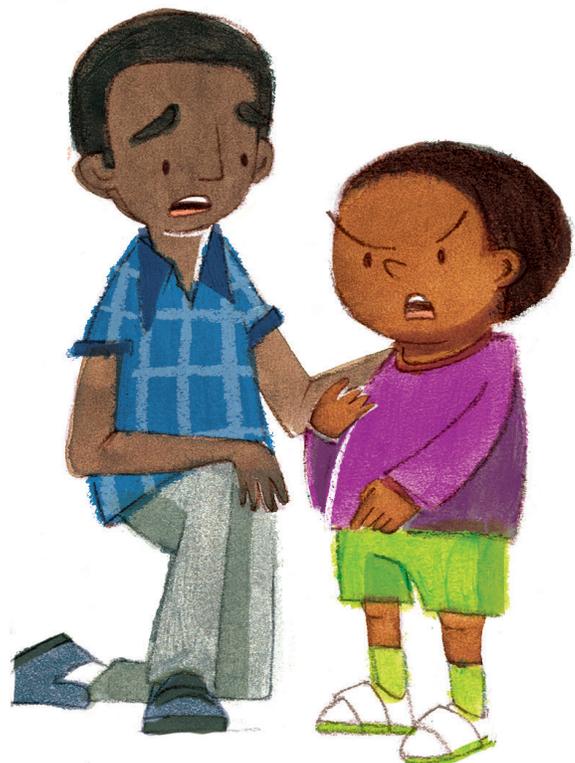


# WHERE DO WE START AS EDUCATORS?

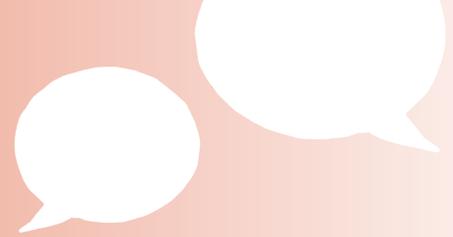


To talk about race and racism with young children, it's important to start or continue the work of understanding it yourself so you are comfortable breaking it down. Here are some tips and resources to get started.

- Learn about systemic racism and practice explaining it in your own words. This will help you find the right words to explain it to young children and follow their lead when they have questions.
- To learn more about what systemic racism is and how it manifests historically and today, here are a few recommended resources for grown-ups to get you started:
  - [What Is Systemic Racism?](#) (videos) by Race Forward
  - [Racism 101](#) by Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)
  - [Allegories on Race and Racism](#) by Dr. Camara Jones
  - [Equal Justice Initiative](#) (museum and website)
  - [Racial Equity Tools](#) (glossary)
- Notice and address racism as it manifests in your classroom, in your own life, in the lives of your students, and in your community. Create a school culture where you continue to discuss this openly with your children and families. This will help them do the same as they grow.
- To get more info and resources on anti-racist professional development, check out these organizations:
  - [Bank Street's Center on Culture, Race & Equity](#)
  - [National SEED Project](#)
  - [Center for Racial Justice in Education](#)
  - [First Conversations](#)



# HOW DO WE START WITH STUDENTS?



Like every other subject, teaching about race and racism in developmentally appropriate ways means that you need to understand where your children are at, and then build from there. Remember, you have permission to talk to young children not just about diversity and differences, but also about injustice and activism.

- Listen and inquire first so you can build on your students' prior knowledge. You may be surprised by how much young children are already thinking about race, and how much they already know!
- Ask families about how they talk about race, racism, and anti-racism at home. Using the appropriate terminology when describing someone's identity is important. You may find that different people prefer different terms to describe themselves. That's OK! If you're ever unsure, just politely ask.
- We can introduce and explore identity terms during play, while reading books, and in classroom discussions and activities. Equipping children with accurate racial vocabulary enables them to be able to talk with us about their ideas. And we want children to feel comfortable talking with us about their ideas regarding race so that we can build off of their existing knowledge and curiosities and address any misconceptions they may already be developing. When facilitating classroom conversations, it is important to remember that each person is not a representative of that racial or ethnic group. That's why we encourage you to seek out anti-racist, abolitionist, anti-bias, and culturally relevant/responsive curriculum guidance over multicultural or "tourist curriculum" approaches to embracing diversity in the classroom.
- Create classroom spaces that reflect the diversity of your community and our world. For example, ensuring your classroom or home space is full of various skin color art materials allows your students to feel confident in their ability to represent themselves in their work. One shade of brown or beige isn't enough for each child to accurately showcase their skin color. Encourage students to match shades to their hands.
- When race comes up, don't shut down the conversation. This sends the message that there is something wrong with talking about race or having a darker skin color. Instead, you can model positive conversations around race so children know they can share observations, ask questions, and feel supported.



## Conversation Starter:

# WHERE DO WE GET OUR SKIN COLOR?\*

Our skin color is made up of melanin. Melanin protects our skin from the sun! People have different amounts of melanin. People who have a lot of melanin have various shades of brown skin. People who have less melanin have various shades of peach or beige skin. People who have very little or no melanin at all have albinism.

**Find a mirror and take a look at your skin.**

- What do you notice?
- Do you have freckles? Moles? Scars?
- What color is your skin? If you had to give your skin color a name, what would you name your skin color?
- What skin colors do you see in our classroom? In the neighborhood? In the books in our classroom?
- How much melanin do you think you have? Everybody has just the right amount for them!



## Activity: Exploring Skin Colors

In this activity, children explore differences in skin color by mixing paints to make a shade that matches their own. This is a great opportunity for getting to know children's comfort with conversations about skin color, human differences, and race. It will also give you a sense of what racial vocabulary they have for talking about race and racism. We encourage you to use this activity as a way to get to know each child's racial identity development and surface the questions they have about skin color and race.

In too many early childhood classrooms, this activity is where the conversation ends. Instead, we hope that you use this activity as a springboard for ongoing and deeper conversations about race, racism, and anti-racism with your students and families.

### Materials needed:

- Tempera paint in red, black, white, and yellow
- Mixing cups or bowls
- Paintbrushes
- Water

**Process:** Using a bowl or small mixing cup, mix small amounts of different colors in order to find the paint combination that most matches your own skin color. Be patient and take your time. Some skin colors have more yellow. Some skin colors have more red. Some skin colors need very little white. Some skin colors need more black. When you have mixed and mixed and found your skin color, use the paint to paint a self-portrait. Be sure you showcase all of your beautiful features.

**Note to educators:** *Be sure to prepare yourself for any comment/question students might say or ask. Keep in mind that by the time children are entering kindergarten, it's likely that they've begun to internalize some of the pro-white/anti-Black bias in our society, and that may come out in the choices they make about their portraits and in the conversations that happen throughout the activity.*

*For example, children sometimes say things that are developmentally appropriate responses to new experiences and may seem offensive to our adult ears. We can redirect these comments with a curious question such as, "I'm wondering why you think that brown is a gross color. Can you tell me more about that?" Don't forget to follow up on the questions and conversations that emerge during the activity in the coming day, weeks, and months. These can be the beginnings of deeper explorations of the nature and scope of anti-Black bias with young children.*

*They also might express discomfort, confusion, or shame. Try to remember that we can support their creativity while also encouraging them to represent themselves accurately. Slow down and try talking about what we love about who they are, as they are in real life. This might sound like an affirmation ("I think your dark brown skin is beautiful. What do you love about your skin?") or a boundary ("That's a beautiful color of brown, but it doesn't match your peachy-colored skin. It's not okay for white people to pretend that they are Black or brown when they're not. Let's work together to find the right shade for you").*

**Alternate activity:** If you have skin tone shades of construction paper, you can make a skin tone collage. Or, if you have skin tone crayons or markers, you can use those to create a self-portrait, or to draw a classmate.

## Conversation Starter:

# WHAT GROUPS DO YOU BELONG TO?\*

Now that you know more about your skin color, think about what racial and ethnic groups you belong to. Some people belong to only one group. Some people belong to many groups. Some people have a strong sense of what it means to be a member of that group and have clear ways of talking about their group membership. Some of us are unsure, or even unaware, of our group membership and will need additional support to develop a positive racial identity and learn appropriate ways to talk about racial groups. There are many more. Talk with your family/caregivers. What is your racial or ethnic group?

- Black
- African American
- Asian
- White
- Latinx/e/a/o
- Indigenous
- Arab
- Pacific Islander
- Biracial

Do you belong to any of these groups? How do you know? What are some other groups that you belong to?

## Activity: Exploring Our World

Find or make a map of your children's world. For younger children, that may look like a map of the school or of the neighborhood around your school. For older children, you might use a map of the city, state, or country. Try naming as many places as you can. Engage with families to locate where they live on the map. Here are some questions you can ask about the groups of people who may live where you live.

- What are the largest groups of people where we live? Why?
- What are the smallest groups of people where we live? Why?
- What are the languages spoken where we live? Why?
- How can we honor and learn more about the Indigenous/Native peoples who call this place home?
- What are the places that make up your community? Compare the places in your community to a friend. Are your lists the same or different?
- Who are the important people in your community? Why are these people important to you?
- With a trusted adult, take a walk through your neighborhood. What do you notice? Who are the people you see? Do you see people who look like you in your neighborhood? Do you hear your language spoken in your neighborhood? How does that make you feel? What questions do you have?

**Note to educators:** *Racial identity is a social identity, meaning that it is about an individual's membership in a racial group inasmuch as it is about how that person feels about their group status internally. These group-based identities are influenced by the impact of a racial hierarchy in the United States which erases the status of Indigenous people, places the status of Black people at the bottom, and positions white people (as a group) above all people of color. This is so unfair and illogical, it can be confusing and upsetting for kids to learn about. There is also so much joy, community, and pride that children can access when they have developed a positive racial identity. Each and every child needs and deserves support from trusted adults to develop a deep sense of their own identity, worth, and belonging. This process necessitates that children understand how race functions in the United States and have accurate and appropriate language for talking about race.*

*Please also keep in mind that the categories of race are always changing. The number of categories, the names of the categories, and who is considered a member of these categories have all changed over time. And it is likely that they will continue to change. These categories are also highly context-dependent, so pay attention to the racial and ethnic groups in your community and the language they use to describe themselves today.*

## Conversation Starter:

# WHAT IS RACE?\*

Did you know that race is a made-up idea? A long time ago, Europeans invented a way of sorting people into groups based on our skin color. They put the groups in order and said that white people were the best. That was not true or fair at all, but a lot of people believed it, and still believe it. Even though race is made up, it's important to talk about because people of color are still treated unfairly. What have you noticed? What questions do you have?

### Activity: Racism can be \_\_\_\_\_

"Racism can be a rule, like when someone says only friends with white skin can play. Racism can be an idea, like thinking princesses only have blonde hair."

What are some other examples of rules or ideas that you can think of that are racist? Racism can be when \_\_\_\_\_?

Try to place your examples in the chart below. You can use chart paper or a whiteboard if you're doing the exercise with the whole group, or print it out as a graphic organizer if you are working in smaller groups or as individuals.

<b>Institutional Racism (Rules &amp; Patterns)</b> "only friends with white skin can play" "how there aren't as many books written about people of color"	<b>Interpersonal Racism (Friends)</b> "calling a person of color a mean name" "if the same friend always has to play the bad guy"
<b>Internalized Racism (Feelings)</b> "thinking princesses only have blonde hair"	<b>Ideological Racism (Ideas)</b> "when people believe this untrue story"
<b>Not Sure</b>	



**Note to educators:** *It's okay if you find overlaps or if there are examples that are hard to place. The goal is to open a conversation about examples of racism that your students know about or have experienced. Over time, you can revisit the chart and deepen your collective understanding by adding in your new knowledge. Try to make sure there's a balance between examples of racism that are far away in place or time and examples that are closer to home. Be brave; the chart is most useful as an organizing tool when the examples of racism are examples that are within your locus of control: yourselves, your classroom, and your school community.*

## Conversation Starter:

# WHAT IS RACISM?\*

Have you ever heard the word “racism”? What do you think it means? Remember when we talked about how race is a made-up idea? When people believe untrue stories about race, that is called racism. For example, when people believe that people of color should not have the same rights and privileges as white people, that’s racism. We learned in *Our Skin* that racism is also the things people do, and the unfair rules they make so that white people get more power and are treated better than everybody else. There are a lot of different ways that racism shows up in our world. Racism has affected our school systems, how we earn and spend money, what laws are passed (or not passed), and how our communities are protected (or not). It can show up in the things people say, the way we behave, and the ways our cities and towns are built.

Racism can even show up in our school library! For a long time, there have not been as many books written about or by people of color. That means that many of the people telling the stories, or the people in the stories, don’t represent all of the many different kinds of people in our country. Let’s take a look at our classroom/school library and see what we find out.

### Activity: Diversity Audit for Educators

Historically, the children’s book publishing industry has privileged white authors and narratives, which can impact the diversity of your own classroom or school library. Take a look at the [infographic](#) of diversity in children’s books from Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen from 2018. Now review the [Cooperative Children’s Book Center School of Education report](#) that analyzes children’s books by and/or about Black, Indigenous, and People of Color from 2018 to 2021. What do you notice about the types of books that were published in 2018 and up to 2021? If you were to look at the books in your home/school/classroom library, what would your diversity collection look like? Whose stories are missing? How can you work to have more representation in your library?

### Activity: Library Audit for Students

You can create your own library quest using the following prompts. Allow your students to search your classroom library as an activity, or just keep a clipboard with this checklist near your library or where you read aloud to the group, so students can check them off as they read daily. Use the completed checklist in a class discussion and ask students to talk about what they noticed and whether there was diverse representation in their classroom library. Add their ideas to the checklist!

\*For younger children, try searching for one prompt a day, or lay out 5–10 books at circle time and ask children what they notice and if they can find any of these characters or stories.

[CLICK HERE FOR PRINTABLE VERSION OF THIS ACTIVITY.](#)

Let’s look at our library! See if you can find...

#### Authors:

- A book written by a Black, Indigenous, or person of color
- A book with a neurodivergent author
- A book by an author with a disability
- A book written by an LGBTQ+ author
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### Book Covers:

- A book with Black, Indigenous, or person of color on the cover
- A book with a person with a disability on the cover
- A book with people with different kinds of bodies on the cover, including fat bodies
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Stories:

- A story with a Black, Indigenous, or person of color as the main character
- A story about a group of kids who are mostly non-white
- A story about a child with LGBTQ+ parents or caregivers
- A story with a trans or nonbinary character
- A story about Black joy!
- A story with Black, Indigenous, or people of color that is not a history book
- A story with LGBTQ+ characters that is not only about their coming-out experience
- A story with Latinx/e/a/o characters that is not about immigration
- A story with BIPOC characters that is not in an urban environment
- A story featuring a multiracial family
- A story with a person or family experiencing homelessness
- A story with a family member who is incarcerated
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Characters:

- A character who is Black, Indigenous, or a person of color
- A character wearing a hijab
- A character with a physical disability
- A neurodivergent character
- An LGBTQ+ character
- A character who is a refugee
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Languages, Cultures, and Traditions:

- A book in a different language than English
- A book that includes a religious tradition or holiday you didn't know about
- A character that wears religious dress or adornments that you haven't seen before
- A story set outside the USA
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Reflection Questions:

- Did you see characters that look like you in our library?
- Did you see books written or illustrated by people who look like you in our library?
- Did you see stories that felt familiar to you and your experience?
- What other stories would you like to see in our library?
- What other kinds of characters would you like to see in our library?
- What do you think we can do to make our library better?



**Note to educators:** Intersectionality is a big word, and this activity is a great opportunity to point out that we all have lots of identities that combine to make up who we are and inform the kinds of experiences we have in the world. Keep in mind that stories about other identities, like having a disability or being LGBTQ+, have also traditionally excluded people of color for a long time. As you are looking together for stories about diverse groups of people, actively notice together whether those identities include or exclude Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

As you engage in this activity, big feelings might come to the surface, especially if some of your students are naming for the first time something that they've likely already noticed—that their identities and stories are not being told in most of the children's books they have read or seen. You can support them by acknowledging that it's unfair and that it doesn't feel good. This activity is also an opportunity to begin to explore the feelings associated with privilege for students who do see themselves reflected in your classroom library.

Seeing yourself represented in stories is really important, and that is why there are lots of people working really hard, all the time, to bring more diversity to children's publishing and other media. You can do it, too! Follow up this activity with a group letter-writing project to children's editors and publishers, your local public library book selection committee, and/or whoever decides which books to purchase for your classroom and school library. In the meantime, engage families by creating a Diverse Books Wishlist together with your class, and asking families to donate books from the list to your library if they can.

## Conversation Starter:

# WHAT CAN WE DO?\*

We've been learning a lot about some things that are really unfair about race and racism. Did you know that for a very long time, and even right now, people are working to make things more fair? They are working for racial justice. One of the biggest movements for racial justice right now is the Black Lives Matter movement. Have you heard that before? Where? What questions do you have?

The Black Lives Matter movement was founded by three Black women—Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors. Together with other activists, it has grown as a movement for liberation guided by principles that celebrate the power and diversity of Black people and center women as well as queer and trans people. Black Lives Matter is important for so many reasons, and there are lots of things people believe when they say “Black Lives Matter.” (Learn more about the 13 Guiding Principles in the book *What We Believe: A Black Lives Matter Activity Book* by Laleña Garcia, illustrated by Caryn Davidson).

Do you remember something we talked about that was unfair? How do you feel when something is unfair? What do you think we can do or say when something is unfair?

### Activity: That's Not Right!

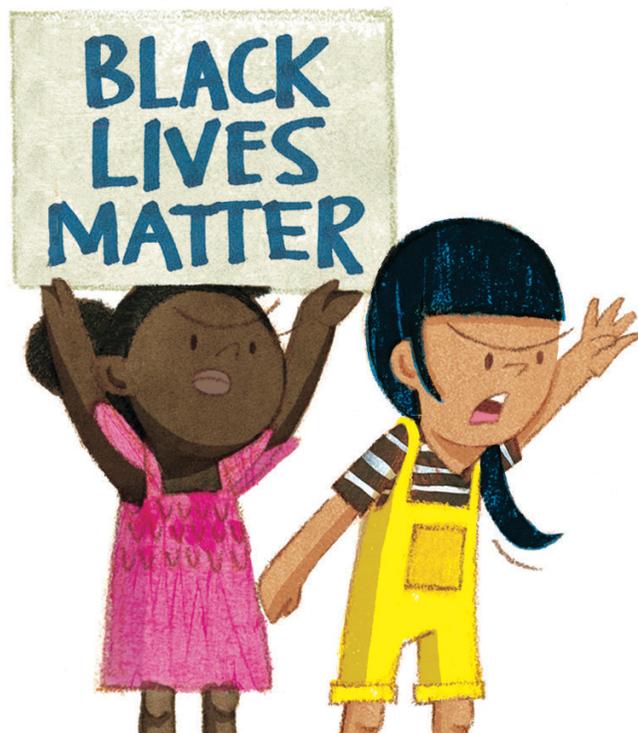
Start by doing some research! Look at pictures of other protest signs, images, and marches. What do they say? Who is at those marches? Do you see people who look like you? Do you see children? Grown-ups? What else do you notice?

Then, you can make your own art. Find different materials that you can use to make a sign, mural, or poster. Use bright colors and big print so everyone can read your words or see your drawing. Think about what you believe, the things that need to change, and what your dreams are for what our world could be.

You can start from a blank page, or use the following prompts:

**FREEDOM IS** \_\_\_\_\_  
**JUSTICE IS** \_\_\_\_\_  
**PEACE IS** \_\_\_\_\_  
**TOGETHER WE CAN** \_\_\_\_\_  
**CHANGE LOOKS LIKE** \_\_\_\_\_  
**I BELIEVE** \_\_\_\_\_  
**BLACK LIVES MATTER**

Create space to share your protest signs in a way that makes sense for your space and community. For younger children, you can use stuffed animals paired with signs to create a play space where children can explore and role-play marching together for racial justice.



**Note to Educators:** *Get engaged! Young children learn more by watching what you do than from what you say about your beliefs. Wherever you live, there is probably a group of people already working together to advance racial justice and advocate for anti-racist policy changes. Find them and get involved! You can start by inviting a local community organizer to your classroom to talk about what they do.*

*If you're not sure where to start, consider getting involved in Black Lives Matter (BLM) organizing and activism or join a local chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ). If you're an educator, it's the perfect time to start planning for next year's Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools. One great way to get started is to make some time to learn together about the thirteen principles that ground our current movement for racial justice and then take action to advance the BREATHE Act with your family or community.*

*You can learn more about the principles of Black Lives Matter and ways to get engaged here:*

- [What We Believe: A Black Lives Matter Activity Book](#) by Laleña Garcia, illustrated by Caryn Davidson
- [Black Lives Matter at School](#)
- [The Movement for Black Lives](#)
- [Black Lives Matter](#)
- [Showing Up for Racial Justice](#)
- [Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools](#)
- [The BREATHE Act](#)



## What to do if you are worried about pushback from parents, caregivers, or school administrators:

Every community is different, and you know your community best. But no matter where you are, we think it's reasonable to expect some questions or pushback. And it's also pretty reasonable to expect some support and encouragement. There is both a great hunger for resources like this from people who are ready and willing to engage in these conversations with young children and also a great deal of misinformation in our society.

One strategy we recommend is talking to your colleagues and communities about these topics early and often. That way, by the time you're sharing these books, it shouldn't be a surprise to your community that these books are aligned with your educational approach, and the reactions and perspectives of your community shouldn't be a surprise to you. Educator and activist Laleña Garcia recommends looking to your school or organization's mission statement. If it talks about equity, building community, or social justice, then sharing these books and ideas are directly tied to that mission.

As an educator of young children, it can be helpful to remember that it's part of your job to give children the resources they need to learn about and affirm their own identities, to discover and celebrate the diversity of their communities, to recognize and talk about unfairness and injustice, and, finally, to learn how to collectively act against injustice. Take some time to read the [2019 Position Statement on Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) released by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

### Some general tips include:

- Before the conversations, get clear about what you believe and why so that you can communicate that clearly, calmly, and concisely.
- Start the conversation by getting curious. Genuinely inquire about caregivers' concerns and questions. Listen. Then listen more. Try to understand the underlying fears, beliefs, and values that are being communicated.
- Be flexible, creative, and collaborative about finding solutions while also holding firm to your boundaries and professional obligations.
- Make space and get support. Try to remember that these are ongoing conversations. Change does not happen in one conversation or with one read-aloud. If you can, try to make some more space for the conversation and reach out to get support. You cannot do this work alone. We all need and deserve support.
- Let go of perfectionism. Try something. Debrief. Then try again, incorporating what you learned.

## Other Resources

We also recommend the organizations and resources below that can provide guidance and support:

[NCTE Intellectual Freedom Center](#)

[NCAC Book Censorship Toolkit: Kids' Right to Read Action Kit](#)

[NCAC and NCTE Responding to Book Challenges Handbook for Educators](#)

[Penguin Young Reader Censorship Resources](#)

# MEET THE CREATORS:



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**Isabel Roxas** is a storyteller and graphic artist. She loves to draw and write stories about curious misfits, young characters who defy the odds, and funny animals. Isabel is a member of The Society of Illustrators, SCBWI, and Ang INK (The Philippine Illustrators Guild).





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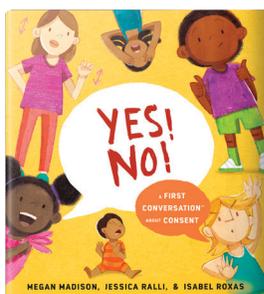
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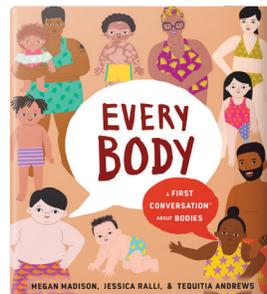
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