



A TOOLKIT FOR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE



CLEVELAND STATE
UNIVERSITY



Children's
Museum
CLEVELAND



let's talk 

**A TOOLKIT FOR
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE**

Created by:



**CLEVELAND STATE
UNIVERSITY**











In partnership with:



**Children's
Museum
CLEVELAND**

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“

To bring about change,
you must not be afraid to
take the first step. We will
fail when we fail to try.

”

Rosa Parks

Letter From the Author

Dear Caregivers,

Thank you for participating in the Let's Talk Series. Through this series we strive to engage and support families in having conversations about race and racism with young children. If you are engaging in this initiative, you are experiencing this unique period in time - balancing the demands of caring for your child, social distancing, and witnessing unparalleled publicizing of police brutality and racial injustice. While you may feel uncomfortable or nervous to begin these discussions, know that your young child does not have enough prior knowledge, understanding, history or life experience on the planet to think-feel-move about the topic the way you do. Your child is just excited to be spending time with you, talking to you, hearing what you think, and being heard as you ask them questions and listen to them share. They are totally ready, willing and enthused to be in conversation with you — even if it is conversations about race. They are experiencing race and racism, but they do not yet realize the importance of the work you are doing right now - but we do. We see you. We appreciate you, and we stand alongside you! Words have power, and conversations taken up now are fertile grounds through which our future will spring up. Thank you for your willingness to plant the seeds of anti-racism.

Sincerely,

Dr. Heather Hill

Heather Hill, Ph.D.
Cleveland State University



A Message From The Children's Museum of Cleveland

The Children's Museum of Cleveland envisions a community where all families have access to the educational resources they need to raise creative, curious, healthy and well-educated children. We believe that honest and impactful racial equity education is foundational to the vitality of our communities. Here are some reasons why we encourage all families to start these conversations early, and talk often:

The forming of biases begins even if you don't intentionally initiate it.

Humans are naturally curious and want to make sense of the world around them. Research has shown that children as young as 6 months old can notice differences in skin color. Children as young as infants start this process and are influenced by their families, experiences, and environments.

It is more effective to develop healthy associations from the start than to unlearn biases that have already taken root.

Learning your native language comes more naturally than learning a language later in life. Biases work in a similar way. Developing a healthy understanding of human differences during the foundation of a child's development will help prevent negative biases from forming. If intervention is delayed until a child is older, the child will likely have already formed internalized biases. Unlearning biases can become more difficult as time goes on.

Race education is not the same experience for all children.

Children of color and different ethnicities can experience racial biases directed at them in the same environments that teach these biases to young children. By starting these conversations with children at a young age, early and often, we can all help create a more equitable and kind world for ALL children.



“
Children are capable of thinking about all sorts of complex topics at a very young age. Even if adults don't talk to kids about race, children will work to make sense of their world and will come up with their own ideas, which may be inaccurate or detrimental.

”
Jessica Sullivan, Ph.D.

Introduction

As an introduction to this work, we offer a few conversational reminders and an overview of the toolkit that we believe will induct and support you along the way.

Embrace Your ‘Adulthood’:

Some caregivers resist conversations about race and racism because they worry that they don’t know enough to talk about the topic. They fear they will say the “wrong” thing or do something that will stifle their child’s development — or cause the child to internalize and espouse racist beliefs and identities. While this may seem right, research suggests the opposite effect. In a society permeated by racism, young children and adults alike are constantly being bombarded by information teaching us about racism and how differences in skin color matter in our everyday lives. When caregivers explicitly or implicitly choose to be silent about issues of race and racism in discussions with their children, they consciously or unconsciously normalize the inequitable messages about race they already have received, and enable these ideas, beliefs and practices to be produced and reproduced over time. To support our children in developing anti-racist dispositions, caregivers must take an active stance to interrupt these social and cultural patterns of talk, and to introduce anti-racist perspectives. It helps if you have engaged with content related to the history of race and racism in America (see the Glossary for resources to support knowledge base); but, trust and believe that your experience as a human living and learning in this nation, qualifies you with enough experience, prior knowledge and perspective to have substantive conversations with someone who just got to Earth, say 3 to 8 years ago. You are the adult. You are not perfect, and you do not and will never, know everything. The great thing is this: you don’t have to. You get to start and keep these conversations going over time. If you make a mistake, or share something you come to find is untrue, there are always opportunities for redos. Young children are notoriously forgiving and resilient in the face of our human flaws. Know that you have enough and know enough to begin these conversations. Your knowledge, experiences and understandings will continue to grow, and the nature of what you say can change over time. As it does, feel comfortable inviting your child into those conversations and creating new opportunities for teaching and learning.

Access Their Prior Knowledge:

It’s important to recognize that our children’s minds are not entirely “blank slates.” They are perpetually observing the world around them and making meaning of what they think they see. Children bring their own perspectives to these conversations. They have a lot of ideas about a lot of things. Some of the things they think they know are often wrong or narrowly constructed. But they’re kids. They don’t know what they don’t know. Their “wrong” answers may not always apply laws of reality, but they can still be used to build understanding. What they share is the outcome of how they think. Their responses carry beliefs about how the world works and the how and why of human behavior. In this way, your job is to first listen to understand so that you can identify the logic driving their perspective and work to disrupt naive theories and introduce new logic and information. Conversations are meant to. When you respect the ideas and logic your child already has, you gain access to additional concepts, metaphors, language and examples that can be used to talk about race and racism in ways that they can understand.

Question the Questioner:

Young children are extremely logical, and let’s be honest – the idea of discriminating against people just because their skin looks different, makes absolutely no sense! Children are deeply attuned to this reality and will probably have a host of “why” questions that will require you to unpack your thinking. Just remember, the work of thinking and unpacking doesn’t have to be shouldered alone. Include your child in the conversation by turning their questions around and using their response as a springboard for elaboration. Race and racism are systems of oppression that rely on arbitrary concepts and unfounded causal relationships (i.e., myths and stereotypes) that were created with individual and structural intentions to sustain white supremacy. Rationale for wanting to retain power and control drive the behaviors of people supporting and enabling these systems. Young children have a strong desire for autonomy, and as a result they have insights that can translate into conversations about race and racism. The questions they pose construct rich opportunities for them to support, enrich and leverage their own thinking in learning about structural oppression.

Cultivate a Culture of Talking and Walking:

Conversations about race and racism are best when coupled with activities and exercises young people can take up to “do something” with the information that they are learning. The toolkit includes literature, conversational guides and extension activities to offer fields for you and your child to practice talking about race and racism over time. Through participation you are modeling the conversational norms and behaviors of naming and countering racist ideologies, policies and practices. Consider ways to move the conversation into the community so that young children can experience the power that comes from putting their words and beliefs into individual and collective action. The extension activities serve as a bridge to social action that can be leveraged into long-term engagement in the community. Normalizing conversation and social action empowers young children to become the advocates and agents of change needed for societal transformation.

Let’s Talk!

The toolkit is our attempt to provide a starting point for conversations about race and racism. While the developmental narratives, conversational guides, books, and extension activities are meant to offer a framework to engage your child in equity-centered talk, the nature of the conversations and the relationship to the narratives, guides, and activities will vary. Race matters. The process of racialization is shared but experienced in unique ways. Thus, your racial identity, ethnic background, status as native born or newcomer, and economic standing are all aspects of identity that influence your experiences and prior knowledge about race and racism, and will necessarily influence what you talk about, how you talk about it, and why you are taking up these conversations. Lean into your and your child’s experiences as resources for conversation over time. Please also note: the developmental narratives have been constructed using chronological views of age. This view of age may not wholly encompass your child’s experience of race and racialization. For example, studies show that Black children experience “adultification” as early as preschool, meaning their experience of being treated as adults by teachers and not being afforded expectations of play and innocence may influence their experience and understanding of race and racism in ways different from white children. You know your child in ways we could never access: feel free to use this toolkit flexibly to meet their unique needs, interests and experiences. The journey of conversation is a gift that will continue to reap benefits in your family, and in our communities. Let’s get the conversations going: Your children are ready to talk!

The Toolkit:

The toolkit includes:

1. Developmental narratives to present insight into your child’s cognitive development and to support you in developing and sustaining developmentally-appropriate conversations about race and racism over time.
2. Anti-racist learning objectives to provide you and your child tangible learning goals around knowledge, skills and attitudes that you can assess and nurture over time.
3. Children’s literature highlighting selected book(s) that can be used as prompts for conversation and supports for inquiry, comprehension, discussion and social action.
4. Conversational guides that provide language to support you in talking about race with your child in ways that are simple and age-appropriate.
5. Extension activities and recommended reading that can create opportunities to learn about race and racism through play, art, and ongoing social interaction.
6. Glossary of terms that deepens personal knowledge and widens the conversational base for talking with your child about race and thinking, conversing and acting strategically about anti-racist social action.

Together these components serve as a toolkit for recognizing and dismantling systems of oppression generally, and racism more specifically, and taking up the “good trouble” of anti-racist work.

Glossary

Note: This guide is not universal, but rather it is to serve as a tool for engaging in anti-racist talk and actions with your family. Varying experiences with race and racism influence how you take up and use the curriculum and have or are currently experiencing racism.

Race: Although race is prominently used as a way to capture ethnic heritage and to categorize people in relation to observable differences in skin color, there is no biological basis for race as an explanatory factor of difference among people. In other words, it is not a biological reality that there are different species or “kinds of people.” Rather ideas of race were created by white people in power to determine if and how rights and services were afforded to individuals and groups. These categories have relied on arbitrary characteristics that have been locally determined and have been codified in law by various states and have changed over time. Although race is not ‘real,’ the codification of race in law has had direct social and political consequences for if, and how, individuals/groups were recognized as citizens, afforded civil rights and protections, allowed participation in forms of public and private government, business and services (See the legislation related to the: Three-Fifths Compromise, The One-Drop Rule, Anti-miscegenation laws, De jure segregation).

Racism: Racism is a system of oppression that is mediated by overt and covert strategies to maintain an unequal social order or racial hierarchy where White people are at the top and Black people are at the bottom. Everyday media and literature are full of images and story lines that are rooted in racist and white supremacist ideologies. The insidious nature/permanence of this system is made possible by an interconnection of media, research, and schooling that presents this hierarchy as normal and natural. The hierarchy is enabled by representations of White people as superior, “civilized,” and their knowledge, perceptions of beauty and cultural practices as standard and models for others to aspire. Schools are often used as a means of acculturation. In this way, both children and their caregivers have often experienced similar contexts of schooling.

Anti-Racism: Acceptance of the reality that racism is embedded in our everyday society. Without intentional efforts to disrupt the status quo, the inequitable practices of exclusion, erasure, marginalization, and devaluation will continue over time. Anti-racism can exist at the individual or interpersonal level, naming and acting against harmful speech, behaviors and activities encountered or observed in everyday life; and can also exist at the institutional level, speaking up and protesting policies, procedures, processes and people that work to erase, silence, and harm people of color. Anti-racism necessitates a both/and approach to dismantle the system over time.

Whiteness: Constructions of race are imbued with beliefs of white superiority or assumption of the features, behaviors, and practices and skin colors associated with Northern European descent as evidence of biological superiority. As immigration increased the demographics of American society, particularly the ethnic diversity of the population, race was used as a construct to unify people with white skin as both “white people” and as “Americans.” These beliefs or ideologies have been cultivated and protected by the judicial, legislative and executive branches of government, across the local, state and federal levels of government.

Colorblindness/Colormutism: The conscious and unconscious beliefs and associated practices of withdrawal and avoidance of “seeing,” “discussing,” or thinking critically about inequitable experiences of race and racism mediated by differences in skin color. This approach is often taken up by caregivers as an attempt to avoid reproducing racist beliefs/practices and ideologies in young people. Research shows that these approaches often produce the opposite effects - caregivers miss opportunities to intervene and disrupt racist attitudes and biases young people have internalized and leave their children with limited to no alternative strategies for thinking and engaging with others who are different. These approaches ensure that racial inequity continues to appear normal and natural over time.

Resources for Adults

Racism and racial bias have a long and complex history in our world. Here are some resources that elaborate on the themes outlined in the glossary. This is not an exhaustive list, but can serve as a starting point.

Articles

“Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition”
by F. James Davis, PBS.org

“What we mean when we say ‘Race is a social construct’”
by Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Atlantic

“11 ways race isn’t real”
by Jenée Desmond-Harris, Vox

“Kill the Indian, and Save the Man”: Capt. Richard H. Pratt on the Education of Native Americans, historymatters.gmu.edu

“White immigrants weren’t always considered white — and acceptable”
by Brando Simeo Starkey, The Undeclared

“How ‘Prerequisite Cases’ Tried to Define Whiteness”
by Matthew Wills, JSTOR Daily

“Plessy v. Ferguson”
by History.com editors, History.com

“Historical Foundations Of Race”
National Museum of African American History and Culture, nmaahc.si.edu

Books

The History of White People by Nell Irvin Painter

The Mismeasure of Man by Stephen Jay Gould

Films

Race: the Power of an Illusion

13th

Unspoken: America’s Native American Boarding Schools

A Class Divided

Museums

Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia

National Museum of African American History and Culture

“
We can’t teach what
we don’t know,
and we can’t lead where
we won’t go.

”
Malcolm X

AGES 0-2

At this age your child is beginning to become aware of him/herself as a separate individual, and recognize familiar people, places and things. They are learning to use their language (verbal and non-verbal) as a tool to communicate with others. Language may include pointing and signaling things they find of interest. Young children at this age are able to identify parts of their bodies and are curious about their and others' physical characteristics, including skin color, hair texture, and gender anatomy. As early as 6 months old, children notice differences in skin colors and may show signs of discomfort around or fixation on unfamiliar people and/or people who look different. They do not yet have the language to express the thinking driving their feelings or inquire about what they see. Sometimes children this age will "match" people based on physical attributes, and thus, show their awareness of people as the same and/or different. At this age they are learning to interact with others, and are looking to their caregivers for attitudes, feelings and responses to difference as indicators of the expected norms and behaviors. Intentionality in recognizing and affirming of difference in physical attributes normalizes diversity as part of their understanding of the human experience.

Anti-Racist Learning Objectives:

- Identify parts of the body, i.e. eyes, nose, hair, and skin as attributes of the human body.
- Distinguish the ways in which features of the body are the same and different.
- Demonstrate positive feelings, attitudes and pro-social behaviors toward people with different skin colors, facial features and hair textures using descriptive language and nonverbal messages.

Recommended Readings:

- *Two Eyes, a Nose and a Mouth* by Roberta Grobel Intrater
- *Shades of Black* by Sandra Pinkney
- *Shades of People* by Shelly Rotner and Sheila Kelly
- *We're Different. We're the Same* by Bobbi Kates

Learning & Discussion Guide:

"Look at me if you have eyes. Smell the air if you have a nose. Shout hooray if you have a mouth! Let's count how many eyes/noses/mouths we have."

Read the book *Two Eyes, a Nose and a Mouth* by Roberta Grobel Intrater. "Does everyone in the book look the same? When we go to the store does everyone in the store look the same?" Identify parts of the face and write the words - eyes, nose and mouth. Create a list of descriptors (e.g., round, small, etc.) to capture differing characteristics you and your child uncover in discussion.

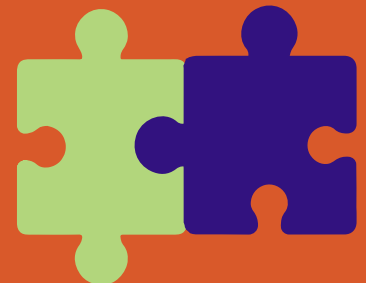


Extension Activities:

Mirror Observations: Caregivers and child will use a mirror to explore similarities and differences in their physical attributes. Caregivers can use the images of the book to identify similar features in persons with differing skin colors. Discussion can support children in recognizing and distinguishing similarities and differences in the features they notice. Caregivers can draw on children's knowledge of shapes and numbers to help them engage with the text. "Can you point to the eyes... the nose... the mouth?"

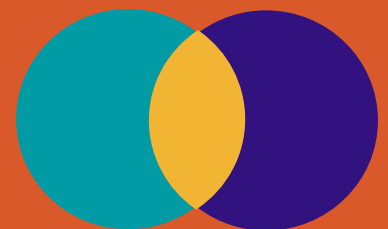


Photo Jigsaw Puzzles: Caregivers will receive a group of jigsaw puzzles (or can cut out images from magazines or use pictures of friends and family) reflecting photographs of the faces of children and adults with differing skin colors. Cutting the photos in horizontal sections, individual strips of eyes, a nose, and a mouth can be brought together to create faces. The sections of the puzzle will allow children to draw on their awareness of differences in skin color to construct faces of smiling people.



Same and Different: Caregivers will receive a Venn diagram as a resource for having children sort the photographs of people in ways that include and go beyond similarities and differences in skin color.

"Can you put all the people with brown hair together? These people have different skin colors, but they are both people with the same eye color. Ooooh those eyes are the shapes of ovals... These are kind of like circles... I like them all. They may look different, but they all help the people to see/smell/taste. They are really beautiful."



AGES 3-4

At this age your child is aware of differences in skin color and is beginning to form beliefs about what those differences mean and how and why they exist. These beliefs include errors, racist ideologies, stereotypes, and implicit biases absorbed from the media language and imagery (e.g., cartoons, advertisement, books, movies, merchandise) and directly and indirectly communicated by members of your family and extended communities. Although they are not yet clear on if and how physical attributes will grow, change, or remain the same over time they are deeply attuned to the associations between concepts of intelligence, beauty, strength, goodness, and skin colors and group identities. As early as 4 years old, young children begin to show evidence of internalized white superiority or internalized oppression (i.e., beliefs that people with darker skin color are inferior, least desirable), and begin to discriminate against others (i.e., making choices to tease, exclude or refuse to play with others, based on differences in skin color). Children this age do not distinguish fine-tuned gradations of skin color and are not fully attuned to the intersectional differences that distinguish ethnic, cultural, and racial groups, but they can learn that skin serves the same purposes for everyone, regardless of skin color and can appreciate that all colors are beautiful.

Anti-Racist Learning Objectives:

- Identify associations internalized about differences in skin color and concepts of beauty, intelligence, and kindness.
- Disrupt racist ideologies and stereotypes associated with differing skin colors and ranking in beauty, intelligence, and strength.
- Describe the biological functions of skin for/on the human body.
- Introduce positive associations between differences in skin colors.

Recommended Readings:

- *The Skin You Live In* by Michael Tyler
- *Happy in Our Skin* by Fran Manushkin
- *Skin Like Mine* by LaTasha Perry
- *Dancing in my Bones* by Sylvia Andrews
- *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers

Learning & Discussion Guide:

Start by reading *The Skin You Live In* by Michael Tyler.

Look at your skin. What do you see? What kind of skin do you live in? Skin colors come in different shades. What shade is your skin? What shades does our family's skin come in? Some people think that you can know what someone is thinking or feeling just by looking at their skin. Some people think that people who live in lighter/whiter shades of skin are nicer, smarter and more beautiful than people who live in different colors of skin. That is not true. People who live in all kinds of skin are beautiful, nice, and smart.

We can't really know how a person really is, just by looking at them. Everyone's skin is like beautiful "wrapping paper." Who they really are is on the inside. Skin protects the things inside our bodies while we are doing all the fun things we love to do. What do you like to do in the skin you live in? Some people think that people with different shades of skin should not live, go to school, or work together. Does that seem fair? What are some fun things we might do with people who live in different shades of skin?



Extension Activities:

Skin We Live in Picture Stories: The child and caregiver can draw picture-stories illustrating what they love to do in the skin they live in. Together they can mix paints to create shades that "match" their skin. After they've painted the individual or family portraits, additional materials (e.g., pipe cleaners, googly eyes) can be added to capture physical attributes of eyes, nose, mouth and hair. Caregivers can jot down notes to capture the story the child shares about their art. The child can also create a picture story showing a fun thing they would like to do with someone who lives in a different shade of skin (i.e., someone real or imagined). Developing these stories works to humanize individuals with different skin colors and to normalize interracial interaction.

Color Swatch Puppets: Color swatches provide a tangible artifact to help children understand the concepts of "shades" and to see variation in skin color. Caregiver and child can cut circles from colored paper to create a "skin observation strip" that can be placed over skin and used to identify their shades of skin. Children can then decorate the circles to create faces, and glue them to popsicle sticks to turn them into puppets. These puppets can be used to assess the beliefs children have internalized about differing skin colors. First, ask your child to show you which puppet they think most friends or adults think is smart/dumb, beautiful/not beautiful, nice/mean, etc. Then, support the child in disrupting those beliefs through creative puppet play exploring what really makes people beautiful/strong and smart.



AGES 5-6

In this age span, young children are deeply aware of differences in skin color and gender and are exploring the meaning of their intersectional identities (race, gender, culture) and the societal messages presented about them and others. They can distinguish gradation in skin color (e.g., light brown and dark brown) and now understand that physical attributes, like skin color or gender anatomy, will remain constant over time. Thus, they express deep interest and curiosity in understanding how the similarities and differences they notice have come to be. Although kids this age show great capacities for empathy and interest in learning about others, they still struggle to see things from another person's point of view. Thus, they can use exclusionary language, prejudicial insults or name-calling to demonstrate internalized feelings of racial superiority or inferiority and to intentionally hurt another's feelings. Language and cognitive development being made at this age afford children an ability to think symbolically and use words to represent objects. They can now understand concepts like 'melanin' and simple scientific explanations about how differences in skin color are produced; and begin to distinguish the biology of skin color from the artificial concept of race (i.e., how people with different levels of melanin are arbitrarily categorized). Much of their learning is mediated through concrete experiences. The children's understanding of differences between "right" and "wrong" behavior, and their deep concern for fairness in their everyday lives, provide context for exploring concepts like prejudice and discrimination and for developing critical thinking skills and explicit strategies for taking up inclusive and anti-racist behaviors at home, in their classrooms, and in the community.

Anti-Racist Learning Objectives:

- Describe melanin and how it functions to produce differences in skin color.
- Distinguish race as a social construct and describe how racial categories have been used historically to separate and rank people with differing skin colors.
- Distinguish myths/stories told about people of different racial backgrounds (i.e., racist ideologies about biological superiority or inferiority of White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native Americans, etc.).
- Define inclusion and exclusion and explore the consequential feelings of people who are excluded.
- Define fairness and unfairness.
- Provide rationale for racial diversity and strategies for inclusion in play and work.

Recommended Readings:

- *All the Colors We Are: The Story of How We Get Our Color/Todos los Colores de Nuestra Piel: La Historia de Porque tenemos diferentes colores de piel* by Katie Kissinger
- *Let's Talk about Race* by Julius Lester
- *Grandpa, Is everything Black Bad* by Sandy Lynne Holman
- *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *The Sneetches* by Dr. Seuss



Learning & Discussion Guide:

Read the books *All the Colors We Are: The Story of How We Get Our Color/Todos los Colores de Nuestra Piel: La Historia de Porque tenemos diferentes colores de piel* by Katie Kissinger and *Let's Talk about Race* by Julius Lester.

People have many different colors of skin. Why do you think people have different skin colors? What stories have you heard about people with different skin colors?

We get these differences because we have something in our skin called melanin. Everyone has melanin, but some people have more or less than others. Melanin is produced by the sun. People who have ancestors who lived in places with a lot of sunlight gained a lot of melanin, and people with ancestors who lived in places with little sunlight did not get as much.

Some people looked at their skin and looked at others and they couldn't figure out why people looked different, so they made up stories to explain it. Some people thought that melanin made people stupid, ugly, and evil. Some people thought that people who had a lot of melanin were not humans. People shared their ideas by telling these stories to their friends, their families, and to their children. More and more people started to believe these stories and started to treat people differently.

Some people made up nicknames for people to be called based on what they looked like. Even though no human is actually a color, they called people who did not have a lot of melanin "white" and people with a lot of melanin in their skin "Colored" or Black, Native American, Asian and Hispanic/Latino Americans. Some white people made laws that would not allow Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian and Native American people to live in neighborhoods, go to schools, eat at restaurants, or work at jobs with them. They made laws that required everyone to exclude them. We have different laws now, but some people still think we should exclude Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian and Native Americans. Do you think it's fair to exclude people because they have more melanin in their skin? People are humans, no matter their skin color. How can we work with people of different races to make sure everyone is included?



Extension Activities:

Book of Me: Race is a social construct constituted by the stories we have been told and the stories we are telling about our and others' differences in skin color. In an era where our communities are often segregated, the stories children receive about others are often transmitted by media, curriculum, and institutions where the voices of members of marginalized racial groups are not included – and when included often reify and reflect racist ideologies and deficit-based perspectives. Young children need support in recognizing their and other's racial identities, as well as strategies for showing and getting to know others beyond racial perceptions.

The 'Book of Me' exercise invites caregivers and children to name and explore the multiple dimensions of their identities. Using the questions in this guide as prompts for conversation, writing and drawing, the caregiver and child can label blank sheets of papers with the statements found in the book e.g., "My favorite food is _____. My hobbies are _____. My religion is _____. My nationality is _____. and My race is _____." The process of finishing the statements and illustrating their thinking can support the caregiver and child in conversing about their multiple identities in ways that include and go beyond race.

Each page offers opportunities for the caregiver and child to share stories about their lives and the ancestors that have come before them. Caregivers can pull together pictures from different parts of the child's life to help them capture and explore the multiple dimensions of their racial identity, including, and going beyond race.

These stories can be 'told' digitally through an electronic compilation of audiovisual recordings, photos/images or mediated through oral storytelling or knit together with writing samples. The caregiver and child can also consider creating an additional labeled book that can also be used as a prompt to support young children in interviewing others (within and across racial backgrounds) and learning the stories of who they are.



Remixing Dominant Depictions by Putting Young Children in the Illustrator's Chair:

Now that children understand that differences in skin color are caused by melanin production associated with geographic exposure to sunlight subsumed by their ancestors, they can begin to recognize and critique stories that include stereotypes and racist ideologies. One way that racism is 'taught' to young children is through use of imagery and use of color. From very early on associations are presented that construct white and black in opposition of one another, such that things that are white are constructed as good, pure and innocent while things that are black are constructed as bad, impure and evil. By extension, characterization and imagery in children's literature, cartoons, and advertisement often portray actors, cartoon figures and people through similar framing.

A caregiver would first discuss the text conversing specifically about the racial composition of the characters they see, i.e. who is and who is not included in the story, how characters are illustrated, and the kinds of roles they are constructed to play. Asking young children to name what they encounter and to question what they see is a way to disrupt the normalization of the exclusion, marginalization and devaluation of members of non-dominant racial groups. This practice can be developed and sustained through caregiver and child engagement with children's picture books.

One way to do this is to put children in the "Illustrator's Chair" and invite them to take on the identity of an illustrator to recognize, critique and re-imagine illustrative decision making for equity and inclusion. The caregiver can begin with practices of "noticing and naming" observing for issues of race and racism and naming instances where stereotypes, erasure and marginalization are operating.

Conversation might sound like, "I just noticed something... all these characters in this story are white... When I read a story, I like to see people who look like me. A lot of illustrators like to draw pictures that have characters that look like them. I'm wondering how Black friends might feel reading this book if they don't get to be included. If you were the illustrator, what would you do? How could you make this story be more fun and interesting for kids to read and look at who aren't white?"

By putting the child in the "Illustrator's Chair" they get to consider how they use their agency to include others in storytelling in ways that are non-stereotypical or marginalized. Then, the caregiver and child can begin the practice of collaborative writing and illustration - remixing the book title, adding new lines in the story (if needed) and illustrating the text in more inclusive and equitable ways. Together, the caregiver and child could reconstruct the story to include fun and interesting story lines with their illustrations at the center.

AGES 7-8

At this age children are aware of intersectional identities, marked by differences in race, gender, class, and ethnicity, and are beginning to establish group identities, membership, and sense of belonging. Racial bias can influence their decisions to include and exclude others. In this age span young people demonstrate positive and negative racial attitudes toward members of their own and other racial groups, and see a rise in name-calling based on race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation. Despite the surge in behavior, children this age show understanding for how stereotypes are harmful, and greater capacity for empathy for victims of discrimination and prejudice, bullying, teasing and name-calling.

By ages 7 to 8, young children have mastered a range of interpersonal skills and understandings of fairness and are now able to apply them in practices of complex and creative problem solving. They can understand racism as a socio-historical system of advantage and disadvantage where they and others are privileged and marginalized. The awareness of themselves and others as members of multiple communities (e.g., family, school, neighborhood, nation) extends their capacity to think more broadly about what it means to be a good citizen.

Everyday racism appears normal and natural to young children. The process of noticing and naming racial inequities is key to disrupting systems of racism. Thus, they can more confidently and critically think about the interpersonal dynamics of racism, sexism and classism and consider how to interrupt them. They are interested in learning about the ‘history’ of their own people and of other communities. Exposure to anti-racist role models and cross-racial and interracial groups create opportunities for young children to find personal connection to the work, heighten their awareness of their privileges or cultural resilience, and imagine a future where they are committed to anti-racist values and social action over time. These connections work to reduce the social isolation they may encounter as they navigate environments where the status quo is idealized and racial inequities are normalized, privileged and ignored. Healthy peer relationships support children in developing friendship skills and strategies for peer mediation and conflict resolution (i.e., moving from bystander to upstander for anti-racism).

Anti-Racist Learning Objectives:

- Distinguish concepts of individual and structural racism and anti-racism.
- Explain how systems of racism have privileged and marginalized people, based on race.
- Describe the role of government (i.e., legislators, judges, and executive officials) in making, ruling, and carrying out laws that required Native-American, Black, Hispanic/Latino and Asian Americans to be separate from white people in schools, residential communities, and workplaces.
- Identify strategies members of marginalized racial communities have taken up to resist systems of oppression.
- Brainstorm strategies for individual and collective everyday anti-racism.

Recommended Readings:

- *A Kids Book About Racism* by Jelani Memory
- *Boycott Blues* by Andrea Pinkney
- *Wings* by Christopher Myers
- *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez & Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* by Duncan Tonatiuh
- *Schomburg: The Man Who Built a Library* by Carole Boston Weatherford
- *Dear Benjamin Banneker* by Andrea Davis Pinkney
- *Hidden Figures: The True Story of Four Black Women and the Space Race* by Margot Lee Shetterly

Learning & Discussion Guide:

Read the books *A Kids Book About Racism* by Jelani Memory and *Boycott Blues* by Andrea Pinkney.

Some white people created laws that required people of other races to be kept separate from white people. These laws were created because some white people believed that Native-American, Black, Hispanic/Latino and Asian Americans were inferior to them and should not be treated as equal citizens.

Do you know what it means to be a citizen? What kinds of things should we get to do as citizens? Can you imagine not getting to do those things? What would you do if everybody else around you got to do those things, but you couldn't just because people didn't want you to because of the color of your skin? How would you feel? What would you do?

Treating people unfairly because of the color of their skin is called racism. Racism has been going on in our country for hundreds of years. Some people think people of color should be enslaved, serving or entertaining them. People of color have led movements for their civil rights, and many people have joined with them in fights to have these laws changed. Even though we don't have the same laws that required us to be apart from each other, we still have laws, and people that create and carry out laws that do not treat people fairly and work to exclude people of color from schools, neighborhoods and workplaces. Some white people are still fighting to keep people of color from going to schools, living in neighborhoods, and working at jobs. If we don't speak up and do things to stop people from treating people unfairly, racism will continue to go on.





Extension Activities:

Interactive Textbook: Examining the History of the Civil Rights Movement through Picture Books:

At this age, young children are beginning to take up skills as independent researchers. In continuation of discussion of race and structural oppression, caregivers and young children can embark on collaborative research to understand the history of race and racism in America.

To prompt the activity, caregivers can ask children about their personal experiences with being treated unfairly or witnessing others being treated unfairly. These questions can draw out their understanding of concepts of fairness and justice, to support them in thinking about how they received and/or provided support in resolving the situation and imagining other ways they could have remedied the situation. This conversation can provide contexts to consider the many strategies of resistance that have been taken up by and with members of marginalized racial communities (e.g., protest, marching, and boycotting).

As an extension of *Boycott Blues*, caregivers can gather a range of picture books focused on the Civil Rights Movement, and those highlighting the lives of members of the movement such as Martin Luther King Jr., Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks, Thurgood Marshall and Ida B. Wells-Barnett presented in the book. Currently, many school-based textbooks marginalize or erase the history of marginalized Americans. Children can use the resources to construct an interactive “textbook” where they bring together information they glean from the text and images as well as information and audiovisual resources they find online to curate their emerging knowledge of history. Platforms like Google Slides or Jamboard offer space for young people to capture, curate and share their learning publicly across contexts of home, school and community.



Pause-Reflect/Role Play-Discuss: Walk in Someone's Shoes:

Reflection provides an opportunity for caregivers and young children to “step into the shoes” of others to consider how they might be thinking or feeling at particular places, spaces and times. Picture books provide “windows and mirrors” for young people to see another perspective and to reflect on their own experiences.

During reading caregivers can regularly embed opportunities to pause-reflect and discuss what they encounter, to help young people cultivate empathy and to engage in multiple perspective taking. Illustrations can serve as contexts to which young people can be prompted to enter and take on differing perspectives of characters on a page (that may or may not be the main protagonist or a character with a name at all).

For example, in reading *Boycott Blues* a caregiver might ask: How do you think Rosa Parks is feeling when the officer asked her to give up her seat? What do you think that person in the crowd is thinking? What might the people have been feeling on day 363? What were they protesting? How did they resist injustice? What would you say if you were in their shoes?

These questions can serve as scenarios that can be drawn from the book or generated by the caregiver and child. Write the questions onto slips of paper and select the different questions to explore how racism manifests. Discuss what it might look like and feel like to engage in anti-racist behaviors. Role play can also provide caregivers opportunities to model language and practices for speaking out, standing up and standing with others in pursuit of equity and social justice.

About The Diversity Institute

The Diversity Institute at Cleveland State University is pleased to partner with The Children's Museum of Cleveland to produce this handbook as a resource for parents and caregivers to engage their children in difficult discussions regarding racial equity. Research, teaching, and advocacy are core activities of The Diversity Institute to promote community awareness of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Opportunities to share this knowledge early in the lives of children are rare. During the formative years is an opportune time to introduce concepts that will promote social justice and reduce bias before youth reach adulthood. We anticipate that this guide will augment the wonderful work that the Children's Museum undertakes to help young children flourish as they learn about the world in which they live.

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Cleveland State University is committed to building an inclusive community that recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. To this end, the university embraces human diversity and is committed to equal access, equal opportunity, affirmative action and eliminating discrimination. This commitment is both a moral imperative consistent with an intellectual community that celebrates individual differences and diversity, as well as a matter of law.

About The Children's Museum of Cleveland



The Children's Museum of Cleveland (CMC) is a leader in early childhood development, offering families a one-of-a-kind museum experience built on the knowledge that young children learn best through play. Our facility is home to seven unique exhibits that provide children the opportunity to explore everything from physics principals to artistic methods in an approachable, hands-on environment. Each of our exhibit spaces was thoughtfully designed with influence from early childhood education professionals, and inspired by innovative learning spaces from around the globe. We are an advocate for self-directed play as one of the best ways for a young child to learn, and offer interactive experiences geared towards children ages birth-8.



We are a museum for all children – of all backgrounds, abilities, and stages of development. We respect not only childhood but also the parent and caregiver as the child's first teacher. We are a community resource, providing experiences that can bridge a child's learning between the Museum, home, and school. CMC facilitates many community partnerships to share our work and educational resources throughout the community, as well as bringing in other cultural and educational opportunities to the families that we serve.



CMC is grateful for the opportunity to partner with The Diversity Institute at Cleveland State University to create resources for families to engage in anti-racist learning. It is our hope that these materials can support families in navigating these complex conversations, and help promote a more informed, inclusive, kind, and equitable future for all children.



Visit Us Online!

All of the materials that you see here, including a digital download of this handbook, activity print-outs, and read-along videos of all of the books on the recommended readings lists can be accessed for free on our website.

VISIT US AT
cmccleveland.org/letstalkaboutrace



A TOOLKIT FOR
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE

CREATED BY THE DIVERSITY INSTITUTE AT CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF CLEVELAND • 2021



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Children's
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let's talk 

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