

Talking about Race and Social Justice with Young Children

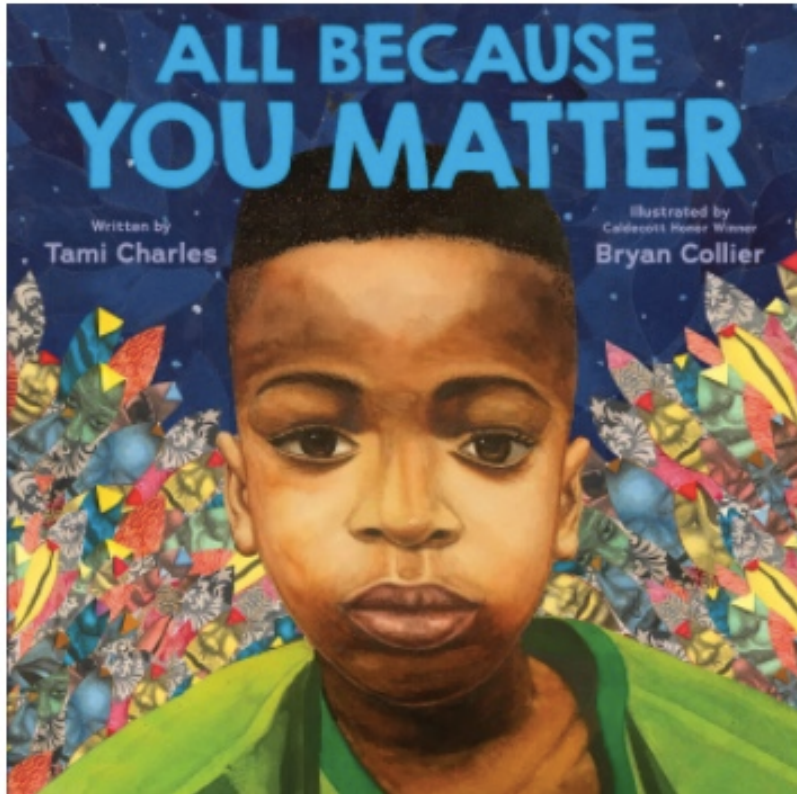


Webinar presentation by Debbie LeeKeenan,
Lecturer, Co-Author of *Leading Anti-bias Early Childhood Programs: A Guide for Change*,
former director of the Eliot-Pearson Children's School
Boston Area Reggio Inspired Network: July 9, 2020

Now is not the time to be silent...



Outline



- Framework
 - Becoming an Anti-bias/Anti-Racist Educator
 - Four Anti-bias Goals and Racialized Identity

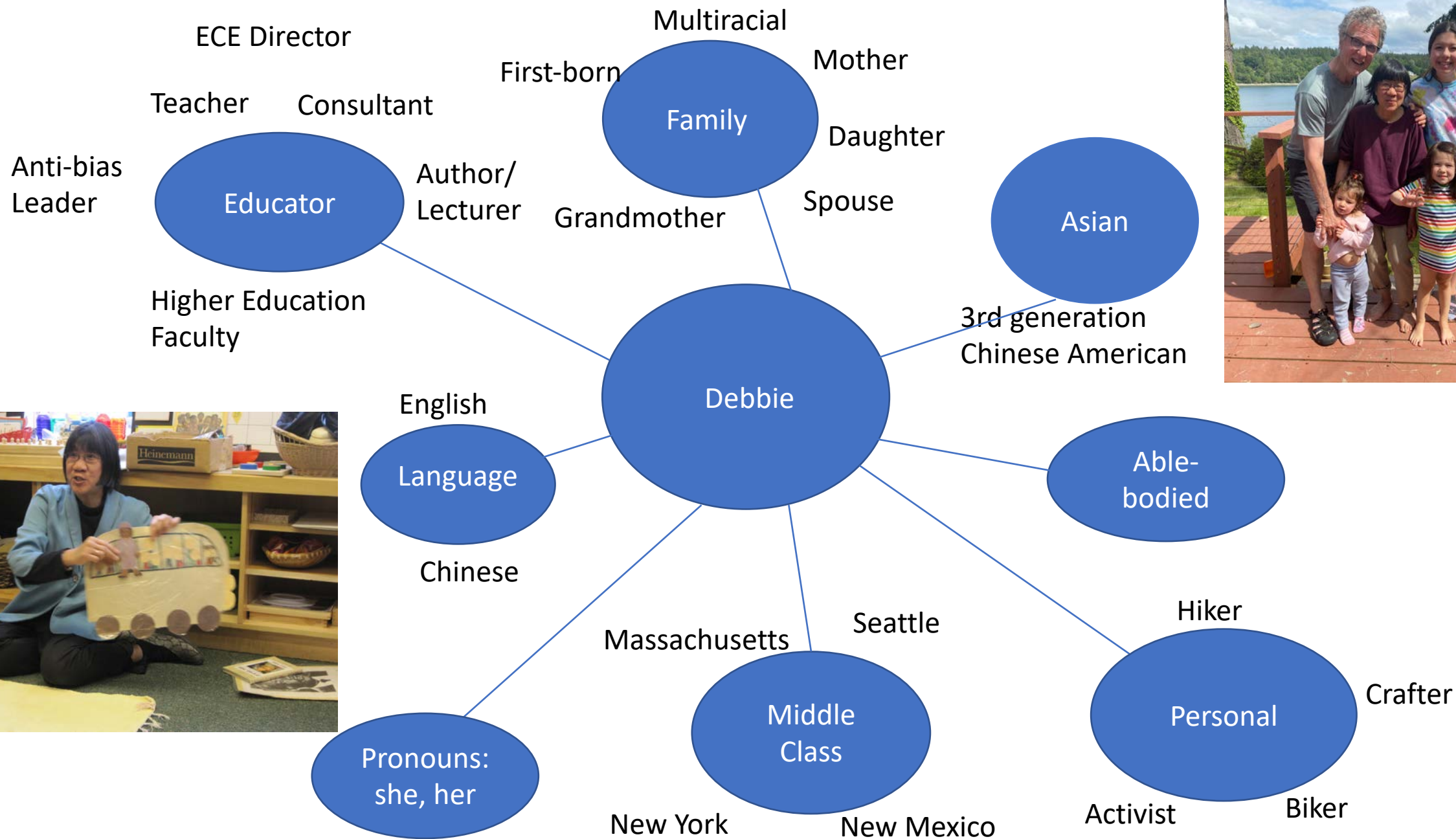
Q and A

- Strategies for Talking with Children about Race and Social Justice

Q and A

- Promoting Social Justice Through Literary Lens in Children's Books

Q and A



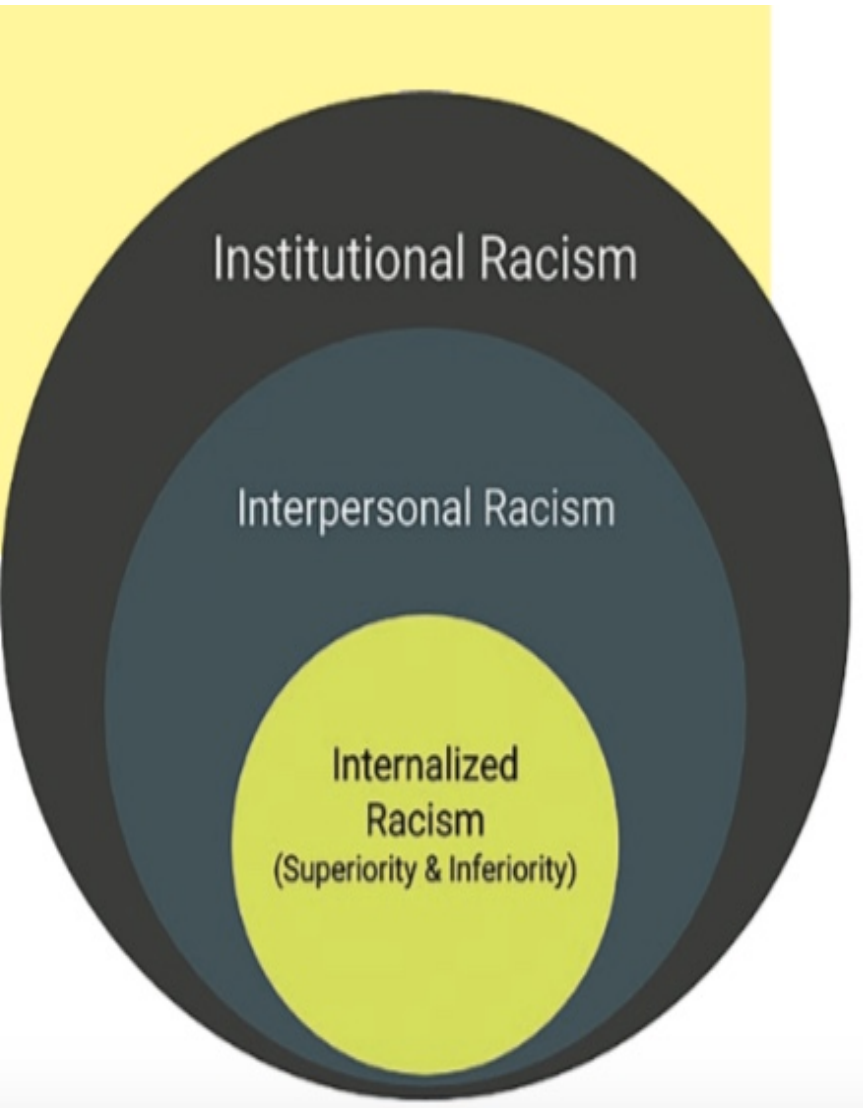
Race and Racialized Identity

(Derman-Sparks& Olsen, 2020)

- **Race:** A social and political construct that creates and assigns people to different hierarchical racial groups. There is no biological basis for these categories. White people created the idea of race to justify European countries' and then the United States' acts of enslavement, economic exploitation and colonization.
- **Racialized identity:** Racialized identity refers to the way groups of people are defined by the society in which they live and how other people treat those groups because of those definitions (societal advantages and disadvantages). It is imposed on people from forces outside and is also constructed internally by individuals. This process begins at a young age.

Racism

(Matthews& Jordan, 2019)



Racism: An internalized system of economic, political social and cultural conditions that assign power, advantage and privilege to one racial group over another.

Institutional Racism: How the system gets baked into the business-as-usual of whole institutions; this includes the intended and unintended consequences of policies, practices, laws, rules and procedures that function to the advantage of white people and to the disadvantage of people of color.

Interpersonal racism: how the system plays out between people; this includes behaviors based on conscious or unconscious biased assumptions about self and others. This usually looks like discrimination.

Internalized racism :how the system gets into each of us: body, mind, and soul, as individuals; this includes both internalized racial superiority for white people and internalized racial inferiority for people of color.

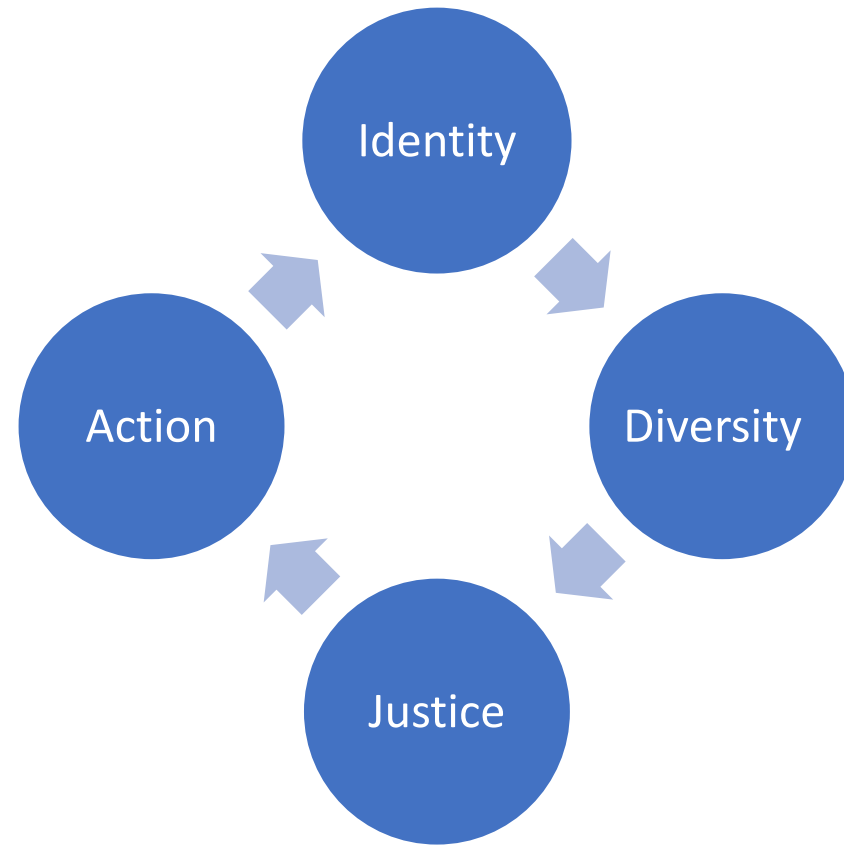
What is Anti-bias /Anti-Racist Education ?

- This is a perspective/stance of everything you do.
- It puts diversity and equity goals at the center of all aspects of an organization's daily life.
- It is relevant and pays attention to the realities of children's lives- culturally responsive and sustaining.
- Values and creates a community that supports and seeks to include all dimensions of human difference.
- An activist approach that provides children with tools to identify and respond to bias
- Anti-racist education centers race as the core. It acknowledges the intersectionality of social identities and the systemic impact of racism on all the other -isms.



Anti-bias Education Goals

(Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020)



Goal 1: Identity : Children will feel positive, but not superior or inferior about their racialized identities. They will understand that their skin color or eye shape or hair texture does not determine their value as human beings.



Goal 2: **Diversity** : Children will have accurate words and information about each other's racialized identities. They will also appreciate their shared humanity and how they are similar to each other.



Goal 3: **Justice** : Children will develop beginning skills for identifying and questioning misinformation, stereotypical ideas and images and hurtful behaviors directed at their own and other's racialized identities. They will know that it is not fair to treat people hurtfully because of who they are.



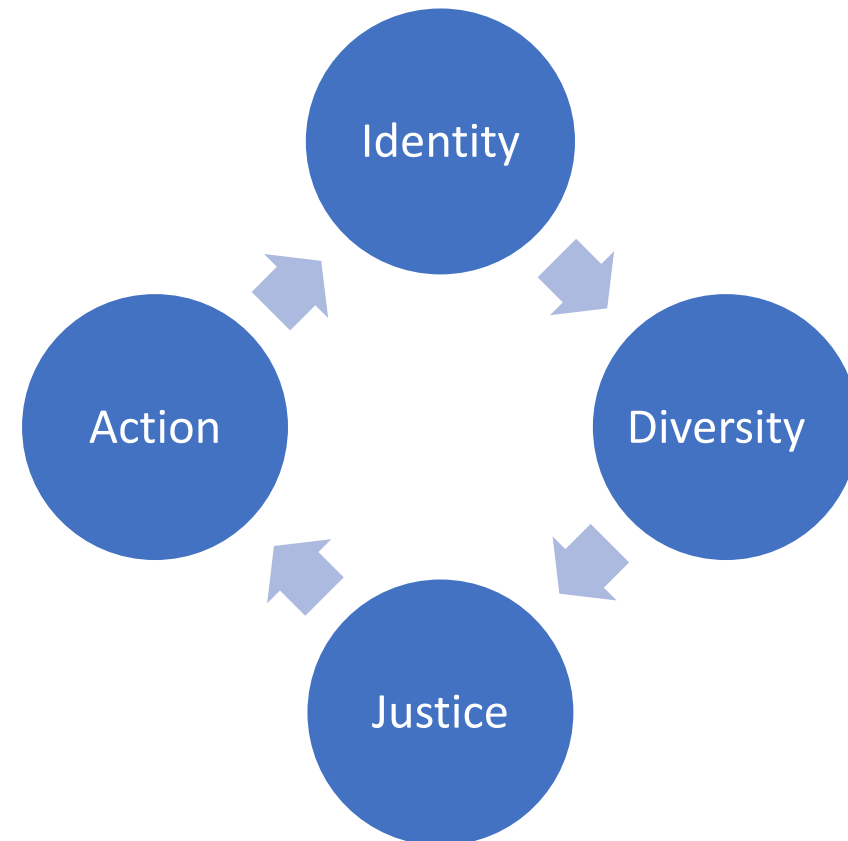
Goal 4: **Action**: Children will demonstrate beginning skills for interrupting biased behaviors targeted at their own and other's racialized identities and for creating a fair classroom environment.



Anti-bias Education Goals

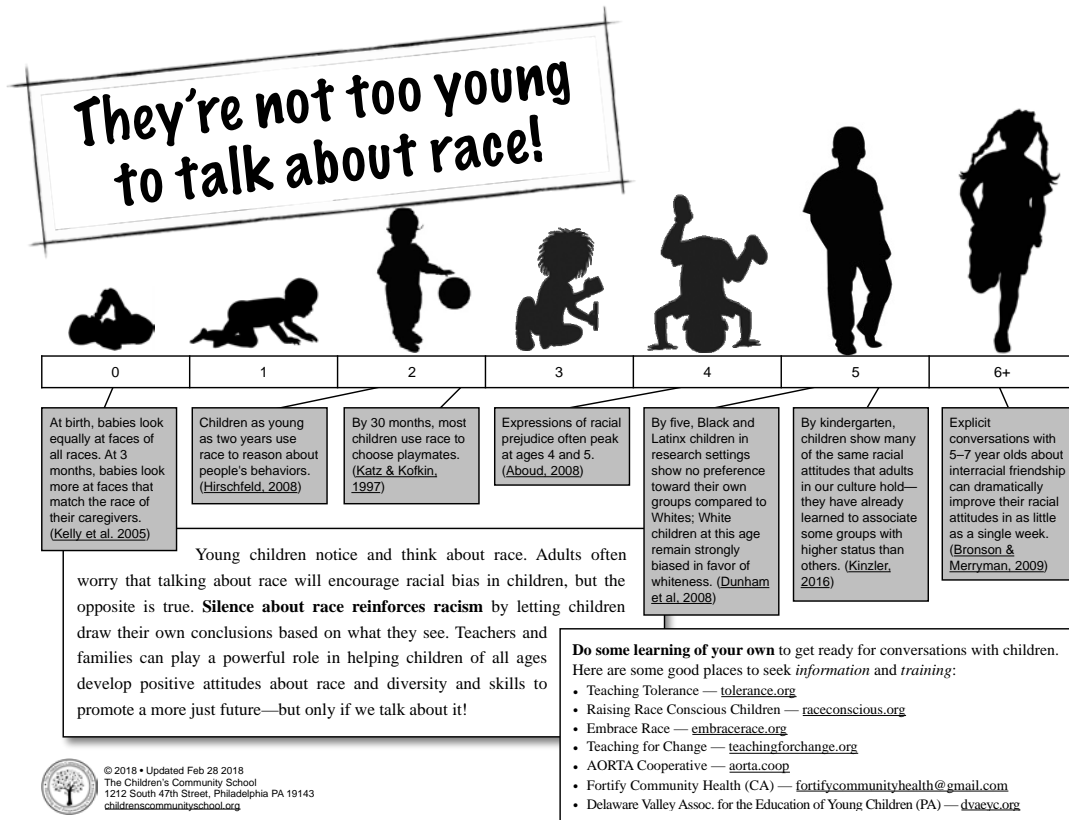
(Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020)

Which goals are you most comfortable with and which goals are more challenging to implement? What do the goals look like in practice?



Strategies for having honest conversations about race and social justice with children

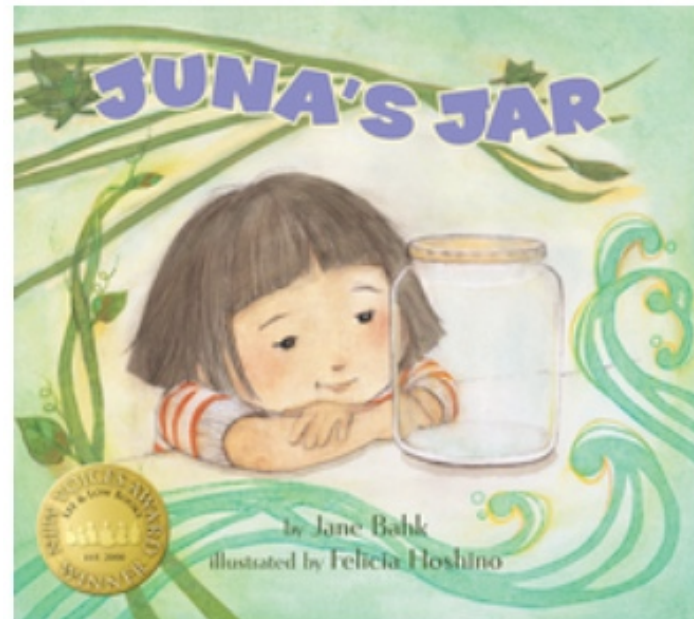
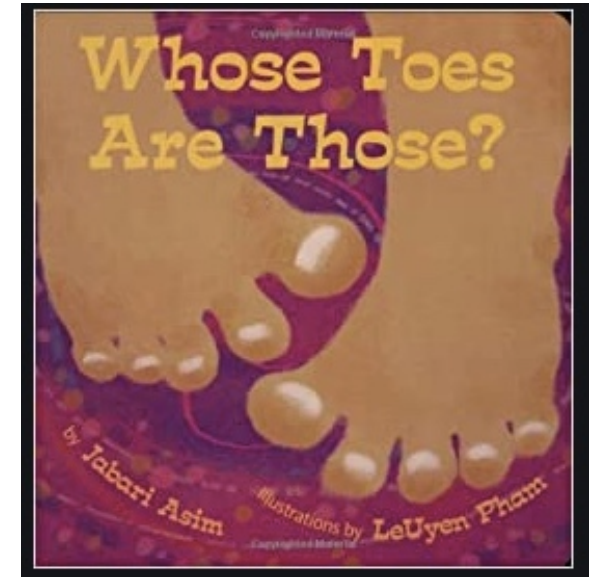
(adapted from Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan & Nimmo; Embrace Race)

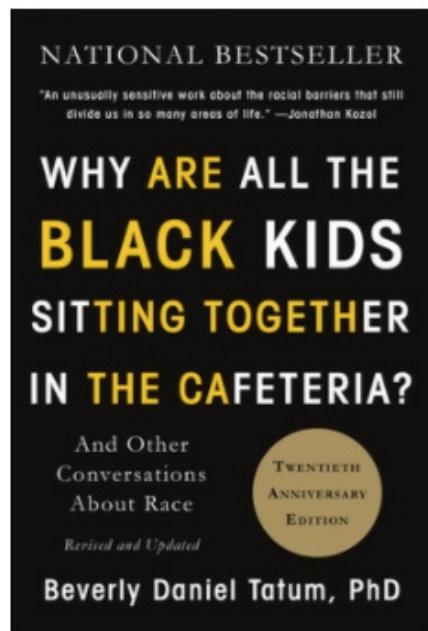
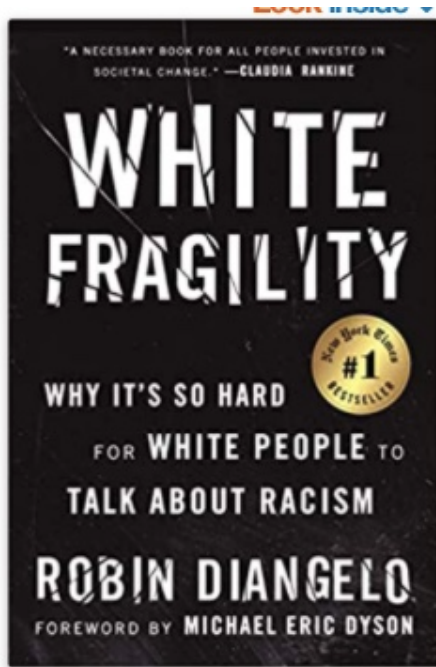
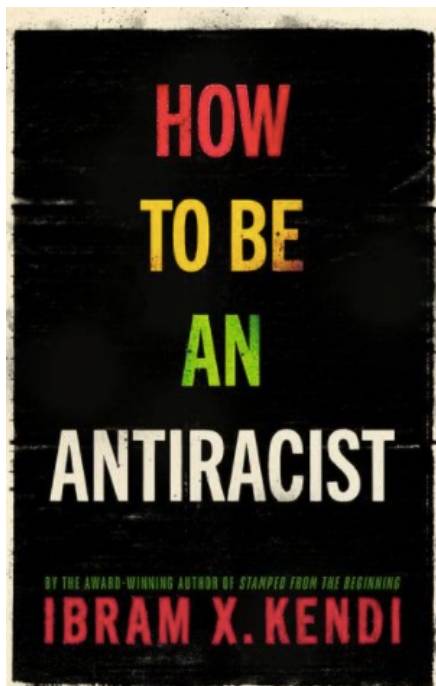


Start early- the earlier the better

- Children notice differences.
- Encourage children to ask questions. Be a good listener. Pay attention to feelings as well as words.
- Answer children's questions immediately and directly, with information that is appropriate to their developmental level and experience.

Read #own voices books.



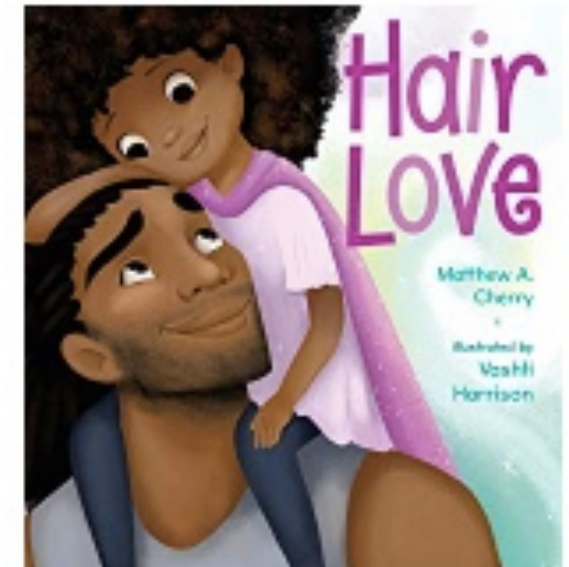
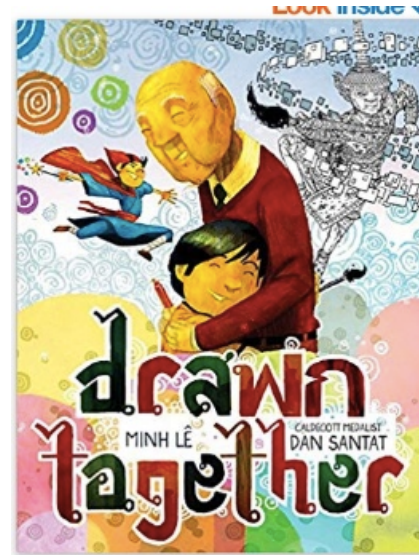
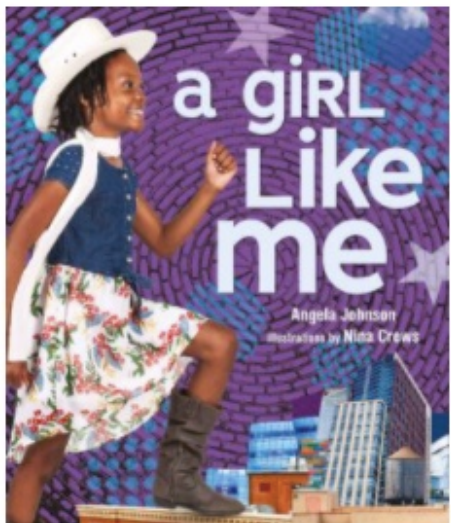
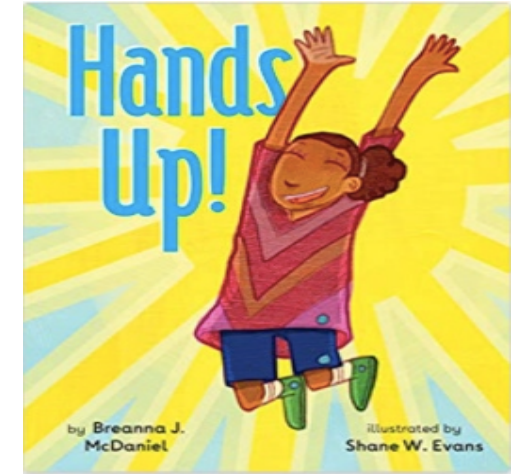


Begin within

- Engage in self reflection and education.
- Talk about your feelings, let children see you face your own biases.
- Acknowledge when you don't have a good answer and say 'we will find out more.'
- Dissonance and disagreement are part of learning.
- "When you know better, do better" - Maya Angelou

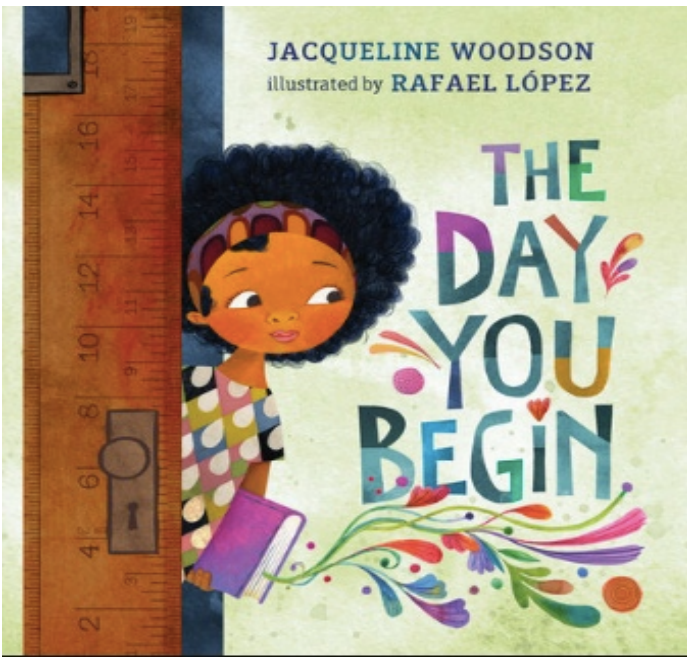
Support children's learning about themselves and others.

- Know and love who you are.
- Choose diversity.
- Learn about and respect others.
- Tell stories of resistance, resilience and joy.



Be a changemaker

- Be honest with children in age appropriate ways about prejudice, oppression and privilege.



Children's Questions:

Why are people being mean and hurting others?

Who is George Floyd?

What happened to him?

Are the police our friends?

What is Black Lives Matter?



Covid-19 and Xenophobia

- Don't sit at our lunch table. We don't want to get the coronavirus.
- Go back to China, We don't want you here. (to a child who was Korean)
- I can't play with you because my mom said you are a virus carrier.
- Do all Chinese people have coronavirus?
- Why doesn't __ like Mei-ling?
- Don't eat that egg roll- you will get the virus.

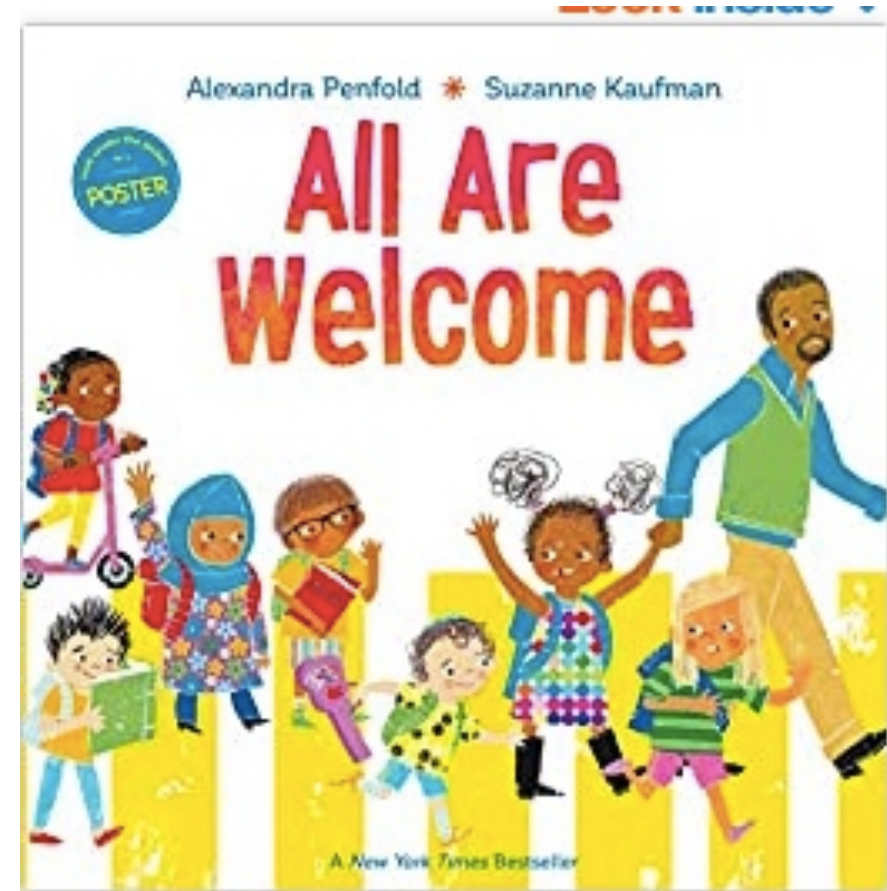


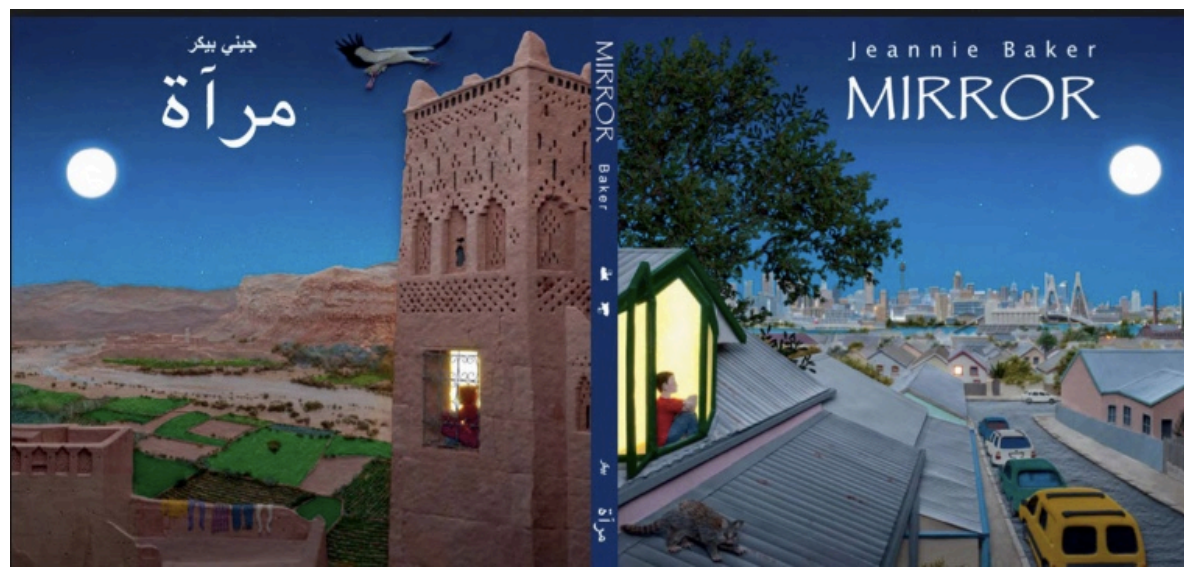
- Foster critical race thinking.
- Empower children to take action.



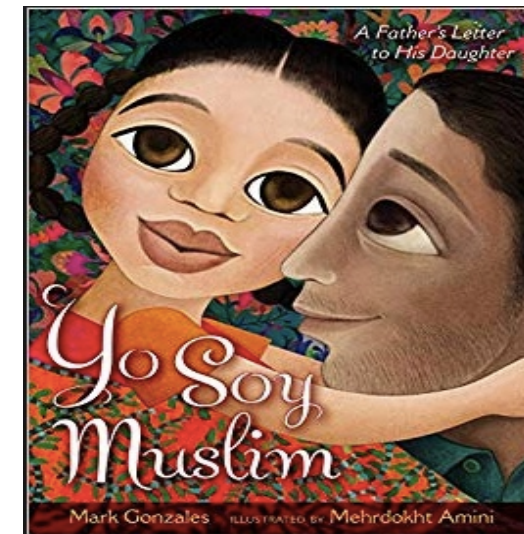
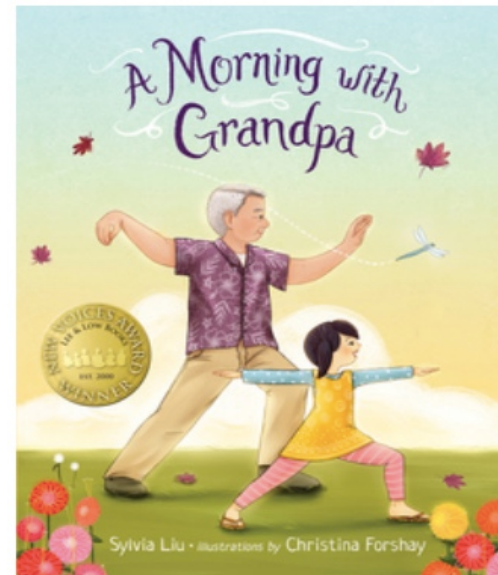
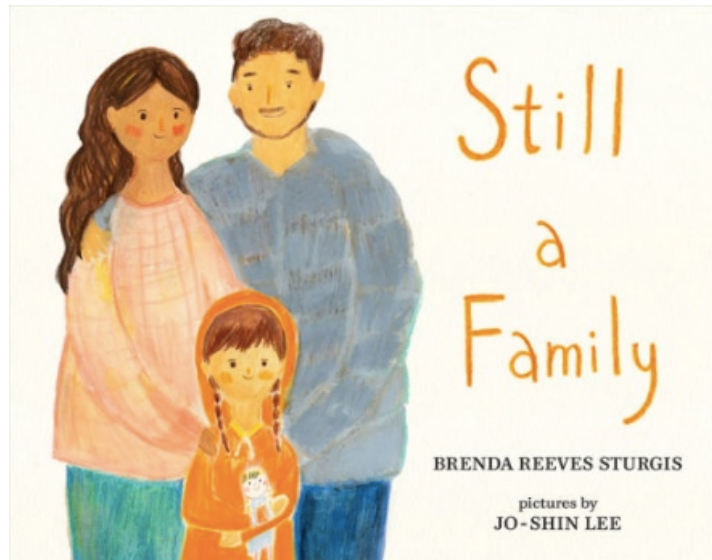
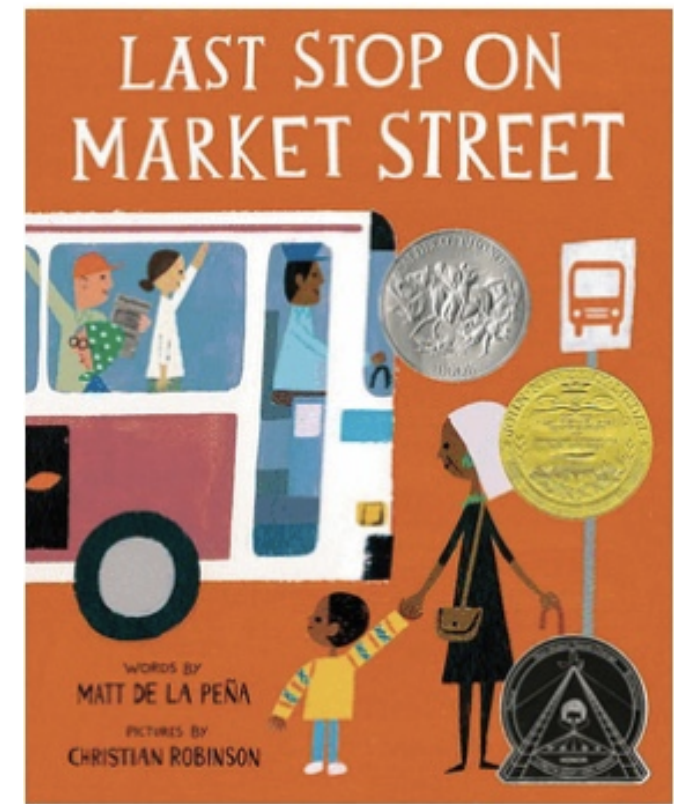
Specific notes for educators in program settings

- Have a clear anti-bias/anti-racist mission statement.
- Budget for equity work.
- Supervise and coach staff in anti-bias work.
- Use families as resources and partners.
- Keep family communication open and responsive about equity work.
- Embrace complexity and find the third space.
- Acknowledge, Ask, Adapt





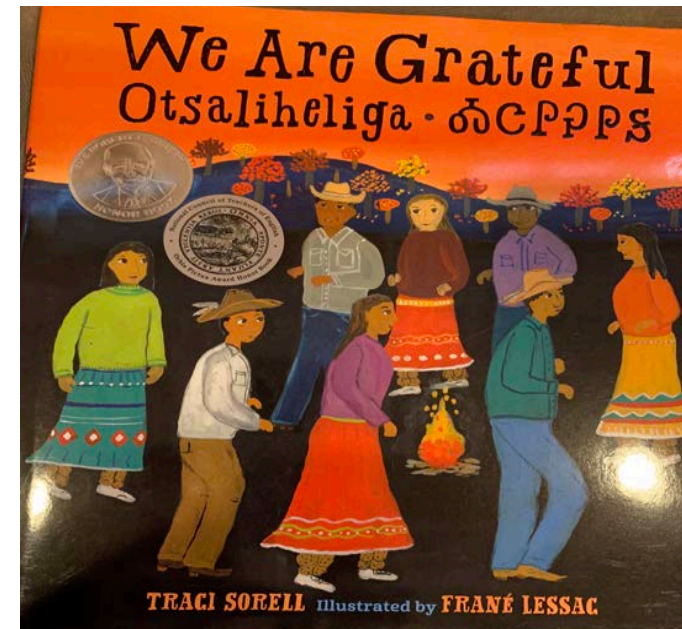
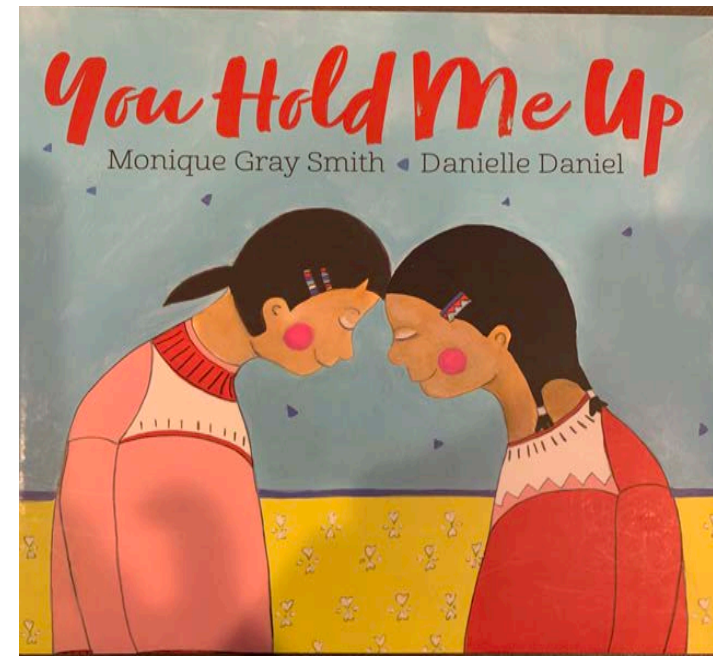
Books as Mirrors and Windows



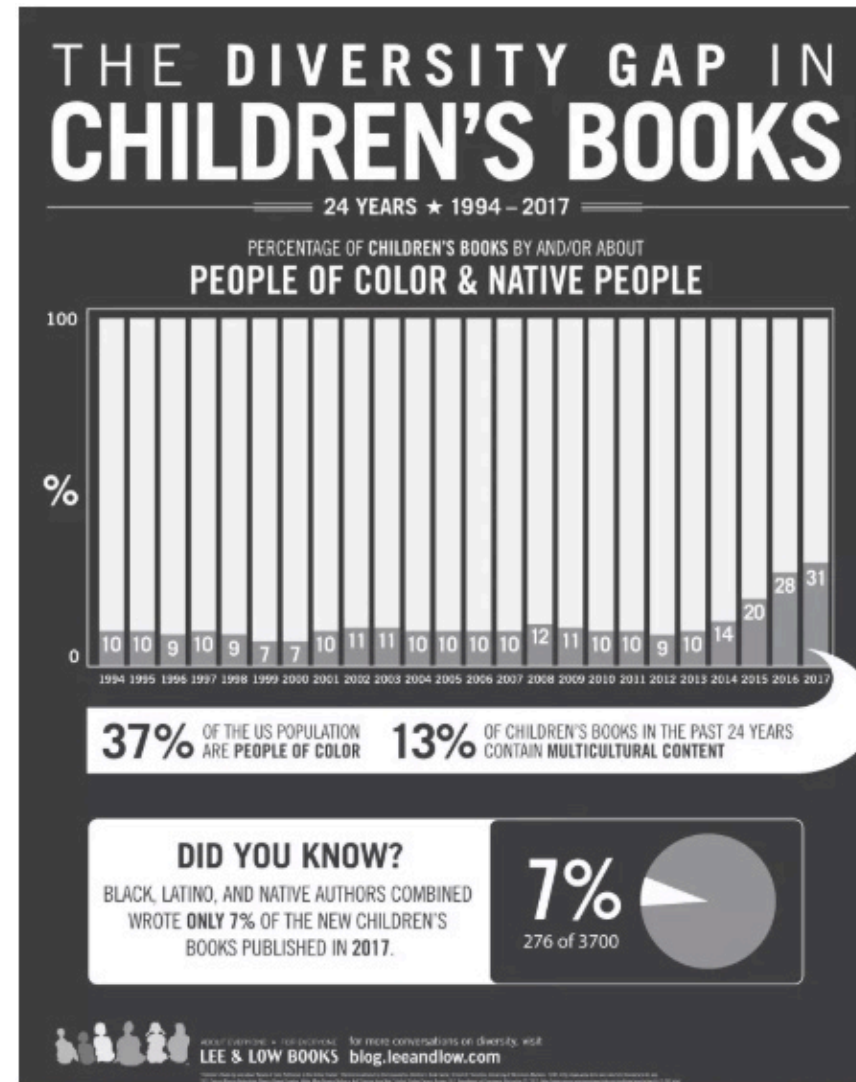


Choosing more authentic and culturally responsive books

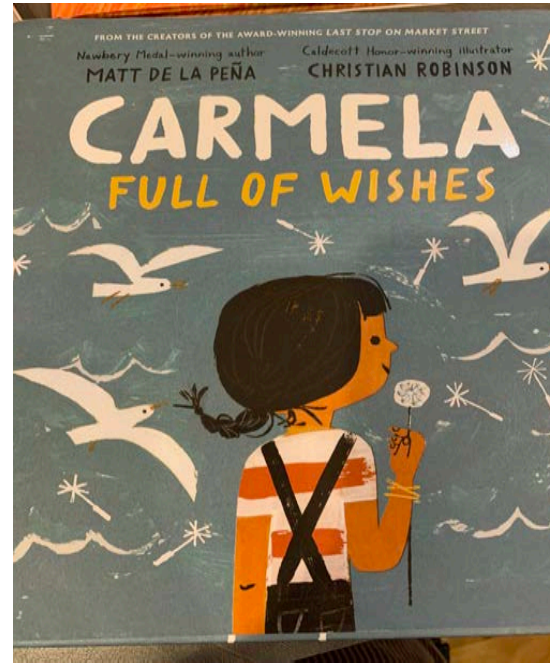
- Provide a range of books about differences: race, ethnicity, ability, family structure, religion, class, etc.
- Have more than one book about a specific identity group; there are different experiences within every group.



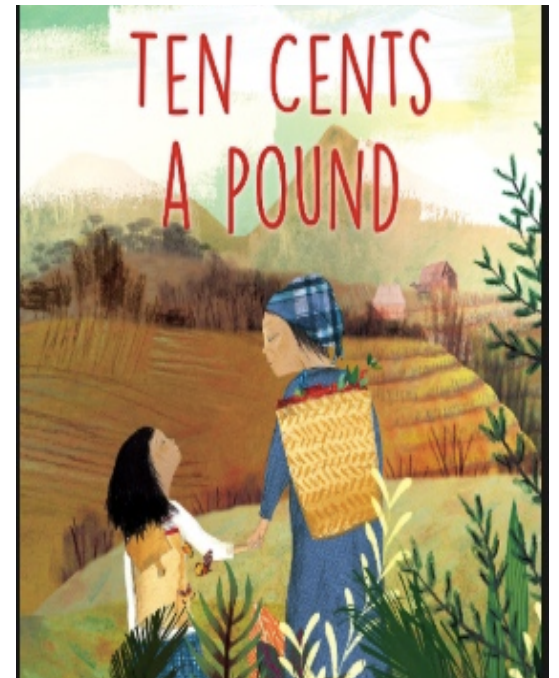
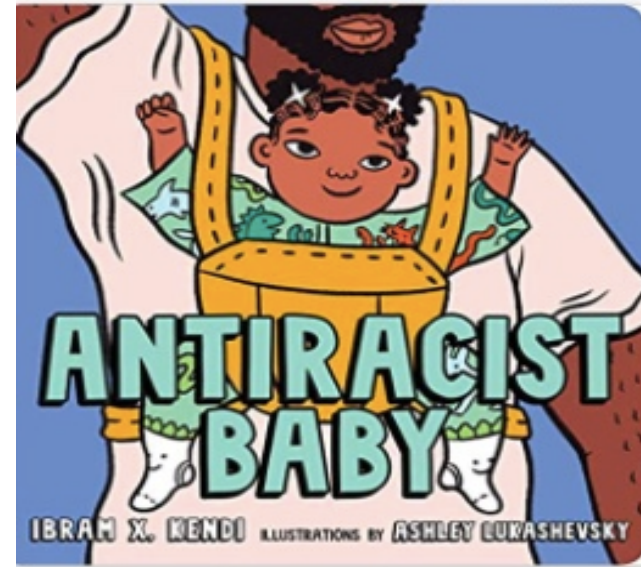
- Consider the author's and illustrator's background and perspective.



- Unlearn stereotypes, don't create them.
- Choose diverse books that are engaging stories that teach children important truths without having to spell out the “moral of the story.”



Books that disrupt the status quo



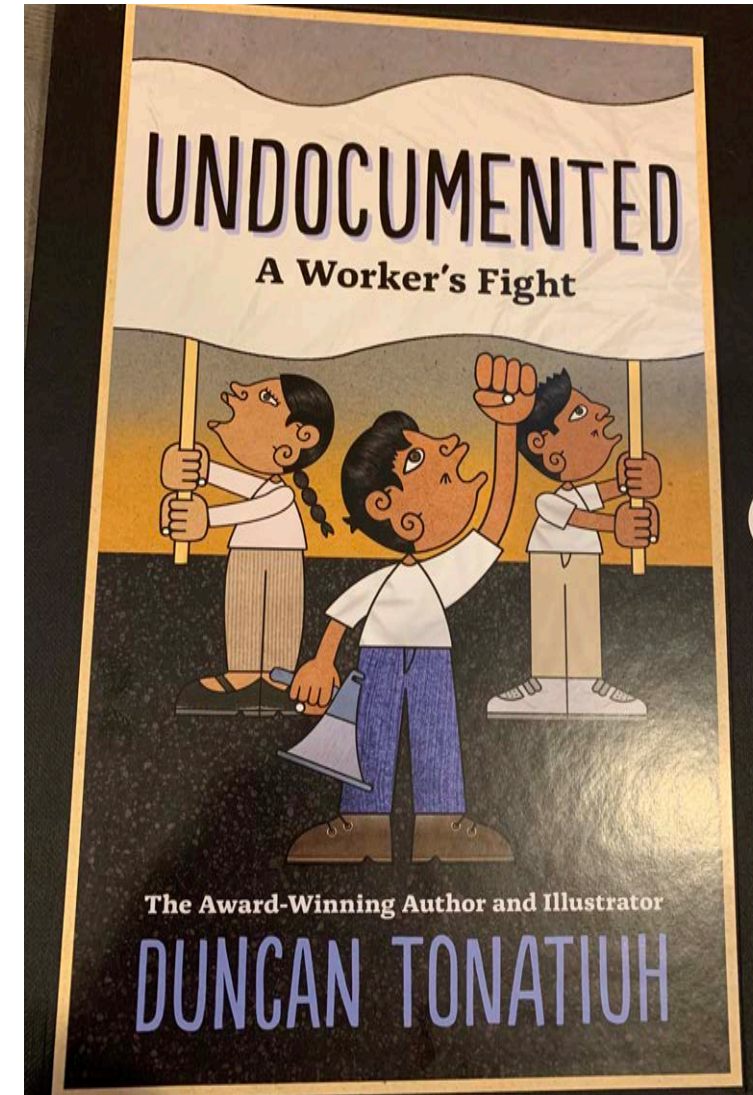
Book strategies to help children develop positive social identities, widen their world view, promote critical literacy:

- Acknowledge that every story has mirror and window possibilities- “how are we the same or different from the people in this book?”
- Emphasize we live in a complex and diverse world- move beyond the “single story.”

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. (Adichie, 2009, para. 24)

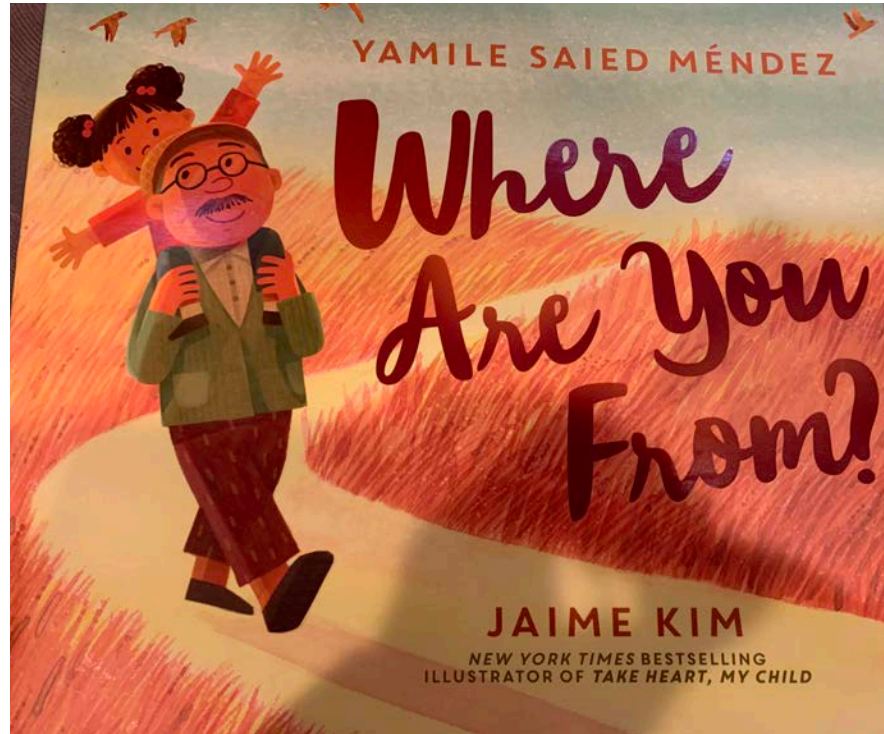


- Discuss ideas in the story to unpack mirror possibilities for all children.
- Choose stories that represent positive aspects of the human spirit, stories in which characters work together for collective action.
- Be open to discussions of inequality or unfairness that you see in stories and in life; discuss with children a vision for a better world and empower them with “what can we do to make it better?”



Promoting Social Justice: Literary Lenses to Look at Children's Books (LeeKeenan, 2019)

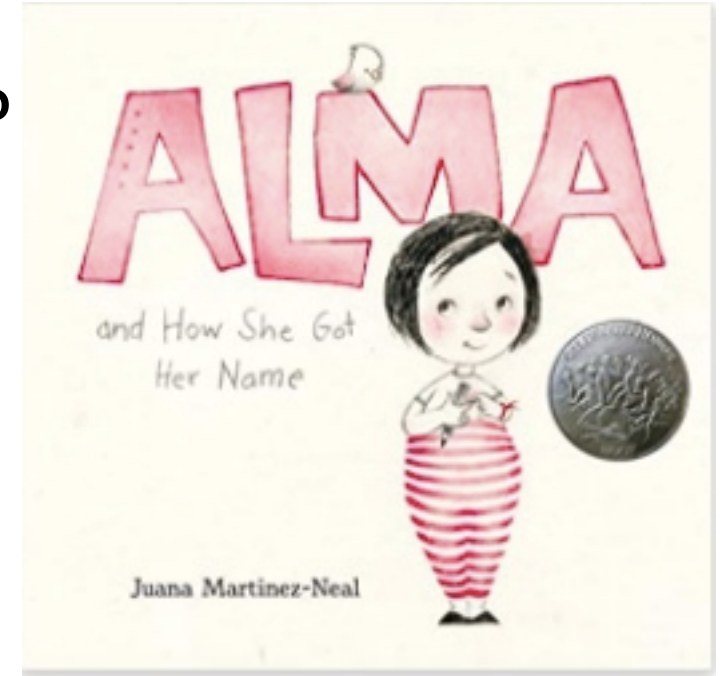
- Readers response
- Racial lens
- Socio economic lens
- Historical lens
- Gender lens
- Psychological lens
- Ability lens
- Family structure lens
- Linguistic lens
- Spiritual/religious lens



- Think about books you might read and which lens are useful.
- What other questions might you use to provoke courageous conversations?
- Which lenses are you more comfortable with and which are more challenging?
- None of these categories stand alone. Consider the intersectionality of social identities and the overlap of the different lens.

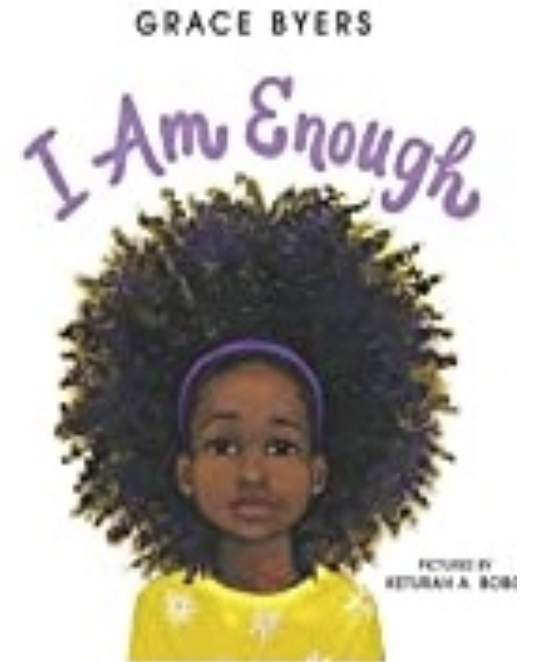
Reader Response Lens: reading a text for personal meaning

1. In what ways is the book familiar to your life?
2. In what ways is the book different from your life?
3. How did the book affect you?
4. How has the book increased your interest in the subject matter?
5. How has the book changed your worldview?



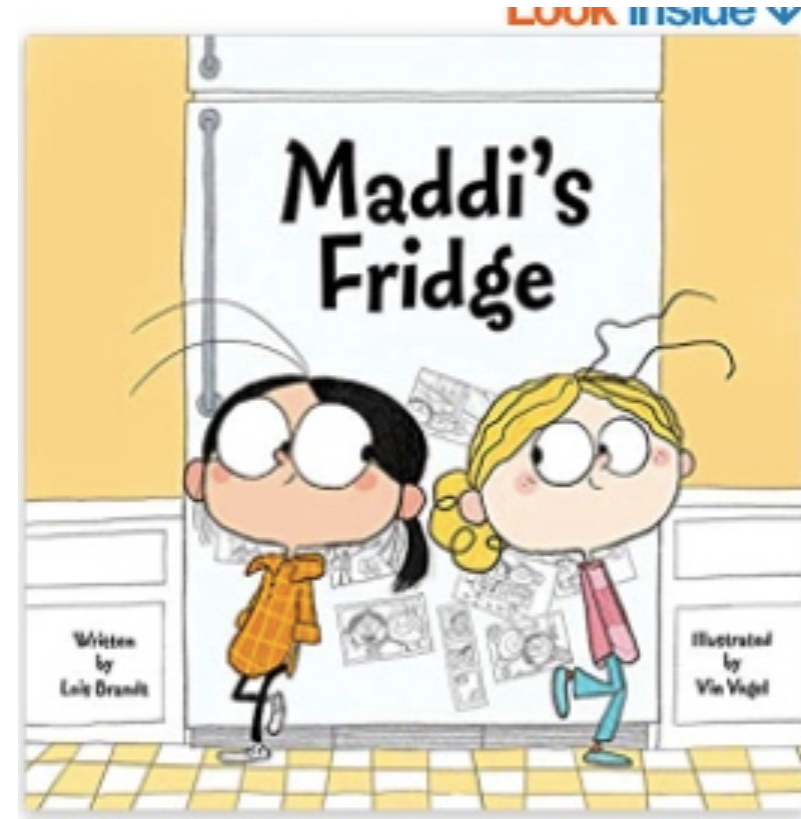
Racial Lens: Reading a text for issues of race, heritage, and ethnicity

1. How is race read through the text? How is race named and noticed?
2. Who are the dominant characters? How is whiteness normalized? How are the “others” portrayed?
3. Are there stereotypes in the images or text?
4. How does the book deal with conflicts, particularly between majority and minority groups?
5. What is fair or unfair in the storyline? Are there examples of resistance, protest, and activism?



Socio-Economic Lens: reading a text for its socio-economic issues

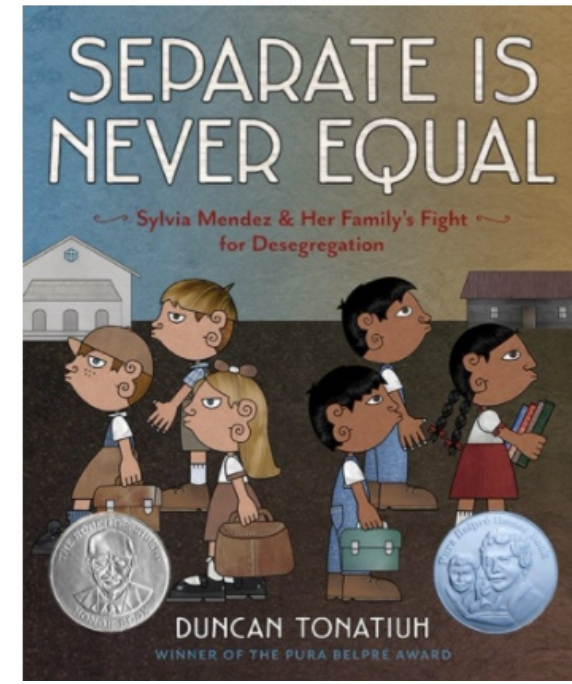
1. How are different demographics represented in the book?
2. What worldview does the book represent?
3. What does the book say about class structures?
4. How are power, privilege, and wealth portrayed?
5. How is poverty, homelessness, hunger presented?



Historical Lens: reading a text for its contextual significance.

This includes information about the author, their historical moment, or the time period of the text.

1. Research the author's life and relate the information to the book.
Why did the author write it?
2. If the author is writing on a debatable issue, do they consider all sides of the debate?
3. Research the author's time (political history, intellectual history, economic history, etc.) and relate this information to the work.
4. Upon reading the book, how has your view on the given historical event changed?



Gender Lens: reading a text for its gender related issues and attitudes towards gender.

1. How is gender expressed in the book (i.e. what words, images, colors, symbols... portray gender?) What counter narratives around gender and sexuality are present?
2. What role does gender identity or gender expression play in the book? Are there LGBTQ characters?
3. How does the book reflect or distort the gender roles of society?
4. How is gender non-conforming behavior acknowledged in the book?



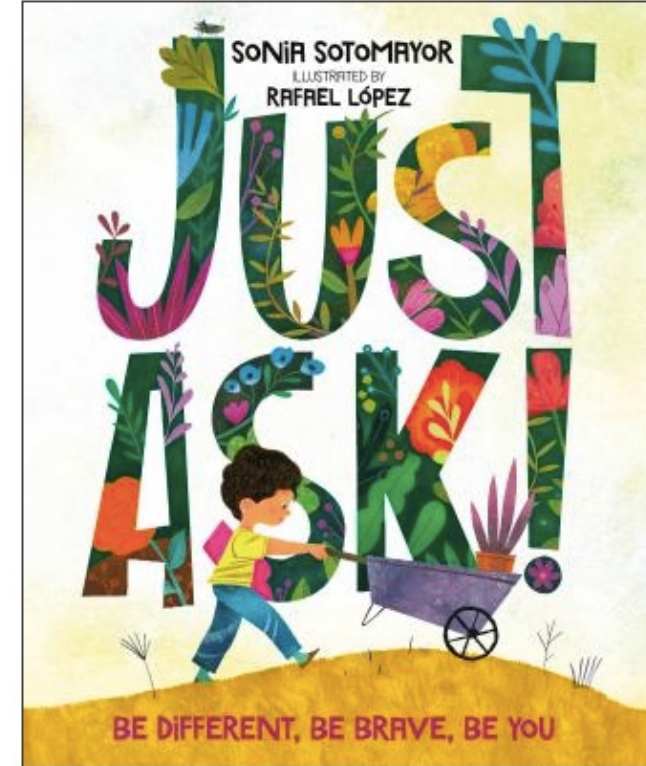
Psychological Lens: reading a text for patterns in human behavior. While everyone is different, there are basic recurrent patterns of development for most people.

1. Is the way the characters act believable? Why do certain characters act the way they do?
2. How is the range of human emotions depicted in the book? (happiness, anger, sadness, pride, depression, indifference, confusion, etc.)
3. What did you think of any moral/ethical choices that the characters made? What would you have done?
4. What are the broader social issues the book attempts to address?



Ability Lens: reading a text for ability and disability issues

1. How are ability differences presented? Are characters with disability normalized? Is the person or disability the focus?
2. Authenticity: Does the book center on a disabled character in their own voice?
3. Does the book work for inclusivity? Encourage advocacy?
4. Does the book promote disability acceptance, not just awareness; e.g., does the storyline focus about changing the environment to suit the disability, not the person?



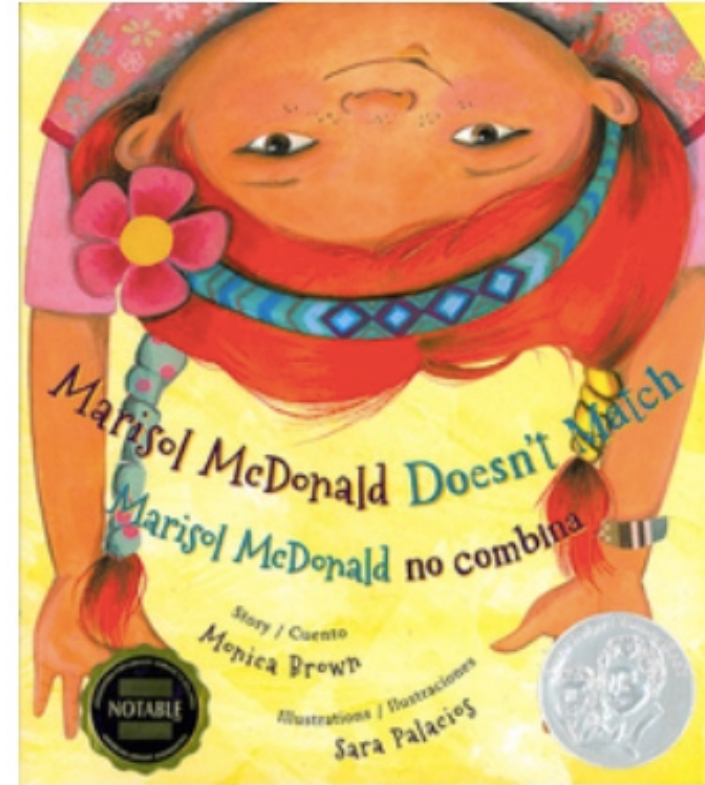
Family Structure Lens: reading a text for an inclusive view of families

1. How are families defined and presented in the illustrations and in the text?
2. Are there a range of different family configurations?
3. How are changes and transitions in family life presented?(i.e., divorce, separation, death, moving, marriage, birth, adoption, job loss, etc.)



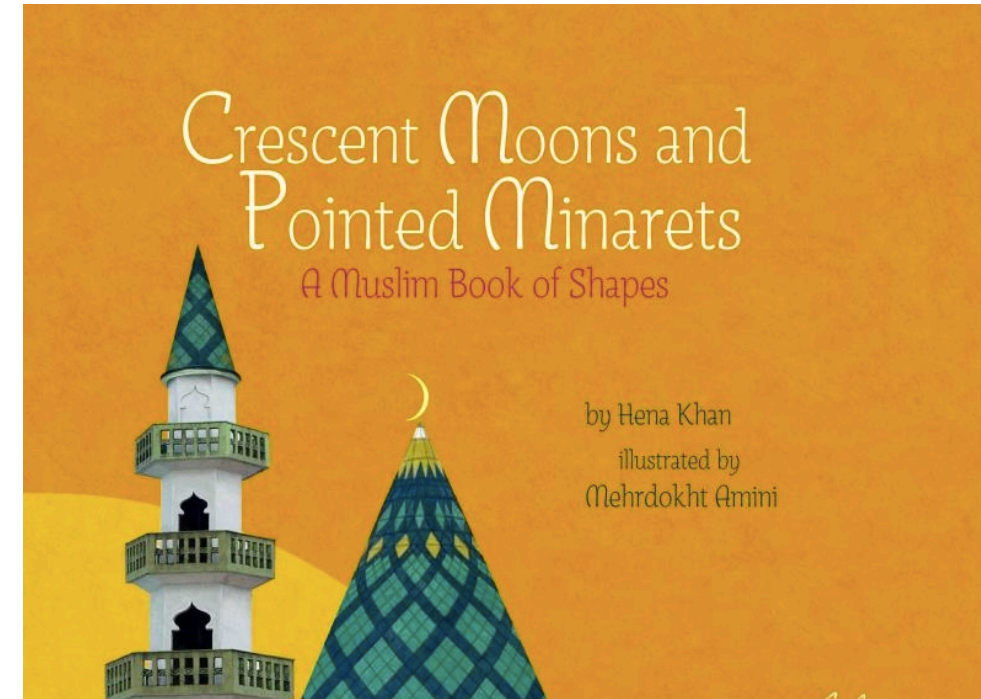
Linguistic Lens: reading a text for an inclusive view of languages

1. How are people who speak more than one language presented? Is the dominant language of the characters always English?
2. Are the characters' home languages respected?
3. Is the connection between language and culture visible and evident?
4. How are problems and challenges navigated when there is a language barrier or communication misunderstanding?



Spiritual Lens: reading a text for its spiritual and faith related issues, and religious literacy.

1. Is religion presented as one aspect of one's social identity? How is religion and spirituality viewed as part of one's everyday life?
2. Are there any stereotypes in the images or text?
3. What does the book say about various world religions? Are certain religions presented as superior to others?
4. How are holidays presented in the book? Are they connected to religious beliefs, as secular events...?
5. What does the book say about different beliefs and values: faith, grace, love, forgiveness, hope, etc.?



Resources

<http://www.antibiasleadersece.com/>

Derman-Sparks & Olson, 2020, *Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*, Second edition.

Derman- Sparks, LeeKeenan & Nimmo, 2015. *Leading Anti-bias Early Childhood Programs: A Guide for Change*.

Embrace Race <https://www.embracerace.org/>

Iruka, Currenton, Durden & Escagy, 2020, *Don't Look Away: Embracing Anti-bias Classrooms*

Matthews & Ijumaa, 2019, "Our Children, Our Workforce Why We Must Talk About Race and Racism in Early Childhood Education" in *Childcare Exchange*.

NAEYC <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/initiatives/equity>

National Association for Multicultural Education <http://nameorg.org>

Teaching Tolerance www.tolerance.org

Picture Book Resources

<https://diversebookfinder.org/>

<https://diversebooks.org/>

<https://www.teachingforchange.org/socialjusticebooks-org>

<https://www.theconsciouskid.org/>

<http://www.janeaddamschildrensbookaward.org/>

<http://www.childpeacebooks.org/cpb/Protect/ourProject.php>

<https://www.leeandlow.com/collections/ownvoices-collection>



From Survive to Thrive by Leading with an Equity Lens

Exploring “She, He, They?” in a Case Study from the Classroom

Presenters:

Debbie LeeKeenan

Lecturer, Consultant & Author,

From Survive to Thrive and Leading Anti-bias Early Childhood Programs

Iris Chin Ponte

Director, The Henry Frost Children’s Program, Belmont, MA.

NAEYC Virtual Institute AVAILABLE NOW JULY 6-17, 2020

<https://www.naeyc.org/events/virtual-institute-sessions>



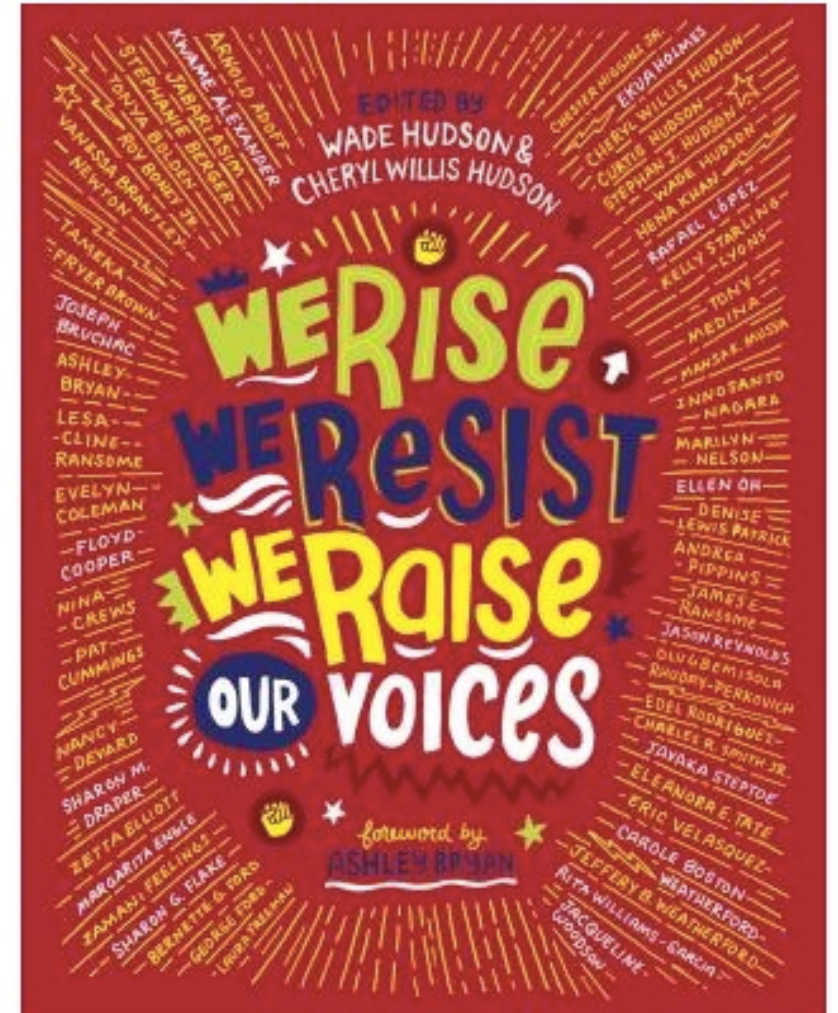
Carry on.....

- Begin where you are
- Be strategic
- Work together
- Carry on...



Reflection

- What is something you learned today or are thinking about?
- What concrete actions can you commit to doing now ?



Contact info:



Thank you!

Q and A

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