

Growing Anti-racist UU's: A Curriculum for Children

www.uucharlottesville.org/anti-racist-curriculum/

Skin Shades - Lesson 1 for Grades 3-5

LESSON OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Thoughts to Ponder:

The truth is that young children noticed differences very early. And by the age of 3 and 4, they're asking questions. They're beginning to develop and to absorb the stereotypes and misinformation, discomforts. I don't like to call it prejudices. It's kind of like pre-prejudices. So, the myth that they aren't noticing, the idea of being colorblind, actually harms kids.

-- Louise Derman-Sparks, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/anti-bias-lessons-help-preschoolers-hold-up-a-mirror-to-diversity>

The irony of American history is the tendency of good white Americans to presume racial innocence. Ignorance of how we are shaped racially is the first sign of privilege. In other words, it is a privilege to ignore the consequences of race in America.

-- Tim Wise

Big Question: What can and do we notice about the color of people's skin?

The first step in teaching children to talk openly about race is to help them notice their own. The second step is to help them notice others'. The goal is to have them internalize the message that all are equally valuable.

GOALS

- To normalize discussing differences in skin color
- To have children notice the shades of their skin
- To appreciate all skin colors
- To explore the first Unitarian Universalist Principle: Respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person (to simplify: each and every person is important)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- identify differences and similarities among skin shades - their own and others'.
- acquire and use words to describe skin shades.
- become more comfortable noticing and discussing skin shades and race.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much of this lesson is by Beryl Achenberg. Used with permission.

Activity 4 is based on Learning to Give's lesson "The Many Shades of Our World."

<https://www.learningtogive.org/units/dr-martin-luther-king-junior-his-life-his-legacy/many-shades-our-world>

The Take It Home handout is based on Louise Derman-Sparks & Julie Olsen Edwards, 2010. *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children & Ourselves*.

LESSON-AT-A-GLANCE

Opening	8 minutes
Activity 1: Story	12 minutes
Activity 2: Self-Portraits	15-20 minutes
Alternative for activity 2: Mixing paints to create skin shades	15-20 minutes
Closing	7 minutes

LEADER PREPARATION

Watch You-Tube TED talk by Nina Jablonski, "Skin Color is an Illusion," (14 minutes)

https://www.ted.com/talks/nina_jablonski_breaks_the_illusion_of_skin_color?language=en

This talk deals with the evolution of human skin pigmentation.

LESSON PLAN

WELCOMING AND ENTERING

Materials for Lesson

- Rotner, Shelly, and Kelly, Sheila M. *Shades of People*. NY: Holiday House, 2009. Print.
- Large piece of paper with "racial justice" printed on it in large letters, folded between the words
- markers or crayons in various skin shades. Be sure to have enough, so that if a few students need the same color, they can each use one.
- Drawing paper for all participants
- Pencils
- One piece of black paper and one piece of white paper
- Small mirrors that children can use to see themselves as they draw
- Other picture books showing people with various skin colors.

- Posters in the room showing people with a variety of skin colors.
- Copies of “Taking it Home” for this lesson.
- If you choose Alternative Activity 2, see that activity for materials needed

OPENING (7 MINUTES)

Materials for Activity

- Chalice and LED/battery-operated candle or matches and candle

Description of Activity

Sit in a circle and follow the usual opening procedures (check in, chalice lighting, listen to chime until silence for centering, opening words, etc.).

Suggested Chalice Lighting Words (if class is not routinely using another reading):

We light this chalice, symbol of our faith,
as a reminder to respect each and every person and
to let Love guide us in our lives.

Consider using an LED chalice to avoid a fire hazard and to include participants who are sensitive to smoke or scents.

Say that the first Unitarian Universalist Principle is the “inherent worth and dignity of every person” (to simplify, each and every person is important).

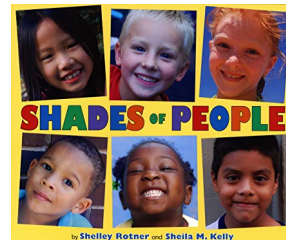
Play a simple game to help new teachers/participants learn names. One idea is to go around the circle with each person saying before their name a word that describes them and begins with the same sound, such as “Lucky Linda.” Before beginning, be sure everyone has thought of a word, giving group help, as needed.

Share Joys and Concerns.

ACTIVITY 1: STORY (12 MINUTES)

Preparation for Activity

Read *Shades of People* by Shelley Rotner and Sheila Kelly in advance, so you can share it effectively.



Description of Activity

Sit close to the children so they can easily see the pictures.

Tell them we’re here in class today for the first of several classes about racial justice. Have the words “**racial justice**” printed on a large sheet of paper or poster board. Fold it so just the word “racial” shows and ask what that means. Do the same with “justice.” Then ask what “racial justice” means.

Ask children if people are really black or white -- hold up a piece of white paper and show how that’s not the actual color of White people. Hold up a piece of black

paper and show that's not the actual color of Black people. Say that even though we don't have skin that is really white or black, that's the way people refer to each other. And, of course, we know that we don't just talk about people as being Black (or African-American) or White (or Caucasian). We have identities of Asian, and Latinx*, and Middle Eastern, and Native American, and many others. And people can be several at the same time. Many people identify as multiracial or biracial. (*for teachers or older children: many Latinx people identify as white, and some as Afro-Cuban etc., and some as indigenous.)

Say: In science race is not a real thing. When Europeans came to North America hundreds of years ago there was no idea of race. It was not a thing. But the powerful European people invented the idea of race, so they would have a way to be more important and richer by saying people with darker skin shades were not as good as they were. This idea of race, with one race being seen as the best, helped the "White" people explain to themselves that it was OK to treat other races terribly.

Even though race is **not** real **scientifically**, race **is** important today because the idea of race changed the ways people acted with each other. A lot of our country's history is connected to this idea of race.

Invite students to notice all the shades they see as you read *Shades of People*, **stopping to look at and briefly discuss several pictures.**

After reading the book, ask the children what they noticed and then ask if they have questions. If possible, ask the group to try to answer the questions rather than have you be the authority. The goal is to foster curiosity and to create a safe space where they feel comfortable talking about race.

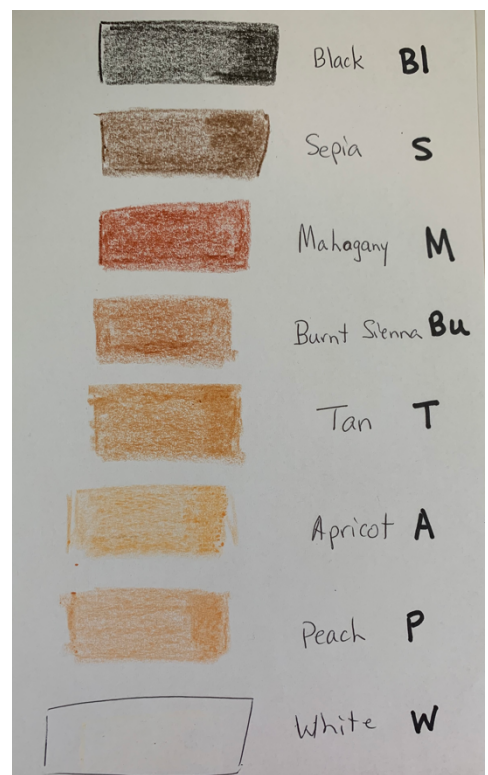
ACTIVITY 2: SELF-PORTRAITS (15 - 20 MINUTES)

Materials for Activity

- Drawing paper for all participants
- Markers or crayons in various skin shades. Be sure to have enough, so that if a few students need the same color, they can each use one.
- Pencils
- Little mirrors (one for every 2 children)
- Other picture books showing people with various skin colors.

Preparation for Activity

Lesson 1, Grades 3-5



- In advance, prepare a sample of the colors available by shading in an area for each color on piece of paper showing the spectrum available. Make a strip that has each color in a block of at least 2" x 3" and label it with the name on the crayon/marker.

Description of Activity

Still in the story location, tell the students that you'd like them to think about their skin-shade, and (in a couple of minutes) draw a self-portrait. Tell them that there are various shades of crayons/markers to choose from that resemble the various shades of people they saw in the book or might see in their homes, schools, or neighborhoods. Encourage them to experiment with skin shades. Form a small circle and show them the color sample page you've made. Have each person put their arm along the spectrum to see what color most nearly matches and tell them the name for theirs.



Say that people have different skin colors because we have different amounts of a chemical in our skin called melanin. If we have more melanin, we have darker skin.

Move to the work area and allow students time to work on their self-portraits, looking in a mirror to see what to draw. Walk around, encouraging and commenting on their work. Engage individual students to talk about how they chose shades to represent their own skin shade. Students who finish earlier than others may draw friends or family members or may look at other relevant books you have there.

After students finish, have them share their self-portraits with each other. Ask the others to provide feedback about how closely the portrait's skin shade matches the artist's skin. Remind them that the *goal here isn't to be great artists, but is to get us to notice, think, and talk about skin shades.*



Comment about how beautiful all the skin colors are. Ask if there are some skin shades that are missing in the group. If so, comment on how much more beautiful and interesting it would be if even more colors were represented in the group.

ALTERNATIVE FOR ACTIVITY 2: MIXING PAINTS TO CREATE SKIN SHADES (15 -20 MIN.)

(RECOMMENDED FOR OLDER STUDENTS – 4TH GRADERS +. YOUNGER STUDENTS COULD DO THIS WITH MORE TIME AND ADDITIONAL ADULTS.)

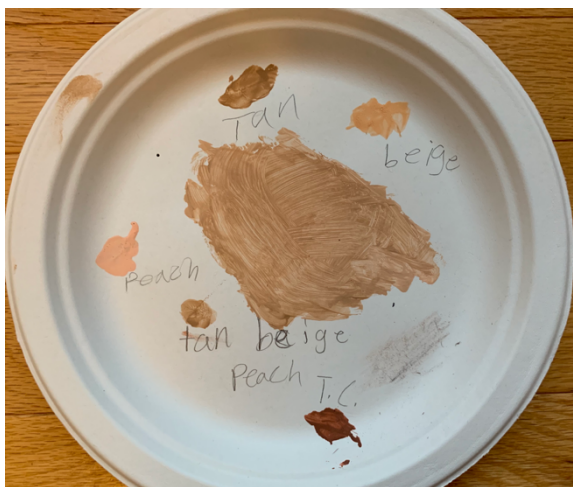
Materials for Activity

- White paper plate for each child or white drawing paper, if plates aren't available
- Paints of possible skin tones, such as Tempera People Paint
- Paintbrush for each child
- Little cup of water for each child
- Index card and pencil for each child

- Sets of small cups of each paint color (approx. one set for each 5 children), labeled with color name and number
- Small mirrors, optional

Preparation for Activity

In advance, create sets of paints with each color in a small cup, labeled with the paint color and a number. (Be sure the numbers and names correspond in all the groups).



Description of Activity

Still in the story location, tell the students that you'd like them to think about their skin-shade, and (in a couple of minutes) mix paints to create their shade. Encourage them to experiment with skin shades. Say that people have different skin colors because we have different amounts of a chemical in our skin called melanin. If we have more melanin, we have darker skin.

- Demonstrate mixing paints to get a specific skin shade, showing how to keep track of what colors are used (by writing on the index

card or on the edge of the plate).

- Divide into small groups with a set of paints and an adult for each group. Children mix colors to get as close to their own skin shade as possible, writing down the color numbers that they use. They might want to match their arm tones or use mirrors to look at their face tones. They might want to "test" the shade by putting a dot of paint on their arm. Then they use this color to paint a large oval on the paper plate or drawing paper.
- Come back to the whole group with their painted papers and share their colors.



Comment about how beautiful all the skin colors are. Ask if there are some skin shades that are missing in the group. If so, comment on how much more beautiful and interesting it would be if even more colors were represented in the group.



CLOSING (10 MINUTES)

Preparation for Activity

Copy Handout 1, Taking It Home, for all participants (and plan to email it to all families after the session).

Description of Activity

Gather children in a circle. Say, in your own words:

Today we talked about one thing that makes each of us special – we each have a different color of skin. Sometimes we need to pay close attention to notice the differences and sometimes they are easier to see.

People have different skin colors because we have different amounts of a chemical in our skin called melanin. If we have more melanin, we have darker skin.

We also talked about the Unitarian Universalist idea that we respect the “inherent worth and dignity of each person.” *That means that each person is important. **If someone has a different color of skin than I do, they are just as important as I am.***

Close following the class’ usual routine,

Hand out Take it Home sheets as parents/caregivers arrive.

LEADER REFLECTION AND PLANNING

When class ends, please stop for a minute with your co-teacher to . . .

- Take a deep breath together and acknowledge that you have done one thing today for racial justice. Sometimes the problems seem so huge that we need to find specific actions we can take, and this is one of them.
- Discuss if any children weren’t fully included in the lesson and how they might be in the future.
- Note any issues that you want to follow up on in the next class.
- Note any issues that you want to mention to your congregation’s racial justice curriculum planners or your religious educator.

TAKING IT HOME

(see Handout 1)

Take It Home!

Introduction to set of lessons about racial justice for children

One day when my daughter was in preschool I was upset to come in during the reading of a book that dealt with segregation, because I was hoping that being in an integrated preschool, she would learn to be friends with all kids equally before learning about the upsetting history of race in America. Recently I've read a book and articles by Louise Derman-Sparks about Anti-Bias Education and realize I didn't understand the development of racial identity in young children. --Linda Dukes



Below are some ideas directly from Derman-Sparks' work.

She explains that two and three year old children do notice differences among people and are curious about them. Noticing differences is natural – it only leads to problems when it is overlaid with messages of one group being better than another.

Young children are also developing a personal sense of self and their multiple social identities (such as race/ethnicity, gender, religious, class). They learn about their social identities by both overt and covert messages.

Overt messages may be hearing statements like “What a strong boy you are!” or “Everybody is important.” Covert messages are trickier to see and can include not only what they hear from media and books (most of the “good” characters – or almost all the characters -- are White people, for example) but also the covert messages from home if parents say everyone's important but only have friends with people like themselves and only go places as a family where most people are like them, too.

Messages of visibility and invisibility are powerful. Who is pictured in children's books, classrooms, toys, and movies tells a child who is important and who is not, what is right and what is not. Children, for example, who are surrounded by White images come to see White as “normal” and that people with other skin colors are not as good. (The same process works for other social identities. So, for example, if the only family images children see in books, movies, etc. are with a mom and a dad, they come to see families with single parents or with two moms or two dads as “less than” or wrong.)

Preschool children develop “pre-prejudice” as they try to make sense of the world. They may see someone with black skin and wonder about cleanliness or how the skin became so dark. If adults are paying attention, pre-prejudice can be addressed.

By ages 5 and 6, children also begin to notice power dynamics – what type of people are in charge. They begin to internalize oppression or privilege.

Primary school-age children develop a sense of fairness and can be guided to learn empathy for others. During this age it is really important for children to receive active anti-bias education. By age 9, children with strongly stereotyped attitudes have a harder time absorbing ideas that differ from theirs.

There is so much more! Here is one resource to start with –

Sophia Fahs Lecture at the UUA's General Assembly in 2012 by Louise Derman-Sparks, "Stages in Children's Development of Racial/Cultural Identity and Attitudes." Just Google this title or go to https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/documents/derman-sparkslouise/1206_233_identity_stages.pdf

FOUR CORE GOALS OF ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION

From Louise Derman-Sparks & Julie Olsen Edwards, 2010. *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children & Ourselves*

1. Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
2. Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
3. Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
4. Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discrimination.

First Racial Justice Lesson



Our first Racial Justice lesson focused on noticing and appreciating skin shades. The first step in teaching children to talk openly about race is to help them notice and value their own. The second step is to help them notice and appreciate others'. When children are comfortable and knowledgeable about race, they can begin the conversations that will shape the world.

Talking with your children about race is very important and yet can be difficult for many of us! At home you might compare the skin colors and the hair types of the people in the family, affirming the beauty of all.