

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

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

Identity - Lesson 2 for Grades 3-5

by Linda Dukes

LESSON OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Thoughts to Ponder:

Imagine being forced to suppress one such ingredient that you openly acknowledge and value. Imagine, for example, being forced to let go of your religion. For people whose faith is a fundamental part of their lives, such a thought is unfathomable.

Yet doing so for race makes no more sense. . . .

The comment "I don't see color; I just see people" carries with it one huge implication: **It implies that color is a problem**, arguably synonymous with "I can see who you are *despite* your race."

As evidence, note that **the phrase is virtually never applied to White people.**

In over 40 years of life and nearly 15 years as an anti-racist educator, I have yet to hear a White person say in reference to another White person, "I don't see your color; I just see you."

In my experience, it is *always* applied to people of color (nearly always by White people).

For the students of color whose race is core to their identities, the comment effectively causes many to feel "invisible."

"Then you don't see me," one student of color once responded.

- *Jon Greenberg*, "7 Reasons Why 'Colorblindness' Contributes to Racism Instead of Solves It" <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/02/colorblindness-adds-to-racism/>

Big Questions:

Who am I?

What do I want others to recognize in me?

What do others want me to recognize in them?

This session explores the second Unitarian Universalist Principle. In the children's version, the color is Orange, Offer fair and kind treatment to others and self. The adult version is "Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations."

GOALS

- To understand that everyone has multiple identities
- To appreciate our own identities and others'
- To understand that it might be a big loss if someone tried to deny one of our identities

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- identify at least 5 parts of their identity
- think about what it would feel like to have one of their identities ignored

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Parts of this lesson are based on Teaching Tolerance's lesson "My Multicultural Self."
<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/my-multicultural-self>

LESSON-AT-A-GLANCE

Opening	6 minutes
Activity: Our Identities	45 minutes
Closing	5 minutes

LEADER PREPARATION

Read "Colorblindness: the New Racism?" by Afi-Odelia E. Scruggs in *Teaching Tolerance*, Issue 36, Fall 2009

<http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-36-fall-2009/feature/colorblindness-new-racism>

MATERIALS FOR LESSON

- Myers, Walter Dean. *Looking Like Me*. Illustrated by Christopher Myers. NY: Egmont USA, 2009. Print.
- Circles that are 2-1/2 to 3 inches in diameter, any color light enough to see writing/drawings on them. Each child and adult will need 5-8 circles.
- A large outline of a T-shirt for each child and adult, ideally as big as a child's T-shirt. They need to be at least big enough for 5-8 of the circles to fit on the "shirt." Ideally they would be cut out to the T-shirt shape, but there might be time to do this in class if there are "extra" adults available (or not to do it at all). They can be any color.
- Pencils
- Markers
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Posters in the room showing people with a variety of skin colors.

- Copies of “Taking it Home 2” for this lesson and the articles at the end of this lesson, Handouts 1-4.
- Chalice and LED/battery-operated candle or matches and candle

LESSON PLAN

WELCOMING AND ENTERING

OPENING (6 MINUTES)

Description of Activity

Sit in a circle and follow the class’s 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.


Play a simple game to help new teachers/participants learn names.

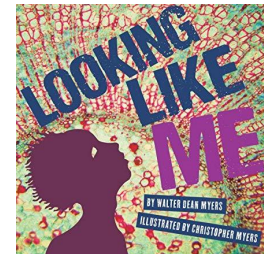
Share Joys and Concerns.

ACTIVITY: OUR IDENTITIES (45 MINUTES)

Description of Activity

Read *Looking Like Me* by Walter Dean Myers. Practice reading

 this beforehand, perhaps with a partner. *Keep attention/ comprehension, by stopping every couple of pages to ask what else he’s discovered he is.* If you have time constraints, you might plan to skip several pages in the middle, saying that he found out a lot more identities and later if there is time, they could look at those pages. For example, after reading the page that begins “Miss Kay put out her fist,” you could skip 10 pages and begin again with the page that begins “Sometimes I let my words go free.”



Creating Identity Circles

Explain that we all have several identities. Explaining what identities are in simple terms isn’t easy! You might try “pieces of yourself” or “roles or parts that you act in a play – except they are real.” It probably won’t make sense until you

give examples for yourself, such as

college student, guitar player, man, Latino, gamer, runner, brother, son, computer geek, Unitarian Universalist

or

woman, wife, mother, American, White, Unitarian Universalist, daughter, oldest sister in family, t'ai chi student, activist, teacher, liberal, temporarily-able-bodied.

Explain that identities can change over time (example, I used to be a teacher at an elementary school but I'm retired and don't teach there anymore).

One identity that doesn't change is our race. Review this explanation from the last lesson: We know from last time that people don't really have white or black skin. but, 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: to complicate matters further, many Latinx people identify as White, and some as Afro-Cuban etc., and some as Indigenous.)

Explain again that **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.

Have children give examples of identities they have, prompting them with your own examples as needed – be sure to include skin color/race as one identity

Give each child five blank circles and a pencil or marker. They write or draw one of their identities in each circle. Have plenty of extra circles in case they can think of more than five. Help those who have trouble thinking of identities or writing them.



Once everyone is ready, make a standing circle with each person holding their identity circles.

Identity Game:

Say we're going to play a game that I think most of you will really like. In a minute I'll ask for a volunteer to go first to step into the circle and call out one of their identities. Then everyone else who has the same identity, even if they didn't write it on one of their circles, steps into the circle also. (If not all can physically step into the circle, find a way to include them, such as move their wheelchair into the circle or raise hands. If someone seems to be reluctant to participate, ask another adult to support them.)

Say there may be a time when one person is the only one inside or only one person is outside. Say that if we had a group of perhaps 100 people, surely there would be others with them – we are just too small a group.

Ask for a volunteer to go first. After those with the same identity step in, have them return to the big circle.

Determine who goes next however you think will work: perhaps someone who didn't step in last time or someone standing next to the person who had the last turn, etc.

Continue until everyone has had a turn who wants one or there are no more different identities.



Discussion questions (if the group has 8 or more, consider dividing into groups of approximately 4 with an adult each)

- Which identities (circles) feel most important to you?
- How would you feel if someone made fun of one of your identities?
- How would you react if one of these identities were taken away or ignored?
Ask a number of children.
- If the identity that was being ignored was your skin color (race), how might you feel? (Older students might be presented with the “color blind” idea. If you say you are colorblind and don't notice a person's skin color, how might they feel?)
- Why is it good to be proud of your race?
- What can go wrong if someone thinks their race is better than other races?
- (For older students) Why do you think some people think it's good to be colorblind about people? In what ways might that idea be hurtful? In what ways might it be helpful?

Making “T-shirts”

Tell participants that they will make a paper “T-shirt” that shows some of who they are. Have large pieces of paper with an outline of a T-shirt (preferably close to child-sized and ideally cut out in the shape of a T-shirt). Ask each child to use a marker to write their first name in large letters on the T-shirt, leaving enough room for all of their circles to fit on the shirt, too. Then ask them to glue their circles on the shirt.

Depending on the time left and the number of children, either encourage them to share their shirts with the whole group or in small groups.

CLOSING (5 MINUTES)

Preparation for Activity

Copy Taking It Home #2 for all participants (and plan to email it to all families after the session).

Description of Activity

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

Today we talked about who we are – that we are made up of many identities. It's important to be proud of who we are and yet not think we are better than other people. We also talked about how it might hurt to have people ignore part of us that we feel is important.

Close following the class' usual routine.

Pass out Take it Home #2 sheets and articles (parents can self-select) as parents/caregivers arrive and encourage them to read them.

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 Handouts 2, 3, 4)

Take It Home!

2nd Racial Justice Lesson

While learning about anti-bias education in order to plan these lessons, we were excited to find Teaching Tolerance’s Social Justice Standards, which give specifics about what to aim for at certain ages. (<http://www.tolerance.org/anti-bias-framework>; click on the link near the bottom) Here are examples for Kindergarten through second graders about Identity:

- I know that all my group identities are part of me—but that I am always ALL me.
- I can feel good about myself without being mean or making other people feel bad.
- I see that the way my family and I do things is both the same and different from how other people do things, and I am interested in both.



In our first Racial Justice lesson we talked about respect and focused on one aspect of our identity – our skin color.

This time we expanded to look at our multiple **identities** – who we are. For example, Each of us has a variety of identities, such as UU, American, family member, Black/White/Asian/Latinx/biracial, soccer player, math whiz, etc.

Children created circles of their own identities, played a game with them, and used them to create a paper T-shirt representing who they are.



We want our children to be aware of their multiple identities, to feel good (but not superior) about them, and to feel positively about others’ identities. These goals fit with the first two of the Four Goals of Anti-Bias Education, listed below.

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.
-

The Never-Ending Task of Shielding Black Kids From Negative Stereotypes

Dawn M. Dow

The Atlantic, Apr 9, 2018

<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/04/black-parents-media-stereotypes/557408/>

Many black parents vigilantly curate the books, movies, and toys their children are exposed to—with mixed success.



A few years ago, when the former pro football player Martellus Bennett was looking for books to read to his young daughter, he was disappointed by his options. He had trouble finding titles with protagonists who looked like her and who had parents who looked like him.

So, unable to find the sort of book he wanted, he wrote his own—his whimsical *Hey A.J.* series follows the adventures of a little girl with voluminous curly hair, like his daughter's.

Bennett is not alone as a black parent who has felt the need to take a hands-on role in selecting what books, movies, shows, and toys his child is exposed to on a regular basis. As a sociologist who studies families, I have interviewed 60 middle- and upper-middle-class African American mothers, many of whom have not just encountered a shortage of media that represents them, but are worried about the messages their kids receive from the majority of books and shows out there. They recognize that a central project of parenthood—raising happy kids with strong self-esteem—takes more (and more deliberate) effort when one's kids are black.

The mothers I talked to generally weren't confident that when they turned on the television, went to a movie theater, or visited a bookstore, their children would see empowering versions of themselves. One mother I interviewed told me, "I don't want [my son's] understandings of black folks to be from the media. You know, I want him to

know black people as we are.” She and other moms I talked to—as is standard in scholarly research, I agreed not to publish any of these mothers’ names—worried about most media’s reliance on damaging stereotypes, and said they curated their kids’ media intake with an eye toward including racially empowering imagery. (For many parents with less time and money, some of these efforts would likely be even more challenging to undertake.)

A working married mother of two described to me how she thinks through her daughter’s exposure to certain TV shows. “I really tried to encourage and push Dora [the Explorer] as much as possible,” she said. “It was like, okay, she is traveling around. She is cool. She speaks Spanish. She is a kid of color.” The mom was not as keen on Disney, whose shows and movies, according to her, “are so white.” She also mentioned the existence of a variety of racist tropes in certain Disney movies decades ago.

Speaking of that history, some mothers I talked to sensed an encouraging shift in their own lifetime. “I think it has improved a lot in the last 20 years since I was a kid,” one said. “Growing up, I don’t remember seeing a book with black faces in it.” Lately, many black parents have embraced and applauded mainstream movies such as *A Wrinkle in Time*, *Black Panther*, and *Hidden Figures* for their positive depictions of blackness. “It’s the first time in a very long time that we’re seeing a film with centered black people, where we have a lot of agency,” Jamie Broadnax, who founded and writes at the website *Black Girl Nerds*, told *The New York Times Magazine* in [a piece about *Black Panther*](#).

Indeed, curation does not always mean censoring and subtracting—many parents go out of their way to add perspectives to their kids’ media diets. Some mothers in my research remembered coordinating outings to theaters with other African American mothers and children to see 2009’s *The Princess and the Frog*, the first and only Disney animated movie to feature an African American princess.

What is the end result of all this effort? Better self-images for children of color, parents hope. And sometimes, the beneficial effects can ripple outward. One working mother of three told me about when, while visiting a predominantly white private school, her daughter sat in with some current female students—all of them white—who were playing with baby dolls. Her daughter, upon entering the room and noticing that the girls weren’t playing with the lone black doll, scooped it up, exclaiming, “Oh my goodness! Look at this beautiful black baby and her beautiful black skin!” The doll quickly became the center of attention, and the mother told me that in the coming weeks the school ordered additional black dolls to reduce disputes among the students who clamored over the original one. She told me it was her proudest moment as a mother.

Dawn M. Dow is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Raising White Children to be Anti-Racist Allies

Posted on December 5, 2014 by Dr. Rebecca Hains

<https://rebeccahains.com/2014/12/05/raising-white-children-to-be-anti-racist-allies/>

In recent days, the nation has been riveted and repulsed by the grand juries' decisions to indict neither Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson in the death of Michael Brown, nor New York City police officer Daniel Pantaleo in the death of Eric Garner. In the ensuing national conversation, many white people are staring down the stark reality of ongoing systemic racism in the United States for the first time. The inequities exposed by Wilson and Pantaleo's impunity in Brown and Pantaleo's respective deaths have served as a rude awakening for countless white people, whose experiences with the U.S. justice system have been nothing like their African-American peers'.

As a result, concerned white parents are now asking: "How can we raise our children to be allies to people of color, to help put an end to racism in the United States?"

This is a crucial goal, and it's a goal that's within reach—but families can only achieve it by being intentional in their parenting. For decades, white families have been hesitant to discuss race with their children, fearful that they might misspeak or be misunderstood and inadvertently foster prejudice in their own children.

In fact, according to a 2007 study at Vanderbilt University of 18,950 families with kindergarteners, 75 percent of white families never or almost never discuss race with their children. This is a major problem. When white parents don't discuss race with their children, studies show, peer and media influences fill in the gaps—often with terrible consequences. Children are not colorblind; they begin noticing race at as young as six months of age. Even though they lack racial vocabulary, they quickly begin to categorize people by color—drawing upon the most obvious of stereotypes.

This means it's important for white parents who wish to raise anti-racist children to begin talking with their kids about race from an early age.

Here are a few suggestions, backed by the research in this area, on how white parents can raise children who are allies to people of color and who can think critically about race relations, race representations, and racism.

1. **Tell your children you value racial diversity.** Children's attitudes towards race are strongly influenced by what they perceive their parents' attitudes to be. For example, studies conducted by researchers at Sesame Street showed that most preschoolers liked the idea of having interracial friendships—but fewer than half of the children in the study (who were African-American, White, Puerto Rican, Crow Indian, and Chinese-American) believed their moms would be happy about it if they actually had a friend of another race. This anticipation of disapproval can have real consequences in children's attitudes and behaviors, even if it's unwarranted—and research with white families, at least, suggests that this is often the case. When parents don't tell their children that they like racially diverse people, kids' assumptions about how their parents feel are way off the mark (Vittrup & Holden, 2011). According to a study published in the journal *Child Development* in 2012, even reading race-themed books to preschoolers is not enough: If moms are "color-blind" or "color-mute" during the storytelling, the children fail to understand that their mothers agree with the book's message (Pahlke, Bigler and Suizzo, 2012). The parents in these

studies are generally less prejudiced than the kids might expect, and vice-versa: without conversation, neither party really knows what the other believes, and both guess poorly. The key, then, is to be explicit. Experts such as Dr. Brigitte Vittrup of Texas Woman’s University and Dr. George W. Holden of Southern Methodist University argue that parents can’t be vague. It’s not good enough to offer platitudes like “Everybody’s equal,” “God made all of us,” and “Under the skin, we’re all the same.” Instead, we must be specific. Dr. Vittrup and Dr. Holden suggest that parents of children ages 5 to 7 can discuss race using clear statements and questions, like this: “Some people on TV or at school have different skin color than us. White children and Black children and Mexican children often like the same things even though they come from different backgrounds. They are still good people and you can be their friend. If a child of a different skin color lived in our neighborhood, would you like to be his friend?”

For maximum effect, though, these conversations should be meaningful—not just a brief mention, but a real dialogue that is age-appropriate, according to one study on how children develop prejudice. It’s worth working at.

2. Teach your children to respect other racial groups.

To really respect other people, it helps to adopt an empathetic perspective. Being empathetic involves taking on another person’s perspective enough to understand and share their feelings. So, one way to help white children respect other racial and ethnic groups is to help them understand what being in the racial minority is like. You can ask them questions, like, “When we watch television, we are fortunate to always see people who look like us on the screen. Now imagine that there were never people who looked like you on screen—maybe that there were never people with your hair color or skin color. Wouldn’t that make you feel kind of funny, like there was something wrong with you?” Then, you can link those questions to the idea that this is the actual experience for children from other racial and ethnic groups. “For little African-American and Asian-American girls, that’s what life is really like. They almost never see television shows about people who look like them. That can make them feel sad. Almost half of the little kids in our country are from other backgrounds. It’s too bad that there aren’t more programs about people like themselves, isn’t it?”

I asked Dr. Holden for his expert advice in this area, and he suggested that white parents should also take their children to visit minority-majority neighborhoods and let them experience, firsthand, what it’s like to be “other.” “White parents can take their children to visit an African-American church,” he suggests, “or a Spanish-speaking neighborhood. It helps for children to know what it feels like to be in the minority,” he explains.

If you decide to take your children to visit a community that is not predominantly white, the key to success is emphasizing empathy. Make sure that the trips are not about gawking—not about saying, “Wow, look at all those people.” It shouldn’t be a form of tourism, a means to gawk at others or their surroundings. Instead, it should be about respectful perspective-taking—experiencing being in the minority. The goal should be to develop a better understanding of the feelings of people from other backgrounds who are often underrepresented in pop culture and made to feel of lesser value. In so doing, we can cultivate a genuine anti-racist standpoint in our children.

3. Introduce your children to diverse adults.

If you have friends outside your own racial or ethnic group—and you should—make sure your kids see this first-hand. If they do, they are likely to perceive people from other races more positively than they would otherwise. In fact, research suggests that knowledge of parents’ friendships is an even better way of reducing racial biases in children than attending diverse preschools. Although studies have shown that interracial friendships and cooperative learning can help reduce children’s biases, doctoral research at the University of Texas at Austin found that children’s mothers’ friendships were the much more influential factor. This can be made sense of by remembering that in the preschool years, parents are the major socializing forces in children’s lives. Our kids want to be just like us—so they’re paying attention to how we actually live our lives. That means we need to pay attention, too, and purposefully expose our children to friends of various backgrounds.

4. Watch media and read books with diverse characters.

Children don’t just need to see people like themselves in the media and in books. They also need to see positive depictions of people from other racial and ethnic groups. So, seek them out: watch movies and television shows about a range of people. And find books that feature stories about people whose backgrounds differ from your family’s.

Make a special effort to find picture books featuring cross-ethnic friendships in particular. (This may be especially important if you live in an area lacking in diversity, where cross-ethnic friendships are not an option for your family.) Researchers have noted that children under the age of 8 are strongly oriented towards their own racial or ethnic group, so seeing a character who looks like them gives them a character to identify with. Then, when they see that character interact with people from different races, the story functions as a source of indirect cross-ethnic contact for the child—with the potential to improve their racial attitudes.

Just remember that as you and your children watch television or read books together, you need to be explicit about your own position. Children of this age range are not very good at making inferences about adults’ feelings on race, so as discussed in Tip #1, we have to be clear.

5. Discuss racial and ethnic stereotypes in the media.

According to media literacy expert Cyndy Scheibe, when children are about 8 years old, it’s possible to discuss racial and ethnic stereotypes with them. When movies or television programs contain stereotypes, you can explain to older children that those stereotypes are the result of decisions made by real people. When I interviewed her for my book, Scheibe explained that Pocahontas is a good starting point for conversations about how the stereotypes in media are the results of people’s decisions. “To me,” Scheibe says, “Pocahontas is probably the most egregious of all of the Disney Princesses because she was a real person in history, and she could not have had a twelve-inch waist. And she was twelve years old when she met John Smith. She didn’t fall in love with him; she didn’t marry him; she did save his life. But the Disneyfication of her story overlays a really skinny, beautiful princess whose goal is to fall in love.

“You can talk about that with your children,” Scheibe suggests, “and you can focus on other aspects of who she is. You can point out all sorts of issues, like the way that skin color in Disney movies ties to gender: Females, regardless of the ethnicity, almost always have lighter skin than the males. Jasmine is much lighter in skin tone than Aladdin; Pocahontas is much lighter in skin tone than any of the male Native Americans. Just as a noticing thing. You can say, ‘That’s an

interesting thing to notice. Why do you think they did that?’ You may not always have the answers, but you can get kids in the habit of noticing that somebody made this film.”

In short, white parents who wish to be allies to people of color should actively model an anti-racist standpoint for their kids. But just modeling isn’t enough—we need to talk openly about our position, too, and call out stereotypes when we see them. By taking these steps, we can raise children who are anti-racist and willing to change our world for the better.

—Rebecca Hains, Ph.D. is a media studies professor at Salem State University and the author of The Princess Problem: Guiding Our Girls Through the Princess-Obsessed Years, a book meant to help parents raise empowered, media-literate daughters. This piece is adapted from Chapter 6 of The Princess Problem: “The Problems of Race Representation and Racism.”

If you enjoyed this post, you may follow Rebecca’s blog by hitting the “follow blog” button at rebeccahains.com.

How to Talk to Your Kid About Being Multiracial

by Jaelyn Youhana Garver, 4/12/19

<https://offspring.lifehacker.com/how-to-talk-to-your-kid-about-being-multiracial-1833721331>

Photo: Jose Luis Pelaez Inc (Getty Images)

When Sonia Smith-Kang moved to California in the 1980s, it was at “the height of The Valley Girl,” she says. All around her, she saw blue eyes and feathered blonde hair.

“I was pretty much the antithesis of that,” Smith-Kang tells me. “I was brown with curly, wild hair.”

Smith-Kang’s mother is Mexican, her father is black, and she was born in Puerto Rico. When she married a Korean man, her experience taught her that it was only a matter of time before her kids were peppered with questions from peers who didn’t understand what it meant to be multiracial.



The number of multiracial children in the United States is in the midst of a boom. The Pew Research Center reported two years ago that one in seven infants born in 2015 were multiracial or multiethnic—nearly three times the number born in 1980.

And yet talking to children about being multiracial can still be complex. Because parents might not know what to say, they often avoid bringing up these conversations. And that can be damaging.

“What happens to children is they internalize it as, ‘There must be something wrong with me if I’m having these kinds of thoughts,’” Smith-Kang says.

So how do you bring it up? What do you say when your daughter asks, “Why don’t you look like me?” Or your son tells you the kids on the playground made a remark about his skin color?

Start the conversation early

To assure she’s being proactive about questions her children might have, Smith-Kang had what she calls The Mash-Up Talk. “It’s when we talk about all the awkward questions that other kids (and grownups!) ask us about who and what we are,” she writes on Mash Up Americans, a site that helps people navigate hybrid cultures and identities.

It’s not just a one-time talk, she says—it’s an ongoing conversation, and it starts early. Children as young as 1 or 2 years old understand the differences between colors and can sort and arrange. During their Mash-Up Talk, Smith-Kang’s family has discussed dolls, books, music and movies that “reflect our cultural reality.”



Photo: Sonia Smith-Kang

Find people with shared experiences

Smith-Kang also suggests finding communities—in real life or online—of people with similar experiences. She recommends a few that showcase diversity and a multiracial experience:

- [Multiracial Americans of Southern California](#), a nonprofit that advocates for multiracial and transracial communities. Smith-Kang is its president.
- [Culturás](#), a women-led media and technology site “creating and discovering content that celebrates culture, diversity and inclusion.”
- [InCultureParent](#), an online magazine “for parents raising little global citizens.”
- [Multicultural Kid Blogs](#), which focuses on arts, food, language and activities for children.

Read books

To teach her multiracial daughter that there’s more to people than skin color, Lauren Gaines uses books. On [Parenting](#), she recommends five titles to help teach children about their background and how to love themselves, including [What I Like About Me!](#) by Allia Zobel Nolan and Miki Sakamoto, which teaches that it’s our differences that make us special; and [Black, White, and Tan](#) by Nicole C. Mullen, where a little girl named Jazz shares what makes her family special.

Mullen has even recorded [an accompanying song](#), which starts out: “Momma looks like coffee. Daddy looks like cream. Baby is a mocha drop American dream. All the colors of the rainbow are in her family tree, woven all together in a paisley tapestry.”

Learn with your kid

Before you can bestow any semblance of identity on your children, you yourself must have a strong sense of self. Parenting expert Samantha Kemp-Jackson tells [HuffPost Canada](#): “This means understanding one’s cultural and ethnic history, not only within the context of the country of ethnic origin, but also the socio-political perceptions of that culture within the society in which they live.”

You should also learn about all of the cultures your child is a part of, trying to understand the specific complexities and challenges the groups might face in America. And stay in the know. You might join Facebook groups such as [Are Those Your Kids?](#) [Navigating Multiracial Motherhood One Day At A Time](#), [Mixed Race Family Parent Resource Group](#) and [Teaching Literacy Skills with Diverse Books](#).

But also know that it’s okay to not have all the answers. Smith-Kang believes you can say “Let’s learn together.” One way she does this is by letting her children be the teachers. They’re learning three languages—Korean, Spanish and English—and they help her with Korean pronunciation and culture.

“I think that’s the beauty in it,” she says. “We have an opportunity to learn about more cultures. That helps keep parents from feeling like they’re going to say the wrong things. And they might, and that’s okay. We learn, and we adapt, and we grow.”