



Promote Anti-Racism Using Children's Books: A Parents' Guide

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We live in a nation of extreme diversity, yet may not see ourselves, or our children, represented. This lack of representation is apparent in children's literature, including the absence of different cultural practices/traditions, racial disparities, gender norms, and beyond. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, often referred to as the mother of multicultural children's literature, once said:

"A book can sometimes be a window. The view from the window can be imagined or real, familiar or new, panoramic or narrow. Usually, the window is also a door, and a reader has only to walk through in imagination to become a part of whatever world has been created or re-created in the book. When lighting conditions are just right, a window can also be a mirror, reflecting back for us the joys and sorrows, the loves and hates, the pain and pleasure of living. One of the reasons literature exists is to transform human experience and reflect it back to us so that we can better understand it... (Bishop, 1990)."



Here are a few terms that may be new.

Anti-racist/anti-racism. To be anti-racist or practice anti-racism is to take active steps in your everyday life to fight racism and promote equity.³

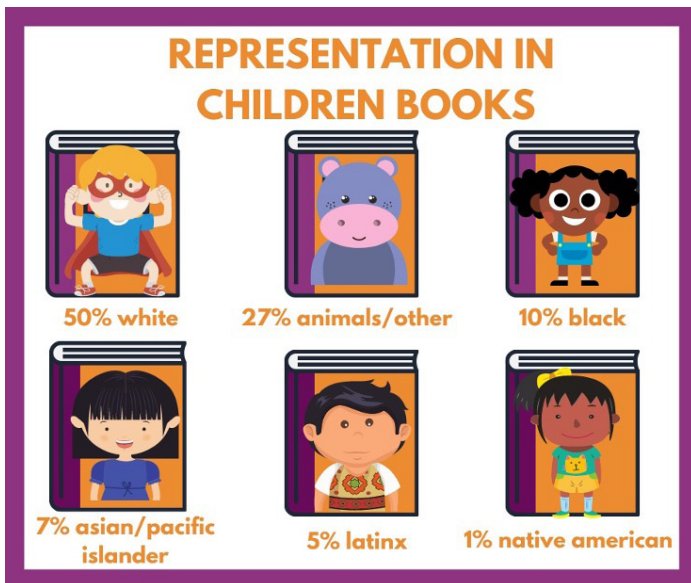
BIPOC stands for **B**lack, **I**ndigenous*, and **P**eople **o**f **C**olor.⁴

In the US, indigenous people are sometimes referred to as American Indians or Native Americans. We use BIPOC (rather than POC or **P**eople **o**f **C**olor) because it is more inclusive and acknowledges that different groups of POC have had different experiences in the US. This also includes Latinx and other minority groups.

Children's literature has the power to transport us to a culture different than our own, introduce unique experiences, and create a window as mentioned by Dr. Bishop. We must take care in choosing books that reflect our own world and the lives of our children and those around them.

Representation in Children's Books

Children want to see themselves and those around them in the books they read. Unfortunately, many children are underrepresented in characters portrayed in books and see stereotypical or negative depictions of people that look like them. A study by the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that in 2018 the percentages of representation in children's books are as follows (Huyck & Dahlen, 2019):



you use stereotypes when talking about others? Children may use these same stereotypes.

- **Start a conversation about current events:** There are many books about race-related events, including books about protesting racial injustice. Use these types of books to introduce your child to events currently happening in the community or in the news.
- **Learn about history:** Choose books that address different perspectives of historical events not always discussed in school, especially the history of BIPOC communities.
- **Help BIPOC children feel accepted:** It is important to read books where children see themselves represented. By reading books to children with characters that look and sound like them and their families, children learn to be confident, proud of who they are and feel accepted and connected to the larger world.
- **Help white children understand the experiences of BIPOC:** Reading books that feature BIPOC characters in a favorable light will help white children learn about similarities and differences (Dunham & Emory, 2014). Exposing children to characters with different backgrounds will help them better understand experiences of BIPOC individuals. Read both books that celebrate the struggles that BIPOC communities have overcome and books that feature BIPOC families as main characters in everyday situations.

However, there are a wide range of books for children that promote diversity. Look for age-appropriate books that highlight specific cultures, traditions, or feature BIPOC main characters of a different race, gender, or disability.

Tips for Using Books to Promote Anti-Racism

Books are most effective when you talk about them with your children. There are several ways you can use books to raise anti-racist children.

- **Break down or challenge stereotypes:** Books with positive portrayals of BIPOC characters (heroes, main characters, problem solvers, leaders, etc.) can cement their own positive beliefs about themselves and those around them or challenge stereotypes (Butler, 2011).
- **Celebrate differences and similarities:** Read books about people from different countries, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds. Talk about how they are similar and different to your family (Michael & Bartoli, 2014). Help guide the conversation. Recognize your own biases. Do



It Is Never Too Early or Too Late to Talk to Your Children About Racism

Speaking to children about racism can be difficult. Below are suggested books to help start conversations and begin your family's journey.

- o **Books to Read with your Infant or Toddler**
 - Antiracist Baby by Ibram X. Kendi (2020)
 - A is for Activist by Innosanto Nagara (2013)
 - An ABC of Equality by Chana Ginelle Ewing (2019)



o Books to Read with your Preschooler

- The Colors of Us by Karen Katz (2002)
- Let's Talk About Race by Julius Lester (2005)
- Sulwe by Lupita Nyong'o (2019)

o Books to Read with your Elementary School Child

- The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson (2018)
- Hair Love by Matthew A. Cherry (2019)
- Not My Idea: A Book About Whiteness by Anastasia Higginbotham (2018)

o Books for Middle School Children

- Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes (2018)
- This Book is Anti-Racist by Tiffany Jewell (2020)
- Us in Progress: Short Stories about Young Latinos by Lulu Delacre (2017)

o Books for High School Children

- It's Trevor Noah: Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood by Trevor Noah (2019)
- Rain Is Not My Indian Name by Cynthia Leitich Smith (2001)
- The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas (2017; UNICEF, 2020)

Summary

Along with your expertise about your child and where they are developmentally, books provide the opportunity for your child to learn about themselves and those around them. They can help jumpstart conversations about race and racism if you are not sure how to approach these topics with your child. Pull from your own experiences and don't be afraid to start a discussion without having all the answers. Working through these conversations together, with your child, is an important part of the process for promoting anti-racism in children.

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