Receptive to Race

Normalizing the Discussion of Race with Children in Libraries

CALCON 2019
Loveland, Colorado
• What is your name?

• Where are you from?

• What is one awkward thing a child or caregiver has said to you in reference to race, at work or otherwise?
• Why are there Black people?
• Why am I called Black if my skin is brown?
• Why does Ruben speak Spanish?
• Your nose is different because it goes up.

• Why am I called White if my skin is peachy?
• I’m going to eat a lot of melanin so my skin can be brown.
• Why am I darker than other kids?
• You don’t look Black.
Infants:
- respond to skin color cues at 6 months.
- absorb a cultural identity through daily interactions.

1-2 years:
- Learn cultural “rule” system of their families.
- Pay close attention to adults feelings and non-verbal messages.
- Curious about physical characteristics of self and others.
Stages in racial/cultural identity development

3-4 years:
• Becoming grounded in their family’s cultural behavior.
• Identify people according to physical characteristics and groups.
• Overgeneralize differences based on limited experience.
• Absorb stereotypes from people and media.
• Have a strong sense of empathy.

5-6 years:
• May reject home culture for dominate one.
• Interested in how people get skin color.
• May select to play only with children close to their identities.
• Enjoy exploring cultures; can think critically.

7-9 years:
• Establish group identities and membership.
• Children of color aware of racism.
• Rise in name-calling based on racial identities; a greater capacity for empathy.
• Learning about the “history” of their own culture.
In 14 of 64 of Colorado’s counties, kids of color already make up the majority.

By 2032 children of color are predicted to be the majority among all of Colorado’s child population.

1 in 4 Colorado kids live in an immigrant family (9 out of 10 are US Citizens.)
ALSC Guidelines

https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2015/12/core-competencies-in-comics/
• Highlight that physical diversity among people is desirable, and that all colors, shades, and shapes of people are beautiful.

• Talk about differences in a tone of delight and interest.

• Explore skin color, hair, and eyes. There is ample opportunity to explain the science behind variations (STEM!)

• Expand awareness of racial similarities and differences. As children encounter wider and more diverse settings, teach them to be open and respectful of all people.
Use Mary Dowd Lambert’s Whole Book Approach:

What's going on in this picture?
What do you see that makes you say that?
What more can we find?
Who are the people in this book?

This affirms that children’s ideas about race matter.
• Ask:
  Whose story is this?
  Who wrote this?
  Who speaks?
  Who looks?
  Who is observed?
  Who is important in this story?

• Read books that depict children experiencing unfair treatment based on their racial identity (Empathy!) and actions taken to counteract/prevent such treatment (Critical Thinking!)

• Never single out one specific child. Everyone has a racial identity and therefore activities can pertain to all of the children.
• Find a book on your table.

• Work with a partner.

• Pick one of the tips to try (bonus points if you can do more than one!)
Collection Development

Diversity in Children’s Books 2018

Percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2018 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp

American Indians/First Nations: 1%
Asian/Latinx: 5%
Asian Pacific Islander/Asian Pacific American: 7%
African/African American: 10%
Animals/Other: 27%
White: 50%

Illustration by David Hudec, in consultation with Sarah Park Dillen
Released under a Creative Commons BY-SA license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

The CCBC inventory includes 31,754 books published in 2018. This graphic would not have been possible without the statistics compiled by the CCBC, and the index and feedback we reviewed from Edith Condit, Muffy ath Griffin, R. T. Fanning, Debbie Reese, Navy Elizabeth Thane, and Andrea Tyler. Many thanks.
Collection Development

- Foster visibility.
- Ask yourself: will all of the children you serve see themselves and their family’s way of life reflected in your book collection?
- Ask yourself: Will all children of color, including those with mixed heritage, see one or more characters with whom they can readily and positively identify?
- Consider the Author’s or Illustrator’s Background and Perspective
Collection Development

- Avoid tokenism (only one of a certain racial group.)
- Check illustrations for stereotypes.
- Check the storyline for power relationships.
- Does your book collection include a balance of people who have made important and honored contributions to American life as well as the world community—and not just the traditional white, male “heroes?”
- Do some of your books about important people include struggles for justice?
Don’t always substitute animals for people when teaching about difficult topics, injustices, etc.

Don’t expect every book to show diversity. The goal is to have a balanced collection.

Don’t overuse folk or fairy tales to explain culture. Culture is also current and evolving and therefore needs to be represented.
Programming

- Parent education
- Let’s Talk About Race
- Service Projects
- Celebrate Peace!
- Cultural Celebrations
- Black Storytime
- Voices of Race/Human Library
- Author Events
- Summer Reading
- Translation services
• What other programming ideas have you tried or could you envision to contribute to the conversation on race?
• What idea(s) from today can you implement at your library?

• What questions do you have?

Discussion
ALSC Core Competencies in Comics - www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2015/12/core-competencies-in-comics/


Coming Together (Project) – comingtogether.in/

Embrace Race – www.embracerace.org

KidsCount Colorado – www.coloradokids.org

Racial Equity Tools – www.racialequitytools.org

Teaching for Change - www.teachingforchange.org/

We Need Diverse Books – diversebooks.org/

Resources
THANK YOU

Becki Loughlin
Patron Services Supervisor
High Plains Library District

Phone:
720-685-5118

Email:
bloughlin@highplains.us