

New Jersey State Bar Foundation



Exploring Race in the Classroom
Lesson Plans for Students



Exploring Race in the Classroom

Lesson Plans in Booklet

1. Using Literature to Discuss Race – Grades K-5, *pages 3-4*
2. Common Questions Children Ask and ways to Respond – Grades K-5, *pages 5-6*
3. Using Video to Discuss Race and Privilege – Grades 6-12, *pages 7-8*
4. On A Plate – Grades 6-12, *pages 9-14*

Additional Lesson Plans Online

1. Discovering My Identity – Learning for Justice – Grades 3-5
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/discovering-my-identity>
2. Looking Closely at Ourselves – Learning for Justice – Grades 3-12
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/looking-closely-at-ourselves>
3. Looking at Race and Racial Identity in Children's Books – Learning for Justice – Grades K-5 <https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/looking-at-race-and-racial-identity-in-childrens-books>
4. What Makes us Who We Are? – Learning for Justice – Grades 6-8 and 9-12
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/bibi-lesson-1-what-makes-us-who-we-are-6-8> and
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/bibi-lesson-1-what-makes-us-who-we-are-9-12>



Using Literature to Discuss Race

(Grades K-5)

“The 2014 school year marked the first time in US history that the majority of elementary and secondary schoolchildren were children of color—Black, Latinx, Asian, or American Indian.”

–Beverly Daniel Tatum, from *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*

Talking about race with elementary students is a difficult but necessary conversation to have. According to studies like Kenneth and Mamie Clark’s Preschool Doll Test or York University’s Faculty of Health study on implicit racism found in children ages 9-12, it has been proven that children as early as preschool can show implicit pro-white bias. Since many children already have awareness, even implicit awareness, ignoring or avoiding conversations about race can potentially stigmatize differences. Children need to have conversations in order to normalize the topic. With young students, literature is often the place to start the conversation. It is important to introduce elementary students to literature where the following goals can be reached:

1. Skin color can be discussed openly
2. Our national history can be portrayed accurately
3. African American (or other people of color) resistance is highlighted and discussed
4. White people can be seen as allies

The following books help open these conversations with elementary aged students and achieve the goals listed above.

- *Follow the Drinking Gourd* by Jeanette Winter
- *Aunt Harriet’s Underground Railroad in the Sky* by Faith Ringgold

The following songs can be used to support the literature:

- Follow the Drinking Gourd song can be found on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pw6N_eTZP2U
- Harriet Tubman / Steal Away by Kim and Reggie Harris can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVBMcwr95ok>

After reading one of these books to the students, use the following discussion questions to have a large group conversation.



Discussion Questions

- Does anyone have any questions about what happened in the story?
- How did Molly James, Isaiah, old Hattie and George (Follow the Drinking Gourd) or Be Be and Cassie (*Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*) resist being enslaved? Have you ever resisted something in your life? Is it the same kind of resistance?

Resistance – when you push back against something because you do not think it is right.

- There were many people who helped the characters resist slavery. Who were they and how did they help?
- It takes a lot of courage to be brave. What did the characters in the book have to fear if they were caught? Have you ever been brave? How? What did you fear?
- These are the definitions of race and racism. Have you ever seen this in your life? Where?

Race – the way we divide people into groups based on the color of a person's skin, the shape of a person's eyes or the texture of their hair.

Racism – thinking you are better than someone else just because of the color of their skin, the shape of their eyes or the texture of their hair.

- Why is racism unfair and unkind?

Student Literature on Race for Elementary Students (even more on resource list)

I Love My Hair! By Natasha Anastasia Tarpley (ages 2+)

Let's Talk About Race by Julius Lester (ages 4+)

The Colors of Us by Karen Katz (ages 4+)

Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold (ages 5+)

Juneteenth for Mazie by Floyd Cooper (ages 5+)

Tea Cakes for Tosh by Kelly Starling Lyons (ages 5+)

The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson (ages 5+)

Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez & Her Family's Fight for Desegregation by Duncan Tonatiuh (ages 6+)

Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt by Deborah Hopkinson (ages 6+)

Stella by Starlight by Sharon M. Draper (ages 9+)

Freedom Over Me: Eleven Slaves, their lives and dreams brought to life by Ashley Bryan (ages 9+)

Ghost by Jason Reynolds (ages 10+)

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson (ages 10+)



Common Questions Children Ask and Ways to Respond

The following questions come up with younger children and may come up in your classroom. Following each question is an example of an inappropriate and appropriate response. Using these questions as a model, answer any questions that might arise with age-appropriate facts.

1. "Why is Jamal's skin so dark?"

Inappropriate

"His skin color doesn't matter. We are all the same underneath." (This response denies the child's question, changing the subject to one of similarity when the child is asking about a difference).

Appropriate

"Jamal's skin is dark brown because his mom and dad have dark brown skin." (This is enough for 2- or 3-year-olds. As children get older you can add an explanation of melanin). "We all have a special chemical in our skin called melanin. If you have a lot of melanin, your skin is dark. If you have only a little, your skin is light. How much melanin you have in your skin depends on how much your parents have in theirs."

2. "Why am I called Black? I'm brown!"

Inappropriate

"You are too, Black!" (This response is not enough. It doesn't address the child's confusion between actual skin color and the name of the racial and/or ethnic group).

Appropriate

"You're right; your skin color is brown. We use the name Black to mean the group of people of whom our family is a part. Black people can have different skin colors. We are all one people because our great-great-grandparents once came from a place called Africa. That's why many people call themselves Afro-Americans."

3. "Will the brown wash off in the tub?"

(This is a fairly common question because children are influenced by the racist equation of dirtiness and dark skin in our society).

Inappropriate

Taking this as an example of "kids say the darndest things" and treating it as not serious.

Appropriate

"The color of José's skin will never wash off. When he takes a bath the dirt on his skin washes off, just like when you take a bath. Whether we have light or dark skin, we all get dirty, but our skin stays the same color after we wash it. Our skin is clean after we wash, no matter what color it is."



4. "Why does Miyoko speak funny?"

Inappropriate

"Miyoko can't help how she speaks. Let's not say anything about it." (This response implies agreement with the child's comment that Miyoko's speech is unacceptable, while also telling the child to "not notice," and be polite).

Appropriate

"Miyoko doesn't speak funny, she speaks differently than you do. She speaks Japanese because that's what her mom and dad speak. You speak English like your mom and dad. It's okay to ask questions about what Miyoko is saying, but it is not okay to say that her speech sounds funny because that can hurt her feelings."

5. "Why is that girl in a wheelchair?"

Inappropriate

"Shh, it's not nice to ask." (admonishing)

"I'll tell you another time." (sidestepping)

Acting as though you didn't hear the question (avoiding)

Appropriate

"She is using a wheelchair because her legs are not strong enough to walk. The wheelchair helps her move around."

Excerpted from Teaching Young Children to Resist Bias: What Parents Can Do at

www.newton.k12.ma.us/cms/lib/MA01907692/Centricity/Domain/1099/Teaching-Children-to-Resist-Bias4%202.pdf



Using Video to Discuss Race and Privilege

(Grades 6-12)



Sometimes videos make concepts easier to understand. Use any of the videos below to introduce a concept or support your already existing conversations. Each video has discussion questions that can be used to help guide the conversation.

Sometimes You're A Caterpillar

(3:18 minutes) A short animated film to help understand privilege. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRiWgx4sHGg&feature=youtu.be&list=PLrMqXQ2J_13tBCDSP0NwUfzy-9RtMOHAU

Discussion Questions

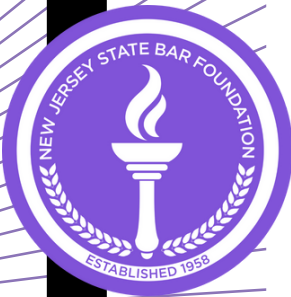
1. What is privilege? (Privileges are unearned advantages or benefits that people have that make their lives easier. One advantage some people experience is that they have food in their home and don't need to worry about where their next meal will come from. Another unearned advantage might be that your school is closed on the holidays you celebrate. Everyone in our culture has unearned advantages, or privileges). What are some of your privileges and how do you benefit from them?
2. What were some privileges that the caterpillar had and how did she benefit from them?
3. Which groups of people in our culture have unearned advantages, or privileges? How might they benefit from these privileges? How can they use their unearned advantages to help others who do not have the same privileges?
4. What disadvantage did the snail have? How did the snail feel about her situation?
5. Which groups of people in our culture have disadvantages? Why are they disadvantaged?

Students Learn A Powerful Lesson About Privilege

(1:45 minutes) An experiment a teacher did with his class to illustrate privilege. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KlmvmuxzYE&feature=youtu.be&list=PLrMqXQ2J_13tBCDSP0NwUfzy-9RtMOHAU

Discussion Questions

1. What could the people in the back rows do to make the situation more equitable? What could people in the front row do to level the playing field?
2. How do people in our culture try to level the playing field? Give some examples in history where ideas have been implemented to help create outcomes that are equitable.



Cacking the Codes: Joy DeGruy, A Trip to the Grocery Store

(3:56 minutes) The story of a white woman and a black woman at the grocery store getting treated unequally. The video highlights how people with privilege can be allies.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTvU7uUgjUI&feature=youtu.be&list=PLrMqXQ2J_13tBCDSP0NwUfzy-9RtM0HAU

Discussion Questions

1. What did Joy experience that felt unequal compared to Kathleen's experience? Without knowing what was in the cashier's mind, what could you imagine the cashier might have been thinking? Why do you think she was thinking those thoughts?
2. Joy's 10-year old daughter was very upset by the experience in the grocery store. What do you imagine she was feeling? Why do you think her reaction was so emotional?
3. Joy mentions that she would "become the angry black woman" if she got upset at the cashier. What does this statement mean? Do you think Joy had a right to become "the angry black woman?"
4. How was Kathleen an ally to Joy? How can you be an ally in your life?

What kind of Asian are you?

(2:19 minutes) This video pokes fun at the stereotyping questions many people of color receive as a result of their appearance.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWynJkN5HbQ&feature=youtu.be&list=PLrMqXQ2J_13tBCDSP0NwUfzy-9RtM0HAU

Discussion Questions

1. The Korean woman preparing for a jog is asked where she is from. She is from San Diego so she answers as such. If the man wanted to know her ethnicity or her ancestry, what could he have asked her instead?
2. The woman was either annoyed or offended when the man made references to Korean culture using food and language. Why might she have been annoyed or offended?
3. The man became offended when she referenced his ethnicity and ancestry with food and language. What was the message she was trying to send by using a British accent and referencing British history and food?

What can you do as a schoolwide initiative?

Not In Our Town. This is a movement to stop hate and bullying and create an inclusive community.

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

No Place For Hate. Become a No Place For Hate school. See the website for the steps needed to become a No Place For Hate school.

<https://nynj.adl.org/?s=no+place+for+hate>

Creating a Schoolwide Racial and Social Justice Initiative.

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/creating-schoolwide-racial-and-social-justice-initiative>

On A Plate Lesson Plan

(Grades 6-12)



Objective

This activity is designed to help middle and high school students see advantages and disadvantages in their lives and in our culture.

Materials

- On a Plate Cartoon for each student
- On a Plate Handout for each small group

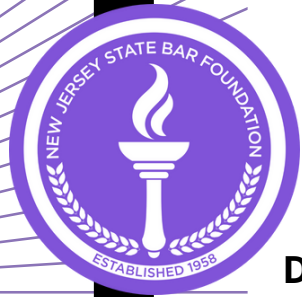
Procedures

1. Ask the students what it looks like to have advantages in a society. Then ask them what it looks like to have disadvantages in our society. (Some answers might be that advantage means you know someone in a job that can help you get the job. And an example of a disadvantage might be that you live in a neighborhood where you have to spend time worrying about safety instead of thinking about schoolwork).
2. Explain to the students that every group in our culture has advantages and disadvantages. Challenge the students to think of a group and list both the advantages and disadvantages of that group. (Some potential groups to explore could be Black or African American people, LGBTQIA+ people, women, people with disabilities, single parents, white people, Muslims, etc.). Challenge any stereotypes that arise from the conversation and try to keep the class focused on facts and personal experiences.
3. Define the following terms for your students:
 - Stereotype: An oversimplified idea or assumption about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences. Ex: All _____ are _____.
 - Prejudice: A belief, or a pre-judgment, about a person or a group of people without having enough knowledge to make that judgement. Prejudice is based on stereotypes.
 - Discrimination: An action based on prejudice and/or stereotyping that excludes people or treats them unfairly. Some forms of discrimination are illegal such as housing discrimination or disability discrimination.
4. Distribute the On a Plate Cartoon to the students. Have them read it alone or as a large group.
5. Break the students into small groups. Give each group a copy of the On a Plate Handout. Have them work as a group to answer the questions on the handout.
6. When the small groups have completed the handout, lead a large group discussion using the questions below.

On A Plate Lesson Plan

(Grades 6-12)

...Continued



Discussion Questions

1. What were some advantages and disadvantages for both Richard and Paula?
2. What were some effects of the advantages and disadvantages that your group determined?
3. Did your group identify any stereotypes, prejudice or discrimination in the cartoon? Explain.
4. Where do you see advantages or disadvantages in your society? Why are some communities more disadvantaged than others? Why are some communities more advantaged?



On A Plate Handout

1. Make a list of advantages and disadvantages that Richard and Paula have.

Richard

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES

Paula

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES

2. How do the differences in advantages and disadvantages impact Richard and Paula?
3. Explain the stereotypes, prejudice and/or discrimination you see in this cartoon.
4. How do advantages and disadvantages manifest in your school, your community and your culture?

ON A PLATE

A SHORT STORY
ABOUT PRIVILEGE

THIS IS RICHARD.
HIS PARENTS ARE
DOING OK.



AND THIS IS PAULA.
HER PARENTS?
NOT SO MUCH.

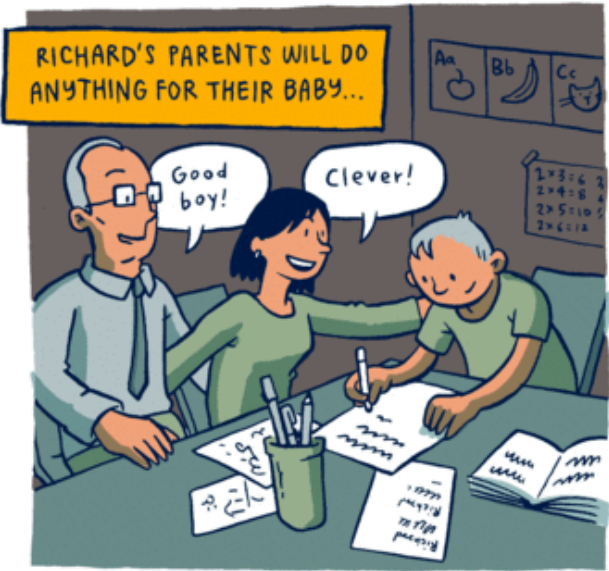


RICHARD'S HOUSE IS WARM AND DRY.
HIS SHELVES ARE FULL OF BOOKS AND
HIS FRIDGE IS FULL OF FOOD.



PAULA'S HOUSE IS FULL OF PEOPLE AND
NOT MUCH ELSE. IT'S DAMP AND NOISY AND
SHE KEEPS GETTING SICK.





RICHARD GOES TO A GREAT SCHOOL. WELL RESOURCED, GOOD KIDS. HIS TEACHERS LOVE THEIR JOB.



AT PAULA'S SCHOOL, THE CLASS SIZES ARE LARGE, THE SCHOOL IS UNDERFUNDED, AND LOOKS IT. HER TEACHERS ARE TIRED, STRETCHED THIN FROM THE STRESS.



SO MAYBE WE CAN SEE WHY THE EXPECTATIONS SET FOR RICHARD...



... MIGHT BE SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT TO THOSE SET FOR PAULA...





FROM: <https://thewellnessalmanac.com/2017/01/27/one-way-of-looking-at-privilege/>