Using Children's Books to Talk About Race: A Bibliography

developed by Krista Aronson and Anne Sibley O'Brien

1. Celebration of differences (CD)

Simply naming and appreciating difference is an essential foundation for conversations about race. Children are already making these observations; talking about them gives children permission and language to voice them. The goal of these interactions is not so much to teach as to create an open forum for children to say whatever they see. Supportive adults then have the opportunity to assist children in developing positive racial associations of both themselves and people different from them.

2. Cross-group (CG)

In psychological research studies, books portraying positive interactions across racial difference have been shown to reduce prejudice. These books show cross-racial friendships which can strengthen children's developing appreciation of and sense of connection to people who look different from them.

3. Race & Racism (R)

Stories of prejudice, mistreatment and discrimination are an essential part of any reality-based education about race, but not as the only or the first story. Too often, when well-intentioned adults want to introduce concepts of race to children, they start with books about the civil rights movement. This is problematic in several ways: Children learn to associate discussions of race with discomfort, conflict, and possibly guilt, and African-Americans may be seen only in the light of a difficult history. In other words, children may absorb the idea of race as a problem and people of color as victims.

However, when presented by a relaxed and practiced facilitator in the context of a broader, ongoing conversation, these stories can be powerful catalysts for provocative conversations, memorable learning, and the development of empathy. Again, the focus of discussion should be on eliciting children's thoughts and feelings and on developing their critical thinking skills.

Here are some examples of books in each category (grade levels are suggestions only).

preschool - Gr. 2

All the Colors of the Earth by Sheila Hamanaka - CD (Multiracial)

Amazing Faces compiled by Lee Bennett Hopkins - CD, CG (Multiracial)

Bein' With You This Way by W. Nikola-Lisa - CD (Multiracial)

Come On, Rain by Karen Hesse - CG (Black/Asian/White)

Jamaica & Brianna by Juanita Havill - CG (Black/Asian)

Shades of People by Shelley Rotner - CD (Multiracial)

Gr. 1 - 4

Baseball Saved Us - R (Japanese-American)

The Bracelet by Yoshiko Uchida - R, CG (Japanese-American)

Chicken Sunday by Patricia Polacco - CG (White/Black/Jewish) Jacqueline Woodson

Freedom Summer by Deborah Wiles - R, CG (White/Black)

The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson - R, CG (Black/White)

Ruth and the Green Book by Calvin Alexander Ramsey - R (Black)

Gr. 3 - 7

The Basket Counts Matt Christopher - R, CG (Black/White)

Feathers by Jacqueline Woodson - CG, R (Black/White)

The Friendship by Mildred Taylor - R (Black/White)

The Other Half of My Heart by Sundee Frazier - CG, R (Black/White/Biracial twins)

Witness by Karen Hesse - R, CG (White/Black/Jewish)

Gr. 7 - 12

The Absolutely True Story of a Part Time Indian by Sherman Alexie - R, CG (Native-American)

American-Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang - R, CG (Chinese-American)

Face Relations: Eleven Stories About Seeing Beyond Color ed. by Marilyn Singer - R, CG (Multiracial)

The Girl Who Fell From the Sky by Heidi Durrow - R, CG (Biracial/Black/White)

I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This by Jacqueline Woodson - CG, R (Black/White)

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros - R (Latino/a)

Other Resources:

"Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Racism and Sexism" http://www.osi.hu/iep/Workshops/anti_bias/ten_ways.htm

"A World Full of Color" - searchable library of books featuring people of color http://www.librarything.com/catalog/World_Full_of_Color

Annie's blog - "Coloring Between the Lines" (coloringbetween.blogspot.com) reflections on race, culture and children's books

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