

Reading to End Racism™
Activities for Elementary School

Some Simple Ideas:

1. Call your assigned teacher beforehand and get a brief idea of what the students are studying currently to help tie in your book and discussion to their curriculum.
2. Create your own bookmarks, stars, or pledges to hand out to the class with a topical design and/or “Reading to End Racism” printed along its side. Print them in them black and white and encourage the students to color them individually and to keep as a reminder of the day and the lessons they learned.
3. Use the RER Pledge to conclude your session.
4. Hand out simple green ribbons and small safety pins as badges for students to wear to announce their commitment.
5. Have your students draw their feelings or the feelings of a character they chose after the reading.

Ice Breaker/Introductions

Grades: 4-8

Time Allotted: 5-10 minutes (10-30 sec./child)

Purpose: To help put the group at ease, improving discussion with the group. All the children respond verbally to the ice breaker, helping them be more willing to participate in discussion later. This ice breaker may also help the RER Reader capture some of the names of the students in the class.

Directions:

- Tell the class you’ll ask each child to say his or her name and one interesting point about their ancestry. (Younger children may need to have a review of what “ancestry” means.)
- Model your request: “I’ll go first. I’m Joe Smith, and my grandfather on my mother’s side came from Ireland to Ellis Island.” (This models a *brief* response.)
- Go around the room hearing the students’ responses, accepting all answers—there are no incorrect answers.

This may be a good lead-in to your own personal story or to the definitions in the Reader’s Guidelines.

People Colors

Grades: K-4 To be adjusted for different age levels. *For use with People Colors crayons, this activity may require alerting the teacher to the need for crayons and follow-up writing activity.*

Time Allotted: 15 minutes

Objective: To explore differences and similarities, and to help develop positive attitudes regarding skin tones.

Directions:

- After reading your book, have your students sit in a circle or at their group tables and put out one hand so everyone can see. Ask children to tell what they see. Accept all observations (i.e., small fingers, freckles, etc.). Make sure someone notices that they are different colors.

- Ask the children:

What do you know about different skin colors?

Where do we get our skin colors?

Accept all answers. You can list their answers on the board.

- Explain all skin is made up of four colors: brown, yellow, red and white. The amount of melanin, the brown color in your skin, is what makes people's skin different colors. Melanin is found throughout the animal kingdom as well, and is the dark pigment that colors hair, fur and feathers.

- Hand out one *People Colors* crayon to each student arbitrarily and a sheet of paper and ask the class to draw a face using the color they received and embellish with their own additional colors. As they draw, ask them to name their person and their person's skin color based on something in nature or a food they might eat (i.e., peanut butter, cinnamon, peaches, toast, brownie). Ask for their ideas and, for younger students, suggest that they have a grown-up record their color names. Ask your students to give their person a name and, for older students, make up a story about their family.

- Discuss terms such as **Prejudice, Race Prejudice, and Ally**

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- How did ___ in the book feel when ___ happened? How do you think your person would feel to be picked on because of the color of his/her skin?

- What could you do if someone picked on your person?

- Have you ever see someone picked on because of their color? – *Ask for examples.*

- What can you do if it happens to you or some one you know? – Remind them of their previous ideas and list new ones. Record all answers.

People Colors

Grades: 3-5. *This will be a precursor to small research topics. You will want to discuss this with the teacher beforehand and link it with a science or writing project.*

Time Allotted: 10 minutes

Objective: To explore and discuss misconceptions regarding skin tones.

Directions:

- After you have read your book, have your students sit in a circle or in their work tables and show one hand. Ask them what they notice accepting all answers such as size, freckles and color. Ask them what they know about skin color and list on the board or on a large sheet of paper under “Know” (or “!”), (i.e., all people from __ have dark skin, everyone has a different color skin, some people are black and some are white, etc). NOTE: some of their answers may be misconceptions)
- Ask them what do they want to know, and list under “Want” (or “?”), (i.e., Why do people have different colored skin? How many colors are there?).
- Suggest several groups of students select a question from the previous section to research and report to the class, comparing their findings with their original comments. These answers can later be listed by the teacher or recorder under “Learned” (or “light bulb”).
- Discuss terms such as **Ancestors, Prejudice, Racism, Discrimination, Ally**

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- Why do you think __ in our book was picked on because of his/her skin color? (or similar link to the book)
- Have you ever been picked on or seen someone picked on because they were different? *Ask for examples*
- How do people feel when they are picked on?
- Why do you think people pick on others?
- What do you think you can do when you see someone being mistreated because of the way they look or the language they speak?

List ideas in columns on newsprint or the black board.

Different And the Same

Grades: K-4 *To be adjusted for different age levels.*

Time Allotted: 10 minutes

Objective: To help students focus on what they have in common with others despite their differences.

Materials: *(optional)* Photos of people of varying ethnicities; particularly useful if you have an all-Anglo class

Directions: Following your reading, have the class gather in a group on the floor around you. Ask your students to raise their hands if they have an answer to your questions. Tell them they will be helping you to create a list.

- Ask: “What do you see that is different than you about your classmates?” If it is a photo, “What do you see that is different from you about this little girl/boy?”
- Create a list on the black board. The students will be coming up with ideas such as hair, eyes, clothing, etc. Make sure some one notices skin color. Have the students hold out their hands in a group and compare and admire various skin colors.
- Ask: “Now, what do you see that is the same about your classmates/this little boy or girl?” Have your students hold out their hands again and ask what is the same, i.e., fingers, freckles, etc.
- Discuss the many things about all people that are the same (We all eat, sleep and love the people in our lives. We have feelings, we cry when we are sad, we feel happy, we get tired and we bleed when we get a scrape). Even though we are different in many ways we share many of the same qualities and should be treated fairly no matter who we are.
- Discuss the definitions of **Prejudice** and **Racism** in the context of your discussion.

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- Have you ever been picked on or seen someone picked on because of the color of their skin or the language they speak?
- How do people feel when they are picked on?
- Why do you think people pick on others?
- How do you think you could help if you see this person (photo) or someone being mistreated?

List their answers and help them to understand when we see someone being mistreated, we should stand up for him/her. Remind them, if it is not safe to intervene, find an adult to help. Be sure to praise them for their ideas.

Suggestions: Finding out the ethnic mix of your classroom beforehand will be helpful for this activity. Choose a book that will help illustrate this activity.

Racial Demographics

Grades: 3-8

Time Allotted: 2 minutes

Purpose: This exercise may help students understand more fully that they live in a multicultural world—even if they don't see it that way in their daily life.

Set-up: Use the skin-toned doll-like cut-outs from the RER supplies. Ask two or three students to put circles of tape on both sides of ten of the brown cutouts; the other side is stark white.

Directions: Put the cutouts on the bulletin board with nine white sides and just one brown side facing out.

- Say, "These dolls represent all the people of the world. In 1965, schools in Boulder were almost all white, like this."
- Then turn over one more dolls so two have the brown side exposed. Say, "Now, this represents the percentage of people in the City of Boulder who are White versus of Asian, African, or Latin descent."
- Turn over one more (making 7 white, 3 brown); that represents the state of Colorado.
- Then turn over 2 more (5 and 5) and that represents the state of California right now.
- Say, "How many more should I turn over to represent the whole world?" The answer: three more (now 8 brown, 2 white).

Suggestions: You can also estimate what your school was like when you were a child; what the student population of the school you are reading in is like; or make projections about the future.

Discussion: You can ask the students, "How is the world changing?" or "How might the people around you be different depending on where you live?"

Close by saying, "We live in a society where the people are increasingly of diverse backgrounds, and to be able to work with people of many backgrounds is more important all the time," leading in to your discussion of how to help end racism.

Role Playing/Enactment

Grades: all

Time Allotted: 5 minutes per each

Purpose: To bring alive the emotional content of a racially charged scene or situation; to give the students a chance to practice their new anti-racism skills

NOTE: an “enactment” means that children re-enact a key scene as it was portrayed in your book selection; “role playing” can be a made-up situation where the children are given roles to play and they ad lib and brainstorm how to respond

Room Set-up: Push back chairs to create a “stage”

Directions For a Re-Enactment:

- Identify the scene you will be re-enacting and ask for volunteers to play the different roles. It’s fine to have boys in girls’ parts and vice versa.
- Go over the scene you’ve chosen, perhaps re-reading it, and then ask the volunteers to act it out for the class.
- After the role playing, thank them for being willing to volunteer.

As an example, in the book *White Sox Only* by Evelyn Coleman, a young African-American girl in the 1950s goes downtown. She is thirsty and, seeing a sign at the drinking fountain saying “Whites only,” takes off her black shoes and stands in her white socks to drink from the fountain. She is harassed by a White man. Other African-Americans support her by also taking off their shoes and going to the fountain. One man finds a way to send off the aggressor. One student can play the girl; another the racist White man; many students can be the townspeople; and one can be the ally.

Directions For a Role Play:

Present a scenario of potential race-based conflict, or solicit one from the class, and ask for volunteers to take roles in it. Typical roles would include a victim, an ally, a perpetrator and a bystander. Note that the victim can defend him or herself, as well as get assistance from the ally. Give the volunteers their roles, and then let them work out the scenario. When they are through, ask the participants how they felt in their roles.

(Role Play cont)

Suggestions:

- If the first group arrives at one solution, ask a second group of volunteers to use the same scenario but come to a different solution. Help you students to work through tough scenes by asking for input from the “audience.” When they are through, ask the participants how they felt at particular moments in their roles.
- More than one group can work on a scenario at a time, giving more students a chance to participate. They may not all be able to present their “plays” to the class because of time constraints.

Pair Share

Grades: 5-8

Time Allotted: 3 minutes per question; consider using more than one question

Purpose: To give every student a chance to talk. It also helps students sort out what insights they may have that they may want to share with the class.

Directions:

- Ask the students to find a partner. Give them a question or issue to consider, and tell them that one of them will have one minute to talk about it while the other person listens. Emphasize that the listener’s job is the most important. Call “time!,” and ask them to switch roles. Time this carefully.
- You may choose to use one question, or a few questions. It may be best to start with feeling questions and then follow up with more intellectual questions.
- Ask for reports from the students or teams after the class re-convenes. Instruct the students that comments from your partner are confidential and can be shared only with permission.

Sample Questions:

- “How did you respond to the part of the book where....?”
- “Have you seen or heard of other examples of?”
- “What examples can you come up with how race plays a role in society now?”

Suggestions:

- This activity is good immediately following a reading.
- Groups of three or four students will work, too.
- You can use this to highlight issues important to your reading selection by posing the question prior to the reading.

The Reading to End Racism Pledge

Grades: K-5

Objective: To bring closure to your session and emphasis your objectives.

Directions: At the end of your session, ask your class to stand, raise their right hand and repeat after you:



I (their name) stand against racism.

I pledge...

- To respect others
- To never use put-downs
- To speak up about hurt feelings...mine or others
and
- To seek help from friends or adults.

I will respect people's differences, and help to build peace at home, in my school and in my community...every day.



JURAMENTO



Yo (Nombre de cada uno) estoy en contra del racismo

YO JURO

- Respetar a los demas
- Nunca burlarme de nadie
- Hablar con alguien sobre mis sentimientos heridos ... mios o ajenos.
- Pedir ayuda de los amigos o de adultos.
- Respetaré las diferencias entre las personas y ayudaré a cembrar paz en case, en la escuela y en mi comunidad ... cada dia.

