

# Community Voices Kit

*Why did we create these kits?*

## Background of Community Voices Kits

Historically, the white perspective and narrative has been dominant in the book publishing industry and in library collections.

Traditional publishing overlooked, excluded, minimized, and marginalized the lived experiences of people of color in books and other library materials. This included publishing limited works by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) authors and illustrators.

This is changing, and we are learning and changing too – publishers and libraries are receiving and supporting a significant and welcomed increase in books by BIPOC authors and illustrators.

Patrons increasingly and routinely request books of this nature:

- Books that affirm, celebrate, and center the lives and experiences of community members who identify as BIPOC.
- Books that provide good openings for conversations about race.

With all of this in mind, we created these kits to provide easy access to a collection of books and resources that invite shared reading time to learn, explore, celebrate, and protect our commonalities and differences.

We also know that related conversations can be difficult. It's okay to feel uncomfortable, and it's okay to feel like you don't know the right thing to say. The conversations are important, and we offer tips to support you in these efforts. We are learning right alongside patrons as we incorporate new books into our recommendations and storytimes - we welcome your feedback and input.





## USING THIS KIT WITH CHILDREN

# Start Early

- Research tells us that human brains are hard-wired to notice similarities and differences. By 3 months of age, babies notice racial differences. By age 4, children begin to show signs of racial bias and may indicate preferences for spending time with others who look like them.
- White children are less likely to have conversations about race with their caregivers than children of color.
- It's okay to notice skin color and variations in human features and to talk about race. Start by talking about what racial differences mean and do not mean.
- It's good to notice the ways we're alike and the ways we're different. It's also important to understand the ways people have been, and are, treated differently based on race and ethnicity to help in conversations about racism, fairness and equity.





## USING THIS KIT WITH CHILDREN

# Talk About Race With Your Child/Children

***Notice, celebrate and talk about the wide variety of cultural and racial identities, including your own. Foster the positive development of every child's racial identity. Read about the joyful everyday lives and happenings of children and families from various racial and cultural backgrounds.***

### **Babies and Toddlers:**

- Just as we notice shades of blue, red and green on a regular basis, it's good to notice shades skin and hair color, as well as varying textures of hair and shapes of eyes. Model positive ways to talk about skin color and difference.

### **Preschool:**

- Reading together and having conversations will open possibilities that your child will say unexpected things at unexpected times. See the *Reading Tips* handout in this kit for some helpful strategies.
- Have conversations about how it feels to be treated fairly and unfairly. When children are exposed to this knowledge and these skills, they can better notice when actions and systems are unjust.

### **School Age:**

- Help children notice that many people are sad and angry when people of color are treated unfairly. These feelings can move us to take action (e.g., get help, ask a peer to use kind words, invite a friend to play).
- Try saying, "It's okay to feel angry or sad when someone is treated unfairly. It's important to tell a friend to be kind or ask a grownup for help if someone is being unkind to someone based on the color of their skin."



# Reflect and Build Your Conversation Muscles

***This is part of a life-long practice of learning and growing and stretching new muscles for having these conversations with our children, families and community.***

- We all have bias. It's part of our human experience. Reflect on your own racial experiences and development of bias.
  - When did you first become aware of your race, and others?
  - What are some of your biases?
  - Can you think of a time you had to confront and overcome a bias?
- Develop strategies to counter your own biases and gaps in experience.
  - Read, listen, and learn about current and historical events. Whose perspectives and experiences are missing? Whose perspectives and experiences are centered? What might have been omitted from your educational experiences?
  - Attend events and join opportunities that build connections with people of different races from diverse backgrounds.
- Know that making mistakes is part of the learning process. As Maya Angelou stated, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."





# Read and Tell Stories: Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors

**Books can serve as “Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors,” a concept authored by Rudine Sims Bishop. It is important for readers to be exposed to all three types. Keep in mind that a mirror for some will be a window for others, and vice versa.**

- **Mirrors** reflect characters and situations that are familiar and relatable. You can “see yourself” in the story.
- **Windows** show the reader a window into the life of a character that is different from their own.
- **Sliding Glass Doors** invite the reader to connect experiences from their own life with experiences shared in the story. This is an active reflection and can lead to changes in perspective by the reader.
  - Examples of making “sliding glass door” connections:
    - In your family, what do you call Grandma/Grandpa/Mother/Father/etc.? Try using your family names in the story to help personalize the experience.
    - Does your child have a favorite family tradition or celebration? How do they talk about/share with their friends and family?
    - Has your family ever had to move? How would that be the same or different as a character who has immigrated?
    - Has there been a time where your child felt they were treated unfairly?
    - Can your child think of a time where they had to make a difficult choice? How does it feel to make hard choices and what might the character in the book be feeling?



# Grow Your Racial Cultural Literacy

***Develop racial cultural literacy by learning about and respecting others from their perspective. Read, listen, and talk about the histories and experiences of groups including Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian Pacific Islanders and others (see QR code at the front of these documents.)***

- It's okay not to know. It's okay to have questions – there are always new things to learn, for your child and you!
- Read books that celebrate strength, community, joy, knowledge and resilience across all races and cultures.
- Caregivers who intentionally plan learning time that affirms children's racial identities see the benefits this produces in supporting children's growth and learning.
- As you read, consider these questions:
  - Who are the human characters in the books?
  - How are the characters depicted? Does this depiction invite inclusion, or reinforce an exclusionary narrative?
  - Whose perspective is this story told from?
- Promote connection and empathy, not sympathy. Rudine Sims Bishop states, "It's not just children who have been underrepresented and marginalized who need these books. It's also the children who always find their mirrors in the books and, therefore, get an exaggerated sense of their self-worth and a false sense of what the world is like because it's becoming more colorful and diverse as time goes on."
  - Try saying, "We may have different skin color, but we're all the same in so many ways. It isn't right to treat someone differently based on the color of their skin."