



"I can promise you that you're more afraid than they are."—Jelani Memory (author)

How do I talk to young kids about **racism**?

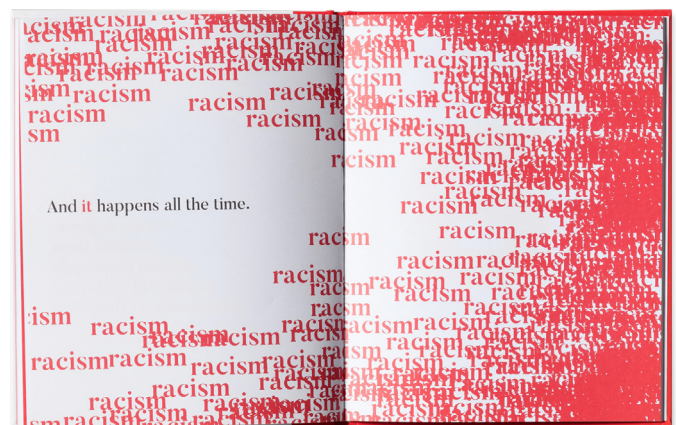
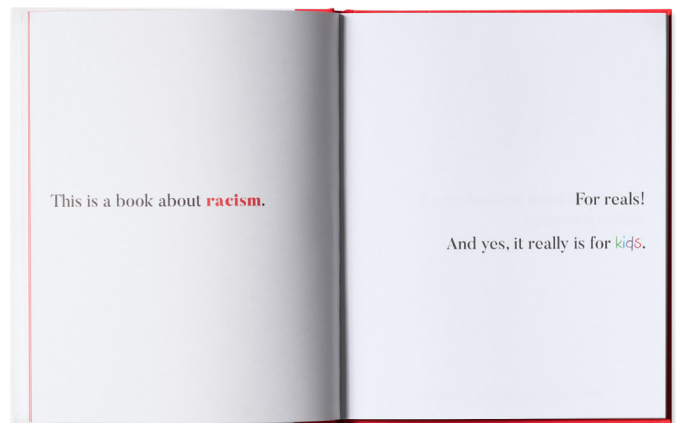
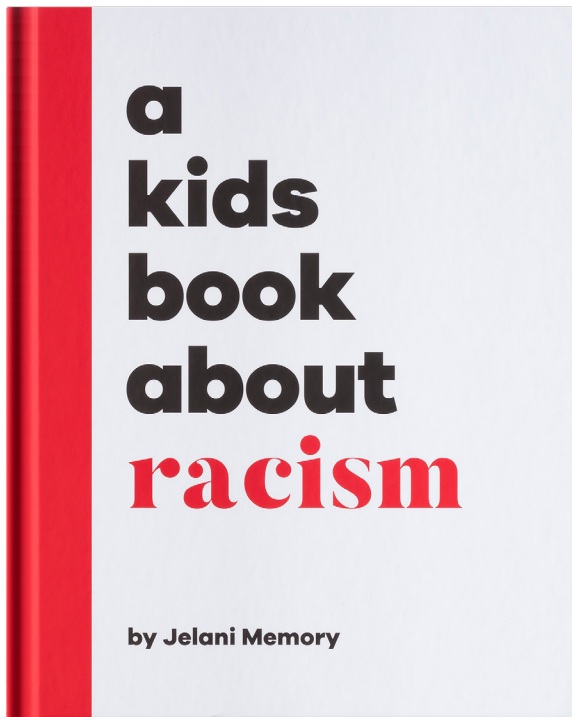


An Introduction Lesson Guide to Be Used Alongside *A Kids Book About Racism* by Jelani Memory

Guide written by Jessica Danelson Onyegam

Jessica Danelson Onyegam holds a B.A. in Bilingual/ESL Education and is a former bilingual early childhood educator with more than a decade of teaching experience. Her time spent in the classroom centered around teaching the whole child with an emphasis on relationship building, embracing cultural diversity, and navigating crucial conversations. She currently lives in Austin, Texas where she manages curriculum and continues to advocate for policy and systems changes that benefit ALL kids.

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About the Book

Yes, this really is a kids book about racism. Inside you'll find a clear description of what racism is, how it makes people feel when they experience it, and how to spot it when it happens. This is one conversation that's never too early to start, and this book was written to be an introduction for the topic.



Educational Standards

This book can be integrated into a variety of different areas of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Kindergarten-2nd grade curricula, including, but not limited to, national English Language, Social Studies, and Civics standards. This book is also a great addition to any Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curricula. The following are National Civics and Social Studies Standards:

- Center for Civic Education: National Standards for Civics and Government (K-4) Content Standards:
 - (II) What are the basic values and principles of American democracy?
 - C. Why is it important for Americans to share certain values, principles, and beliefs?
 - D. What are the benefits of diversity in the United States?
 - E. How should conflicts about diversity be prevented or managed?
 - F. How can people work together to promote the values and principles of American democracy?
 - (V) What are the roles of the citizen in American democracy?
 - C. What are important rights in the United States?
 - D. What are important responsibilities of Americans?
 - E. What dispositions or traits of character are important to the preservation and improvement of American democracy?
- National Council for Social Studies: College Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards
 - Dimension: Civics
 - D2.Civ.7.K-2. Apply civic virtues when participating in school settings.
 - D2.Civ.10.K-2. Compare their own point of view with others' perspectives.



Instructional Planning & Tips

English Language Arts standards are embedded throughout instruction, and, depending on the purpose of the read aloud, can address all domains of literacy: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For more information, reference your state educational standards. You can also reference the national Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy K-5 for more information.

When lesson planning, reference your state educational standards to ensure strong alignment to your grade level and content area as well, especially when discussing topics that could be mislabeled or misunderstood. Always reference your local and state education legislation and policies to have a clear understanding on any limitations that may occur and to allow for proper planning and facilitation of the lesson. Note that educational censorship laws are for teachers and what they can and cannot say; this by no means limits or impacts the ability for students to discuss these topics authentically and with full transparency.

A Kids Book About Racism is meant to be an introduction to the topic of racism. Continue to reference culturally relevant children's literature and other materials throughout the year to continue the conversation and to foster student learning.



Adult Pre-Work

Before engaging students in a conversation around racism, the adult facilitating must have a certain level of cultural competency and comfort around the topic. This includes assessing your own biases and gaps around race and continuously learning about the complex issue of racism. Be cautious speaking in general terms about how people experience racism, as this can vary greatly person to person, and be sure to use asset-based language (focus on people's abilities) when discussing marginalized groups of people.

Understand that some children will have connections and questions as you are reading. They may share their own experiences of either racism impacting themselves or a loved one. They may have misunderstandings or further questions. Many times, the most common issue arises from not having done the pre-work to be able to anticipate how to support and answer questions from children (and remember that we don't always have all the answers!). The adult's role is to be the facilitator in this discussion and to create a safe space where children feel comfortable sharing and asking questions.

Also, before reading this book to kids, ensure that there are classroom norms and expectations established around teaching tolerance and respect towards others.



Adult Pre-Work (Cont.)

Review the following resources below prior to teaching to ensure you have laid the groundwork for creating a safe space for your students, and to feel confident navigating these conversations.

- 10 Principles for Talking About Race in School [article](#)
- Learning for Justice [resource](#) “Discussing Race, Racism, and Other Difficult Topics With Students”

If you are interested in continuing your education on this topic, consider referencing the additional resources to get started:

- “Teaching and Learning About Race and Racism with Young Children and Their Families” [article](#) from NAEYC
- Read Dr. Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
- *How to Be an Anti-Racist* by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi
- *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* by Dr. Gholdy Muhammad
- *White Fragility* by Dr. Robin DiAngelo

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- discuss and explain what racism is.
- make connections and inferences to the text.
- identify why it is important to speak up when witnessing racism.

Vocabulary Words

Downloadable flash cards are available for use in the classroom.

Race / raza: the idea that people can be categorized based on their physical traits such as skin color

Racism / racismo: when people are treated unfairly because of their skin color

Materials

- *A Kids Book About Racism* by Jelani Memory
- Writing materials (paper, notebooks, pencils, colored pencils, crayons, etc.)
- (Optional) multicultural crayons
- (Optional) "Behind the Book: Racism with Jelani Memory - Meet the Author" [video](#)

Introduction

1

Begin by asking students to remember a time when they noticed someone being treated unfairly and to explain what happened. Allow students to turn and talk to one another before asking a few to share with the whole group.

2

Show students the cover of *A Kids Book About Racism* and read aloud the title and name of the author.

3

Then share how, together, you are all going to learn about the author's personal experience with racism and how it can affect many people.



Read Aloud Lesson

1. Begin reading *A Kids Book About Racism*.
2. Read to “Which makes me mixed” page. Stop and ask students to notice how the words are printed in specific colors. Discuss how there are a lot of different shades of brown, white, and black, and that, when we look at our own skin, there are various tones of colors as well. (If you have a multicultural pack of crayons, demonstrate how they all say “flesh,” which means skin, and how there are so many different shades of the same color.) Reinforce how everyone’s skin is beautiful.
3. Continue reading to “African American, biracial, Black or a person of color” page. Stop and clarify for students that not everyone identifies the same way, and that, when you are unsure of the way someone likes to identify or describe themselves, it is always a good idea to ask.
4. Continue reading to “And it happens all the time” page. Stop and ask students, “How do you think you would feel if you were treated poorly because of your skin color?” Allow students to turn and talk before asking a few to share with the whole group.
5. Continue reading until the end of the book. Ask students about any connections, questions, or feelings they are having after reading the book. Allow students to turn and talk before engaging in a whole-class discussion. *Reference the Adult Pre-Work resources for tips and tricks on navigating a conversation around racism. It is the job of the adult to act as a facilitator for students’ questions and comments and to validate students’ personal experiences.
6. Read the “About the Author” page to students. You can also share the optional [video](#) to learn more about the author before continuing to the student discussion and writing activity.
7. Ask students, “Why should we speak up when we see racism?”, and, “How can we make sure that everyone at school feels like they belong?” Allow students to turn and talk before asking them to then journal about their thoughts, connections, and questions. Encourage them to draw illustrations that connect to what they wrote.
8. At the end of the lesson, allow students to share their work with their groups and/or whole group depending on time.



Extension Ideas:

A Kids Book About Racism can be integrated into various content areas and learning opportunities in the classroom, such as:

- Social Studies & Civics Connections:
 - Values, principles, and beliefs of American democracy (How should people be treated and what can we do when they are being mistreated?)
 - Rights of American citizens
 - Characteristics of good citizenship
 - Functions of government
 - Real-life examples of people who have influenced their community, state, and/or nation
 - Creating and interpreting timelines for events in the past and present
 - Compare and contrast different points of view
 - Problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Language Arts Connections:
 - Discuss the author's purpose for writing the text
 - Ask and answer questions about key details
 - Make connections and inferences to support understanding
 - Synthesize information to create new understanding
 - Compare and contrast experiences in stories
 - Write brief comments on literary texts that demonstrate an understanding of the text
 - Interact with sources in meaningful ways, such as illustrating or writing
 - Teaching biographies/autobiographies
 - Participate in shared research and writing projects
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Connections:
 - Self-awareness
 - Social awareness
 - Relationship skills
 - Self-management
 - Responsible decision-making
 - Social justice



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