

Talking to Young Children about Difficult Topics (April 2021)

5 Things to Know or Do

1. Babies begin to notice race at 6 months old — in fact, according to this pair of studies by Professor Kang Lee at the University of Toronto, they actually show signs of racial bias by this age and;
2. By Kindergarten children have already learned to associate some groups with a higher status than others.
3. When adults avoid talking about difficult topics, children learn that there is something wrong with that topic. Silence about racism reinforces racism.
4. When children ask questions first ask them “well, what do you think?” This helps gauge their understanding and knowledge level. Then keep your answers factual, simple and short. Young children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurance. [How to Talk to Kids About Race](#)
5. Help children express their feelings. More information coming in the May 54321, stay tuned!

3 Articles to Read

- Common Sense Media: **How to Talk to Kids About Difficult Subjects** <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-difficult-subjects>
- NAEYC: **Conversations that Matter: Talking with Children About Big World Issues** <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/conversations-that-matter>
- Zero To Three: **Racism and Violence: Using Your Power as a Parent to Support Children Aged Two to Five (En Espanol)** <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/1598-racism-and-violence-using-your-power-as>

1 Point to Access Research

- American Psychological Association: **Children Notice Race Several Years Before Adults Want to Talk About It** <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2020/08/children-notice-race>

4+1 Children Read Alouds

A Girl Like Me by Angela Johnson ([Fairfax Library](#)). This book uses photographs to present diverse children in the fullness of their humanity. A review of ***A Girl Like Me*** in the Horn Book Magazine calls it “a rallying cry for girls to reject limitations others might place on them and their dreams,” and Crews’s photo collages specifically center Black girls and other girls of color.

We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga by Traci Sorell ([Fairfax Library](#)) We’ve heard of many people practicing mindful gratitude throughout the pandemic, trying to find silver linings to sustain them amidst the worries, hardships, and outright tragedies they are facing. We can think of no other picture book that better exemplifies that spirit of giving thanks than this one. We know that the COVID-19 crisis is having a disproportionate impact on Indigenous nations and communities, and so we think it’s important to center depictions of contemporary, Indigenous people like this one, which is rooted in the author’s lived experience as a citizen of the Cherokee nation.

Your Name is a Song by Jamilah Thomkins-Bigelow ([Fairfax Library](#)) Thomkins-Bigelow’s picture-book debut, ***Mommy’s Khimar*** illustrated by Ebony Glenn (2018), offers a joyful representation of a little girl within a supportive Muslim American family and community, and this forthcoming picture book beautifully portrays a young girl learning that she can teach others the beauty of diverse names. The protagonist ends her first day at school sad because her teacher could not pronounce her name, but her sadness is short-lived. As they walk through their neighborhood, dancing to the sounds around them, her mother shows her how every name has its own kind of music, using examples from many cultures, and responding to the claim that the girl’s name is “made-up” by saying that “Made-up names come from dreamers” who “make a way out of no way.”

Where Are You From? by Yamile Saied Méndez ([Fairfax Library](#)) “This resonant and award-winning picture book tells the story of one girl who constantly gets asked a simple question that doesn’t have a simple answer.”

Yoko Learns to Read by Rosemary Wells ([Fairfax Library](#)) “Yoko is eager to learn how to read, and Mama wants to help her. But they only have three picture books at home, all in Japanese. Yoko is worried that she’ll be left behind when she sees the other kids in school earning leaf after leaf on the classroom book tree. Yoko and her Mama begin taking books out of the library. Mama can’t read the English words, but by looking at the pictures, sounding out letters, and recognizing words from the wall at school, Yoko gradually teaches herself. In a poignant ending, Mama asks Yoko to show *her* how to read.”

2 Videos to View

- PBS KIDS: **PBS KIDS Talk about Race & Racism** (youtube) https://youtu.be/_fbQBkwdWPg
- act.tv: **Systemic Racism Explained** (youtube) https://youtu.be/YrHIQIO_bdQ