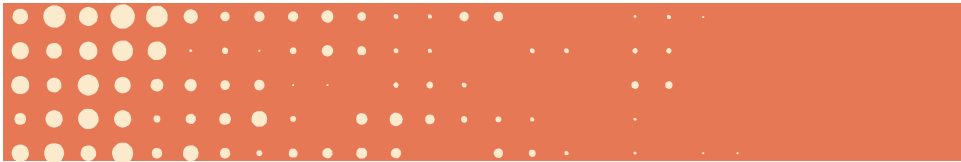
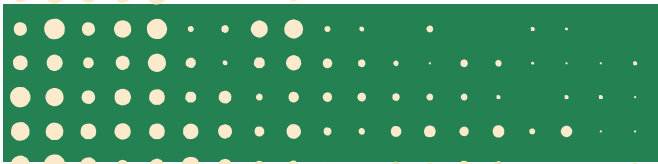


FAMILY LEARNING PROGRAM



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Acknowledgement

In the founding of the Family Learning Program, Laura Horwitz and Adelaide Lancaster developed the basis of the content for this document. Rhema Anazonwu, the first program manager of We Stories, also played a large role in the initial content development. Due to those founding roles, Laura, Adelaide, and Rhema have contributed to the content in this document. Having evolved over time, the latest iteration is what you see here.

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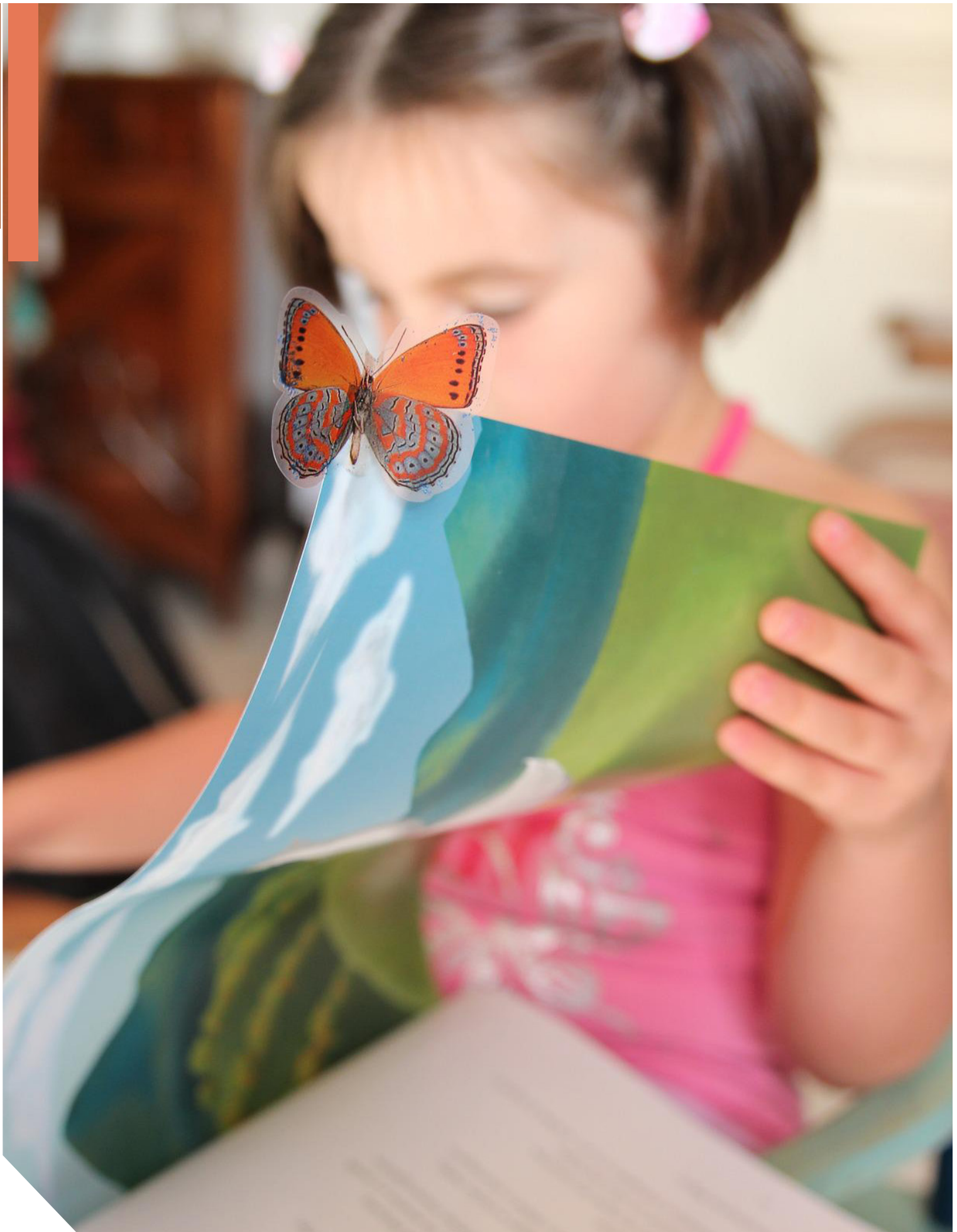
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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT US

Research on child development, racial identity, and family socialization demonstrates that bias formation begins at a young age and that white families tend to discuss race much less frequently than families of color. Based on these findings, Laura Horwitz and Adelaide Lancaster founded We Stories in 2016. We Stories sought to build a more equitable and inclusive future through the creation and implementation of its core offering, the Family Learning Program (FLP). Its grounding framework is in our **Getting Started** document.

The program was designed for white caregivers with young children (ages 8 and under) in the St. Louis region who wanted to start and strengthen conversations about race and racism with their families. In each cohort, or group of participating families, caregivers were provided with diverse children's books as well as strategies for minimizing and deconstructing bias formation. The program endeavored to foster mindsets and build skills toward lifelong learning and advocating for change in spaces where these families lived, worked, and played. This program is now captured in this self-guided curricular document.

At the end of the facilitated 12-week program, the families in the cohort joined an ongoing learning community of a growing group of fellow FLP families. Together they received continued support in extending, processing, and implementing their learnings. Rich collaborations with schools, libraries, community organizations, parent groups, and a robust social media presence quickly followed. We engaged in teacher training opportunities, research partnerships, and curriculum design and development. The **DEI Themed Lessons** document represents many of the resources developed to support these partnerships, as well as our FLP families.

Clear that meaningful change required intentional actions to address root causes of disparities, we developed the Advocacy Builders Project for FLP caregivers to move beyond family conversations to deeper discussions of systemic racism. To support learning, this program focused on four social determinants of health and challenged participants to see how systems are designed to help some groups of people, while simultaneously designed to hurt other groups of people. We Stories piloted this project with FLP families in 2021. This content has been consolidated and now exists as our **Advocacy Builders Project** document.

To increase the accessibility and impact of our programs and resources, our board and staff made the decision to culminate and refine these assets into resources that could be utilized and shared broadly. We hope to bolster changemakers as they lead our collective effort for a more equitable and inclusive future.

WHAT'S INSIDE

The Family Learning Program curriculum was originally designed to be completed sequentially over the course of three months. Over time, many families revisited the curriculum, spent months on one theme, or came back when more time allowed. We invite you to complete it on any time-frame that makes sense for you and your family.

Two **Caregiver Reflection** prompts, the Caregiver Beginning Prompt before the monthly themes and the Caregiver Conclusion Prompt, after the monthly themes, provide bookended space to reflect on your individual and familial journey.

Monthly themes guided reading, reflection, conversation, and action with caregivers and their children. The themes were chosen for their power in deconstructing biases, building anti-racist mindsets, and fostering anti-racist family habits. Our content begins with individual and family learning and practices, and then encourages further engagement in equity efforts in the spaces where we live, work, and play.

Every month includes the following components:

- A **Critical Question** to frame the selected stories and subsequent conversation, reflection, and action. You can learn more about the critical questions in the Getting Started document.
- One or more corresponding **Social Justice Standards** to reflect age-appropriate learning and to provide a more equitable learning experience. Developed by the organization Learning for Justice, these standards serve as "a roadmap for anti-bias education at every stage of K–12 instruction."
- A **Summary** to introduce the theme to set the stage for your family's learning.
- A **Booklist** including at least four story recommendations for ages 4 to 8 and at least two recommendations for ages 9+. Month 1: Noticing and Naming Difference includes recommendations for ages 2 and under as well. Month 1: Stories of Belonging is meant for ages 9+ only. For kids ages 8 and under, we encourage reading aloud with them. For kids ages 9+, we encourage reading alongside them.
- Two sets of prompts, **Family Discussion Prompts** and **Caregiver Reflection Prompts**, to inspire reflection and conversation around the chosen theme.
- A selected **Family Activity** to reinforce lessons learned during conversation and reading. Play, art, and community building are often included.
- Curated **Caregiver Resources** for further exploration. The resources include video, audio, books, and other online options.



CURRICULUM

CURRICULUM FAQs

How do I begin with my toddler?

For kids 3 and under, we encourage beginning with Noticing and Naming. While very little kids aren't going to be able to understand some of the bigger topics that we explore, together you still have very important work to do! The focus with your children should be on deepening your comfort talking about race and physical descriptors such as shades of skin and textures of hair, as well as incorporating as many examples of positive representation as possible in real life and on their bookshelf. Together your task is to: Read. Reflect. Repeat. When your child is ready—usually around the age of 4—move on to Months 2 and 3.

Why children's literature?

Lived experience and research tell us that reading books with our children and instilling a love of storytelling is critical in spurring creativity and aiding in social, emotional, and cognitive development.

We also teach that a book can serve as a window when it allows for an empathetic experience, pushing the limits of the readers' own lives and identities and providing the opportunity to spend time observing those of others. In contrast, books can also serve as a mirror when they reflect back to readers' portions of their identities, cultures, or experiences.

For some, stories will stretch our imaginations and experiences. We will not adopt another's lived experience, but we can learn how others, unlike ourselves, feel that they belong to their community and the world. We learn how important it is to value those differences, to resist conflating intricacies into one melting pot. We learn how to look through this window as an opportunity to view how full life is, in its nuance. For other stories, we will find our experiences etched into the pages as if we were yet another character in this story. We feel ourselves reflected back through characters or settings or events, and feel as if we belong even more so.

What if I say or do the "wrong" thing?

It is part of the experience! If you've already had an incident where you've told your children that it's not okay to talk about race, consider having a conversation about that experience.

You could try something such as, "Do you remember the time when I told you not to call someone Black or ask why so-and-so had hair like that? I was thinking more about it, and I changed my mind. I think it's important that we are able to talk about how people look different from each other. I'm afraid that by saying not to, I'm giving you the impression that it wasn't okay to talk about, but it is. It's important that we understand more about all the people in our world, and how they are similar and different from us."

CAREGIVER BEGINNING PROMPT

What factors most influenced your perspectives on and understanding of race as a child?

How have your understandings changed over time? Since then, what has reinforced or challenged those perspectives?

MONTH 1: NOTICING AND NAMING DIFFERENCE FOR AGES 8 AND UNDER

CRITICAL QUESTION: What do I know? How do I know it?

Social Justice Standards: Identity 3, Diversity 6

AN OPPORTUNITY TO:

- Take stock of how race is or isn't talked about in your home
- Develop a practice of explicitly noticing and naming difference

Why "Noticing and Naming?"

The focus of this theme is introducing, developing, and modeling language to explicitly, descriptively name differences among people, including, but not limited to skin color, eye shape, hair texture, dress, and customs. For age 3+, this would include introducing accepted terminology to discuss racial and ethnic groups (Black, white, Asian American, Native American, Latinx, etc.).

Research shows that kids clearly notice skin color and ethnic differences. See our Getting Started document for a summary. By talking about these visible and meaningful differences, you are giving your children the language they need to be competent and fluid in the world in which they live. They may have a different idea about what's appropriate to say in public than you do, but the best thing you can do is to model that race and skin color is an okay thing to notice and talk about.

It's important to underscore the distinction between noticing differences and drawing conclusions about people based upon these differences. All humans notice difference – we are hardwired to do so. Which differences we are conditioned to notice, and what they signify to whom, is deeply tied to our social context. Many of us were taught to, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr., judge people not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. For some, this made noticing skin color (or admitting that one does) akin to judging people based on their skin color. This is part of what makes adult conversations about race complex.

For our kids, providing language to name the differences they are noticing sends the message that race and racism are not taboo topics; we are showing them that talking about their observations allows us to guide their sense-making process. From ages 2 to 4, children are naturally fixated on what is alike and what is different, what belongs and what doesn't. Use their natural curiosity to talk about similar and different phenotypic characteristics. These small conversations will help you build your confidence too.

Booklist

For Ages 3 and under

- *"More More More," Said the Baby* by Vera B. Williams
- *Our Skin: A First Conversation About Race* by Megan Madison and Jessica Ralli, and illustrated by Isabel Roxas
- *Please, Baby, Please* by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee, and illustrated by Kadir Nelson
- *We're Different, We're the Same* by Bobbi Jane Kates and illustrated by Joe Matthieu
- *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry and illustrated by Vashti Harrison
- *All of the Colors of the Earth* by Sheila Hamanaka
- *Max and the Tag Along Moon* by Floyd Cooper
- *Bein' with You This Way* by W. Nikola-Lisa and illustrated Michael Bryan

For Ages 4 to 8

- *Not Quite Snow White* by Ashley Franklin and illustrated by Ebony Glenn
- *Juna's Jar* by Jane Bahk and illustrated by Felicia Hoshino
- *All the Colors We Are* by Katie Kissinger and photographed by Christ Bohnhoff
- *Change Sings* by Amanda Gorman and illustrated by Loren Long
- *Heart and Soul* by Kadir Nelson
- *Can I Touch Your Hair?* by Charles Waters and Irene Latham and illustrated by Sean Qualls and Selina Alko
- *Eyes that Kiss in the Corner* by Joanna Ho and illustrated by Dung Ho
- *Ron's Big Mission* by Rose Blue and Corinne Naden and illustrated by Don Tate

Family Discussion Prompt

Use stories in the booklist to start conversations about skin color difference about characters in the books. Extend those conversations to real life as well as other books and media. For example, "What color would you call our skin color?", "Do we have the same skin tone?", or "The boy in this story loves to play in the snow, just like you! He's also three, just like you. What else is the same between you? What else is different?"

Family Activity

Use a color wheel to talk about shades of skin. Compare your family members' skin tones to each other and to the story characters and also story characters to each other.

Caregiver Reflection Prompts

Reflect on these prompts about your experience noticing and naming difference:

- How comfortable is it for you to name whiteness?
- What is the impact when whiteness is left out of the conversation?
- Reflect on something you've recently learned about race and racism and were perhaps surprised not to know. What kept you from being curious about it before?
- How can you share your experience of learning and what you've learned with your kids? Brainstorm ways you can demonstrate or model to your children each day that you are a learner about race.

Caregiver Resources

- PBS Kids Talk About Race and Racism
- Embrace Race's 10 Tips for Teaching and Talking About Race

MONTH 1: STORIES OF BELONGING FOR AGES 9+

CRITICAL QUESTION: Where do I fit into this story?

Social Justice Standard: Diversity 7

AN OPPORTUNITY TO:

- Develop an understanding how you, your family, and others feel included
- Analyze how communities exclude others that are different from their own sense of "normal"
- Build a practice of welcoming in your home, school, neighborhood, and greater community

Why Belonging?

This theme is rooted in the concept of belonging. For families with children ages 9+, noticing & naming differences may already be a tradition within your family or perhaps this is a new family habit. In either case, the conversations you have with children ages 9+ will look different than ones you have with younger children. In middle childhood (9 to 11) and into the teenage years, children gain and build a strong sense of empathy, form complex friendships, and gain more and more independence.

Psychologist Dr. Kelly-Ann Allen defines belonging as a “unique and subjective experience” in which we both feel connected to others and simultaneously feel accepted, valued, and understood.

It is no mistake, nor without a long history, that time and time again, we are faced with the realities of the United States systematically banning entry to peoples across the world, especially — and intentionally — those who are people of color. It can feel daunting to lead family conversations about these large and complex issues.

When we focus on a singular word like “belonging,” we can develop empathy for others who have vastly different lives and experiences from our own. It’s important to feel included. When kids feel included and like they belong, they are more likely to be accepting of others and sensitive to their needs. It’s important for us to consider other people’s need and desire to belong and then build ways we can help other people belong, too.

The topic of belonging is a fruitful discussion point for children ages 9+ navigating peer pressure and physical, emotional, and mental changes. We ask that you notice and name difference as spoken about above, but extend these conversations into belonging: how we define it to ourselves, and how we can understand how others find belonging, too. By exploring these questions and prompts, we build further empathy and nuance into our understandings of communities unlike our own.

In the following story recommendations, activities, and prompts, you’ll find insight into belonging: how hard it can be to find places where you belong, and how wonderful it feels to belong to ourselves, our families, and our communities.

Booklist

For Ages 9 to 12

- *Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids*, edited by Cynthia L. Smith
- *Flight of the Puffin*, by Ann Braden
- *Melissa*, by Alex Gino

For Ages 13+

- *You Should See Me in a Crown*, by Leah Johnson
- *The Legend of Auntie Po*, by Shing Yin Khor

Family Discussion Prompts

- When have you felt part of a group or like you "fit in"?
- When have you felt like you weren't part of a group or like you didn't "fit in"?
- When have you felt accepted by a group for just being yourself? How did it feel?
- What can you do to make others feel included and like they belong?

Family Activity

Create a family flag. Across the world, flags can symbolize a community's values, ideals, and location. As your family explores what it means to belong within your own family and other communities, we invite you to design a family flag that represents the values of your home. Use images, symbols, and drawings to create a flag that shows others who your family is and what they stand for.

Caregiver Reflection Prompts

Reflect on your family's experience developing traditions of belonging:

- What reminds you of your family — turns of phrase, habits, heirlooms, beloved objects, traditions, do's and don'ts, values, and benefits?
- How do you celebrate and share these hallmarks with your children?

Caregiver Resources

- Rough Translation Podcast: Our Boxes, Ourselves
- Bridging Belonging and More from the Othering and Belonging Institute
- Boston Review's Poems about Belonging



MONTH 2: STORIES OF NEIGHBORHOODS

CRITICAL QUESTION: Who is present? Who is missing?

Social Justice Standards: Identity 5, Diversity 9

AN OPPORTUNITY TO:

- Think about difference and sameness as it relates to your own experiences and environments
- Develop a dialogue about whom you see in your daily life, and who you don't
- Take time to notice what has become automatic in your life, and how that shapes what may seem "normal"
- Analyze your own "normal" as it relates to space, place, media, entertainment, and news

Why Neighborhoods?

In this theme, our focus is on your local community. St. Louis is one of the most residentially segregated cities in the United States. Yet the truth is that Americans all over the country experience a daily multi-faceted segregation of their friends, news, media, and commercial and public spaces. These divisions and distinctions drive white and Black, Indigenous, and people of color to have radically different experiences and realities, and these different experiences often lead to very different understandings and perspectives.

This theme uses the questions "Who is present?" and "Who is missing?" to develop a dialogue about who we see in our daily lives and who we don't, and how patterns of the past affect our present.

We Stories began in St. Louis, one of the most residentially segregated cities in the United States. Take the two neighborhoods of Clayton and Jeff-Vander-Lou. In 63105 (Clayton), residents are 78% white, while in 63106 (Jeff-Vander-Lou), residents are 95% Black. This kind of residential segregation has been caused and maintained by more than 100 years of intentional, deliberate housing and financial policies.

The insidious thing about segregation is that it's self-perpetuating. The more segregated we are, the more segregated we tend to stay. Patterned and habitual behavior reinforces separations amongst us, compounding the residual impact of historical racist policies and practices. Yes, where you choose to buy a house matters, but so does where you choose to shop, dine, travel, and explore, as do the media that you hear, see, and share, and the people who are part of your daily life.

We are not focusing on segregation in order to highlight individual choices that are better or worse than others. Even folks who live in relatively diverse neighborhoods can have a surprisingly segregated existence supported by decisions and patterns both big and small. We instead want to highlight how we are ALL limited and constrained by the forces of historical and systemic segregation. When we recognize the impact of those constraints, we then have the choice to push against what has become automatic and reconsider what's available for all.

Booklist

For Ages 4 to 8

- *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero and illustrated by Zeke Peña
- *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña and illustrated by Christian Robinson
- *Around Our Way on Neighbors Day* by Tameka Fryer Brown and illustrated by Charlotte Riley-Webb
- *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold

For Ages 9 to 12

- *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang
- *Take Back the Block* by Chrystal D. Giles

For Ages 13+

- *Piecing Me Together* by Renée Watson
- *Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo

Family Discussion Prompts

- Who do we see in our neighborhoods and schools? Who is missing from our neighborhoods and schools? Why?
- What happens when we live in spaces where not everyone is present or welcome?
- What experiences do we as a family or as individuals of being in the minority? How does it feel?
- How do we know that we are welcome in spaces?
- How do we show others that they are welcome?
- When you think about your neighborhood, workplace, school settings, community spaces, frequent stories, and shopping experiences, what do they look like? Feel like?
- What patterns of the past do we still see today?

Family Activity

Draw the important places in your community that are special to you. These could be big places (a school, a library, a grocery store) or small places (a creek, a playground, a corner).

Use items from nature or your home to bring your neighborhood to life. Who are the people you meet? Your friends, family, teachers, neighbors? Add them in too! At the end, choose a title for your community. Perhaps, it's your town name or what you wish you could name your community!

Caregiver Reflection Prompts

Reflect on your past experience living in your childhood and your current living situation:

- Who was present in your childhood neighborhoods? Who was missing in your childhood neighborhoods? What was your assumption about that? How did it shape your sense of "normal"?
- Does your family have examples of spaces that are differently peopled? How can you expand their experience in differently-peopled public and private spaces?

Caregiver Resources

- Integrated School's Gentrification and School Segregation
- The Disturbing History of the Suburbs
- Learning for Justice's Burning Brown to the Ground

MONTH 3: STORIES OF AMERICA

CRITICAL QUESTION: Can we allow multiple truths to be present?

Social Justice Standards: Justice 13, Justice 14

AN OPPORTUNITY TO:

- Embrace both the promise and the pain of America and American history
- Consider how many ways there have been throughout history to "become American"
- Reflect on which stories we commonly hear and which ones we often miss

Why America?

The final theme extends out to stories of America. Messages about what makes America and Americans unique are ever-present. And yet, this is often presented in fairly simplistic terms, focusing primarily on opportunities and triumphs, not challenges and failures. In truth, our collective story is quite nuanced, in ways that are both painful and promising. And while it can be challenging at times to hang on to, exclusively embracing the promise can feel like a denial of the pain and exclusively highlighting the pain leaves us little to build upon.

Our responsibility, as those who live here, requires us to see, experience, and appreciate this both/and (rather than either/or) experience. In embracing the pain as a reminder of work to be done, we can simultaneously – power ourselves with stories of promise, as we work toward what’s possible. This theme’s stories promote thinking about these multiple perspectives.

Sometimes people talk about America being special because some of our laws state that all people should experience certain freedoms. AND YET...

- Not all Americans have the same stories and experience of freedom.
- Not all Americans have had the same access to liberty.
- Not all Americans are free from persecution.
- Some Americans risked all they had to come to this country.
- Some Americans were brought here against their will.
- Some Americans were already here long, long before July 4, 1776, and have watched as our nation’s growth consumed their traditions and freedom.

There are MANY stories of America.

Booklist

For Ages 4 to 8

- *The 1619 Project: Born on the Water* by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson and illustrated by Nikkolas Smith
- *We Came to America* by Faith Ringgold
- *Apple Pie, Fourth of July* by Janet S. Wong and illustrated by Margaret Chodos-Irvine
- *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* by Kevin Noble Maillard and illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal

For Ages 9 to 12

- *The Birchbark House* by Louise Erdrich
- *Efrén Divided* by Ernesto Cisneros

For Ages 13+

- *Almost American Girl* by Robin Ha
- *A Very Large Expanse of the Sea* by Tahereh Mafi

Family Activity

Design a plate showing foods that remind you of home. After reading *Apple Pie, Fourth of July*, you will understand that Americans foods are filled with a variety of cultures and traditions. Using craft materials and a paper plate, decorate the plate with foods that bring you joy. Share why you chose those foods and the cultures and traditions they represent.

Family Discussion Prompts

- How does our family's legacy reflect the larger narrative of America?
- How, as ONE OF MANY stories of America, does our family's story differ from others?
- What would you add to our country's ideals and values?
- What do our ideals and values say about who we could be as a country?
- What do we and can we do to ensure that ALL Americans enjoy the same freedoms?

Caregiver Reflection Prompts

Reflect on something you've considered an American truth or that you present to children as an American truth.

- When or how would I have encountered information about different experiences and perspectives on this?
- What kept me from knowing it or seeing it on my own?
- What has enabled me to accept it as fact without deeper curiosity?
- What enables me to better question or wonder about the universality of my experience?
- What other questions does it raise, and where can I learn more?
- How can I share my experience of learning and reflection with my kids?
- How do I frame and react to present day violence and traumatic realities? How do I incorporate this discussion into action? What does action look like in my family?
- How can I utilize holidays or "months" as starting points for deeper discussion?
- What key stories have shaped your family's relationship to American identity? To whiteness?

Caregiver Resources

- Code Switch podcast: A Taste of Freedom
- The New Yorker "The Invention of Thanksgiving"
- The Atlantic: Inheritance project

CAREGIVER CONCLUSION PROMPT

What small practices can I incorporate into my and my family's daily life to learn and reclaim histories beyond this curriculum?

After brainstorming these small practices, what is the one commitment I can make to myself and my family moving forward?

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