

# LESSON PLAN SERIES

## Different Colors of Beauty

**Grade Level:** K-2, 3-5

**Topic:** Race & Ethnicity

**Subject:** Reading & Language Arts, Social Studies, SEL, Arts, ELL / ESL

**Social Justice Domain:** Identity

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The overall goal of these lessons is to help students develop their racial or ethnic identities in a safe and open classroom environment. Each lesson capitalizes on a slightly different modality of learning. The lessons offer questions and conversation starters to help build understanding and community.

Because issues of skin color, race and racial identity can be complicated, each lesson offers additional guidance for teachers in a section on professional development. These sections will help you build a safe, open and accepting classroom and school community.

### **Looking Closely at Ourselves**

Students paint self-portraits and use visual arts to begin exploring skin color.

### **Looking at Race and Racial Identity Through Critical Literacy in Children's Books**

Students look critically at the literature in their school and classroom libraries and develop an understanding of racial stereotypes.

### **Sharing Our Colors: Writing Poetry**

Students explore their own sense of racial identity by reading and writing poetry.

### **Family Colors: Interviewing Our Families**

Students develop interviewing and reporting skills. They will talk to their families and develop a historical understanding of racial bias.

### **Painting Beauty: Creating Self-Portraits**

Students apply and continue to develop a more nuanced understanding of skin color, race and beauty by painting and critiquing more advanced self-portraits.

### **Reflection**

Students reflect on and celebrate the concepts they have developed and their growing sense of community. They set goals for themselves as community members and fighters of stereotypes and bias.

# LESSON ONE

## Looking Closely at Ourselves

In this lesson, students explore race and self-identity by creating self-portraits. The lesson aims to help students develop detailed observational skills and use these skills in relation to themselves and others. It also begins constructing a vocabulary that is crucial in helping build community and discuss some of the more challenging aspects of race and racial identity formation.

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**Grade Level:** 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

**Topic:** Race & Ethnicity Bullying & Bias

**Subject:** Reading & Language Arts, Arts

**Social Justice Domain:** Identity

### Objectives

At the end of the lesson, students will understand the importance of self-reflection and how it helps us improve our observation, understanding, and communication with others in our community.

### Essential Questions

- How does looking closely at ourselves help us understand others?
- What are some ways we can make ourselves — and people around us — more comfortable when we are talking about challenging or confusing topics?

### Enduring Understandings

- Looking closely at ourselves can make us more sensitive to how we see and think about others, and heighten our awareness of our own and others' beauty.
- Talking about challenging or confusing topics requires sensitivity and thoughtfulness. Speakers should use respectful tones, be specific when offering feedback, and listen carefully to responses.

## Materials

- small hand mirrors for each student or several large mirrors for groups of students to share
- heavy paper for painting
- sharpened pencils
- erasers
- tempera paints, brushes, and palettes. NOTE: If paints aren't available, students can use markers, colored pencils, construction paper, or other art supplies that may be more readily available.
- smocks (as deemed necessary)
- chart paper

## Vocabulary

**color** [kuhl-er] (*noun*) the appearance of something, including how bright it is and what shade it is

**skin** [skin] (*noun*) the outer covering of a human or animal body

**skin color** [skin kuhl-er] (*noun*) the coloring of a person's face and skin

**race** [reys] (*noun*) one of the major groups into which human beings can be divided. As a social construction, it relates to the grouping of people based on physical characteristics, such as skin color, often for the purpose of creating the perception of a superior race. (*Note: There are many ways to define the term "race." We provide a working definition, but one of the goals for this series is for students to come to individual and collective understandings of the term that make sense to them and their personal, developmental, and communal needs.*)

**self-portrait** [self-pawr-trit] (*noun*) a picture a person makes of himself or herself

**beauty** [BYOO-tee] (*noun*) the part of a person—or thing—that makes us like how he or she looks

*(Note: There are many different ways to define the term "beauty." We provide a working definition, but one of the goals of this lesson and series of lessons is for students to come to their own understanding of the term and concept.)*

## Suggested Procedure

1. Have students talk about these questions in small, diverse groups: What does it mean to look closely? Why is looking closely important in school? Why is it important in life outside of school? Encourage each group to share one or two key points. (*Note: With older students, you may have them write about the questions instead.*)
2. Help students understand that one reason that we look closely at ourselves is to start understanding who we are as physical people, which is often the first thing we notice about ourselves and each other. One thing we often notice—also one of the first things other people notice about us—but sometimes don't talk about is the color of our own skin and each other's skin. With your class, discuss these questions: What is color? What is skin? What is skin color? Why is it important? Why isn't it important? Why might some people find it challenging to talk about these topics?
3. One important reason for looking closely is to find beauty in ourselves and in others. As a shared-class writing activity, make a list of other words or ideas students associate with the word "beauty." (*Note: With older students, have them write their own lists in journals.*) Encourage students to consider these following questions: What does beauty mean to you? Are there different ways to be beautiful? Do you think beauty is important? Why or why not? (*Note: During your conversation about skin color, the concept of race might come up. Help students speak openly about their understanding concerning race. It is important to assess where your students are in their conceptual understandings and to provide a safe and open forum for talking about race and how it relates to skin color. You might have children talk with partners or as a class about what they think race might mean or how they have heard this word used. Lesson 2 in the series will explore race more explicitly.*)
4. Artists look closely at themselves when they paint self-portraits. Explain that a self-portrait is a picture you create of yourself. Pass out a mirror to each student or each group of students. Show students how they can use mirrors to pay attention to what they look like: the shapes of their faces, the different shades of skin, and the different features they have. While still looking in the mirror, have them use a pencil to draw an outline of their face on painting paper. They can mix the paints together in many ways to show the different colors present on their faces. (*Note: Lesson 5 in the series will include more explicit and targeted explanations of mixing colors. This is to give students a starting point; then they'll have something to look back on at the end of the series to see how their vision of themselves may have changed.*) Help

students consider this question: How did looking closely at yourself influence the way you see and think about yourself? (*Note: If students have performed similar activities in the past or are very experienced with self-portraits, encourage them to notice something about themselves this time that they have never focused on before.*)

5. When students finished painting the portraits, leave them to dry. As a class, talk about what it means to critique others' art, and develop students' comments into guidelines for the critiques. For example: When students workshop one another's artwork, they should focus on giving specific compliments and maybe one thoughtful suggestion. Chart the guidelines your class comes up with for a helpful workshop. Some starting points for conversation could be colors used, attention paid to detail, or favorite parts of the portrait.
6. Take time to visit each group and to look at students' self-portraits so you may give helpful feedback. Share anything you noticed about your students, their portraits, and their critiques during this activity. (*Note: Try to focus the conversation around the theme of skin color or, if it has come up, race. If students are struggling to stay with these themes, you may want to start a separate conversation about why skin color can be difficult to talk about and what might make it a more comfortable topic.*)
7. Either in groups or in journals, have students reflect on why or how this activity was helpful or important. Direct students to discuss and/or write down any further questions the activity brought up for them.

## Extension Activities

### Do Something

Have students research and explore the community's demographics. Ask: What challenges does our community face as a result of its diversity or lack of diversity? Have students report their findings and recommend approaches to meeting the community's needs, including ways to facilitate awareness and understanding of important or sensitive issues. Some ways students could report their findings include: write a report, create a bulletin board, plan a campaign or host a town hall meeting.

**ELL Extension**

A self-portrait involves learning about different parts of your face and even your body. Working with art materials also means learning words for different colors. Depending on the level of the students' English, explore the distinction of colors. This means not only "red," "orange," "yellow," but also terms such as "shade," "light," "dark," and "darken." As you work on your portrait, make labels on sticky notes for any new nouns, verbs, or adjectives you learn. Keep them beside your portrait. Once the portraits have dried, put your sticky notes in appropriate places on your portrait. Challenge yourself to see if the same words might also find homes on some of your classmates' portraits! Practice using these words in sentences as you critique your classmates' work.

This activity addresses the following standards using the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: CCSS SL.1, SL.2, SL.4, SL.6, W.10, L.1, L.3, L.6.

## LESSON TWO

### Looking at Race and Racial Identity in Children's Books

This lesson, the second in a series, encourages students to think and talk openly about the concept of beauty, particularly as it overlaps with issues of race and racial identity.

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**Grade Level:** K-2, 3-5

**Topic:** Race & Ethnicity

**Subject:** Reading & Language Arts, Social Studies, ELL / ESL

**Social Justice Domain:** Justice

#### Objectives

Activities will help students:

- acquire vocabulary for orally critiquing author and illustrator choices
- make text-to-self and text-to-text connections using picture and chapter books
- talk about racial identity openly and consider the harmful potential of racial stereotypes
- become active readers capable of finding and critiquing hidden messages in texts
- develop a sense of belonging in relation to the literature in their school and classroom library
- build a safe and supportive classroom community where students can engage in literacy development together

#### Essential Questions

- What does it mean to read critically?
- What explicit and hidden messages about race do authors and illustrators of picture books send to readers?
- What obvious and hidden messages about beauty do authors and illustrators of picture books send to readers?
- What can authors, illustrators and readers do to make picture books that include more people from more different backgrounds?

Reprinted with permission of **Teaching Tolerance**, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center.  
<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/different-colors-of-beauty>

## Materials

- chart paper
- graphic organizer: “[Keeping Track of What We Notice](#)”
- picture books from the classroom or school library (Note: There are many possibilities, including: *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson, *Pink and Say* by Patricia Polacco, *Tea with Milk* by Allen Say, *White Socks Only* by Evelyn Coleman and *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz. However, the lesson would work just as well with any set of picture books as long as they involve images of people rather than only animals. Race does not have to be an explicit theme in order for children to discuss racial issues as they relate to images in picture books.)

## Framework

Literature plays a powerful role in helping children form value systems. Children start to understand what is—and is not—valued by authors and stories. Part of learning to read is being able to look critically at the images and messages in books, to understand what we can learn from authors, but also to think about problematic stereotypes authors and illustrators might perpetuate.

By using critical literacy skills, children will analyze not only picture books with explicit messages about race, but they also will learn to examine and begin talking about racial stereotypes present in picture books more generally. By thinking about messages surrounding race as it relates to beauty standards and norms, children will be challenged to articulate their own conception of what it means to be beautiful.

## Professional Development

There are many books about the various aspects of critical literacy, including wonderful suggestions about how to use reading and writing to promote social justice. Some useful titles for the elementary grades include *Getting Beyond “I Like the Book”* by Vivian Maria Vasquez, *For a Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action* by Randy Bomer and Katherine Bomer, and *Creating Critical Classrooms* by Mitzi Lewison.

The professional development modules [Culturally Relevant Curriculum](#) and [Engaging Curriculum](#) can also be helpful in understanding the importance of, and some strategies for, incorporating critical literacy into your reading and writing work.

## Vocabulary

**color** [kuhl-er] (*noun*) the natural appearance of something, including how bright it is and what shade it is

**skin** [skin] (*noun*) the outer covering of a human or animal body

**skin color** [skin kuhl-er] (*noun*) the coloring of a person's face and skin

**race** [reys] (*noun*) one of the major groups into which human beings can be divided. As a social construction, it relates to the grouping of people based on physical characteristics, such as skin color, often for the purpose of creating the perception of a superior race. *(Note: There are many different ways to define the term race. We provide a working definition, but one of the goals of this lesson and series of lessons is for students to come to individual and collective understandings of the term that make sense to them and their personal, developmental and communal needs.)*

**beauty** [BYOO-tee] (*noun*) the part of a person—or thing—that makes us like how he or she looks. *(Note: There are many different ways to define the term beauty. We provide a working definition, but one of the goals of this lesson and series of lessons is for students to come to their own understanding of the term and concept.)*

**author** [AW-ther] (*noun*) the person who writes a book

**illustrator** [il-uh-strey-ter] (*noun*) an artist who creates pictures or images in a book

**stereotype** [ster-ee-oh-tahyp] (*noun*) an overly simple picture or opinion of a person, group or thing

## Activities

1. If *author* and *illustrator* are new terms to your class, clarify and chart the definitions. What is an author? What is an illustrator?
2. Allow students ample time to look through the picture books in your classroom library with a partner. They should pay attention to anything they notice about the images in these picture books and keep track of observations using the graphic organizer. Children who cannot write or who struggle with writing can use shorthand or quick illustrations to keep track. Depending on your students' graphomotor abilities, you may want to modify the graphic organizer with lines. Encourage them to focus on how the

illustrations do or do not remind them of themselves and the people in their lives, particularly with regard to physical appearance, including those we call racial—skin color, facial features, hair texture. They should share observations with a partner.

3. Come together as a class and provide time for students to share what they noticed. Some questions you might ask include: What did you notice about the images in the book? What skin colors do you notice? How would you describe the variations of skin colors? What other physical attributes did you notice? Did you notice anything missing? *(Note: It is important at this juncture to remain aware of where your students are coming from in terms of their understanding of race as a concept. You might choose to step back from the lesson to construct an explicit definition of the term race, which you can go back to as you move forward. If talking about race is very new to your class, allow them time to process why the conversation may—or may not—feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, this is an excellent entry point to begin talking about stereotypes. Help students begin to understand that race is a social construction, and literature can contribute to or fight the various stereotypes so frequently associated with race.)*
4. Have students turn and talk to a different partner about how it makes them feel to have something in common with a picture in a book. Then have them talk about how it feels or might feel to notice that most characters in books are very different from them. *(Note: This is a good chance to bring the conversation in to other literacy activities or lessons you have done around text-to-self and text-to-text connections. If these types of connections are already familiar to your class, you can challenge them to also consider text-to-world connections. Begin with the question: What real-world problems or issues do the themes we're talking about remind you of?)*
5. What is beauty? What does it mean to be beautiful? In journals, instruct students to draw a picture of a person they think is very beautiful. They can share the pictures in groups. Talk about what the pictures have in common. Help students relate their ideas of beauty to the theme of race and skin color. What do they think authors and illustrators of picture books are trying to tell us is or is not beautiful? Is this OK? Why or why not? How does it make us feel? *(Note: If your classroom has a very diverse classroom library, students may notice that people of a variety of colors are portrayed as beautiful. If so, great. This conversation does not have to lead in one particular direction; it simply has to get students thinking critically about the images in books and the messages they communicate, for better or for worse.)*

6. Come together as a class. Do a shared or interactive writing activity composing a letter to an author and illustrator pair about what we would like to see in a picture book. Challenge your class to incorporate terms like *beauty*, *skin color* and *race* into your letter.

### Applying What You've Learned

Think about the experience of discussing race and beauty in literature. In your journal, respond to the following questions:

- Why is it important to think critically about physical characteristics and beauty in books for children?
- What hidden messages about race and beauty do you think authors and illustrators might be sending to most young readers? What is your own opinion about these messages?
- In your opinion, what would be an ideal way for authors and illustrators of children's books to communicate messages about race and beauty?

### Extension Activity

Look through the picture books and young adult chapter books in your local library or at home. Think about the conversations you had with your class about skin color, race and beauty as they are shown in picture books. How are the messages in this collection similar to or different from the ones at your school? Write a few sentences or a paragraph describing what you found. Share your findings with your classmates the next day and discuss the meaning of what you learned.

### ELL Extension

Looking at the images in a picture book without reading the words is a great way to practice your language skills. While you are working with your partner, challenge yourself to tell a story that goes along with the images you are examining. Try to use complete sentences. Later, tell your story to your teacher or a buddy who can write it down for you.

Activities and embedded assessments address the following standards from the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: CCSS: SL.1, SL.4, SL.6, R.1, R.2, R.3, R.6, R.7, W

## LESSON THREE

### Sharing Our Colors: Writing Poetry

This lesson is the third in a series called “The Different Colors of Beauty.” The goal of these lessons is to help students develop their racial or ethnic identities in a safe and open classroom environment, while being aware of our multicultural and diverse world.

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**Grade Level:** K-2, 3-5

**Topic:** Race & Ethnicity

**Subject:** Reading & Language Arts, SEL, Arts, ELL / ESL

**Social Justice Domain:** Identity

#### Objectives

Activities will help students:

- develop their understanding of what a poem is and gain strategies for reading poetry
- practice working with different forms of poetic language and structure
- engage in the steps of the writing process, including developing skills for providing constructive feedback to their peers' writing
- make connections between poetry and racial identity issues

#### Essential Questions

- What is poetry? How is poetry similar to and different from other sorts of written language?
- What is identity? How does our personal sense of identity relate (or not relate) to our skin color, race and sense of beauty?
- How have other poets used language to express their sense of themselves as beautiful, as well as their sense of racial identity?
- How can we most effectively express our sense of identity through poetry? How can we use beautiful language to show how we feel beautiful?

## Materials

- chart paper
- individual notebooks or journals
- children's poetry or appropriate adult poetry as available in the classroom library (*Note: You will want to make sure you have a diverse set of poetry available for this activity. If your library collection is limited, use the poets listed in the "Professional Development" section to gather a varied collection.*)
- Sharpies
- watercolors
- watercolor paper

## Framework

Race, skin color and beauty are complicated concepts to understand cognitively. In many ways, they can be even more challenging for children to untangle emotionally. Each child has a unique relationship to these themes, and the relationships are rarely simple. Writing poetry is an important way for young children to express thoughts and feelings. Thinking about poetic language allows us to see the beauty in ourselves and others as we work with the beauty of words.

This lesson helps children develop their skills for poetic expression while working toward a more intricate and productive understanding of race, racial identity and their own concept of beauty. By reading poetry that is concerned with social justice and by writing poetic self-portraits, students will deepen their understandings of the many different ways to recognize beauty.

## Professional Development

Reading and writing poetry with children can be a rich experience. Some helpful guidance for incorporating poetry can be found in *Awakening the Heart* by Georgia Heard, *Poetry Matters: Writing Poetry from the Inside Out* by Robert Fletcher, and *Wondrous Words: Writers and Writing in the Elementary Classroom* by Katie Wood Ray. *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* by Linda Christensen describes the concept of relating reading and writing poetry to themes of social justice.

Countless poets have written on themes of racial identity. Here are nine: Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, Rita Dove, Walter Dean Myers, Julia

Alvarez, Martin Espada, Audre Lorde and Gary Soto. Reading the work of these and other poets forms a framework to help students write poetry with racial themes.

**Vocabulary**

**color** [kuhl-er] (*noun*) the natural appearance of something, including how bright it is and what shade it is

**skin** [skin] (*noun*) the outer covering of a human or animal body

**skin color** [skin kuhl-er] (*noun*) the coloring of a person's face and skin

**race** [reys] (*noun*) one of the major groups into which human beings can be divided. As a social construction, it relates to the grouping of people based on physical characteristics, such as skin color, often for the purpose of creating the perception of a superior race. (*Note: There are many different ways to define the term "race." We provide a working definition, but one of the goals of this lesson and series of lessons is for students to come to individual and collective understandings of the term that make sense to them and their personal, developmental and communal needs.*)

**beauty** [BYOO-tee] (*noun*) the part of a person (or thing) that makes us like how he or she looks (*Note: There are many different ways to define the term "beauty." We provide a working definition, but one of the goals of this lesson and series of lessons is for students to come to their own understanding of the term and concept.*)

**identity** [ahy-DEN-ti-tee] (*noun*) the sense people have of themselves, who they are, and what they feel is most important and defining about themselves

**poetry** [POH-ih-tree] (*noun*) written work usually defined by particular beauty, excitement, freedom of verse or particular poetic structures

**Activities**

1. What is poetry? What is a poem? How is poetry different from other types of language? Discuss these questions with your class. If the study of poetry is new to your class, read aloud, do a read-around or allot some time for independent reading of a variety of poetry to help them understand the genre's flexibility. Use the poems students read to help them talk about how poets utilize writing to express themselves or to understand themselves better.

2. Explain that one part of how we think of ourselves—a part of our *identity*—is how we think about our skin color and our race. To some people, this is an important part of identity; to other people, it's less important. Explain that we all have many facets to our identity. These might include personal abilities and interests, life experiences, family history and structure, culture and religion. Help students understand how complex identity can be, but then explain that, as in the other lessons in this series, you will be focusing on racial identity. In their notebooks, help students write a list of five to six words that describe their race or skin color. *(Note: This is a good time to come back to your class's developing understanding of race. Remind them what they learned through previous lessons, and explain that the creative process will be a chance for them to express their own feelings about racial identity and develop their own contributions to the definition of the term. Encourage them to push beyond generalizations or stereotypes.)* If students cannot come up with that many, list a few other words, such as *deep* or *warm*. *(Note: In preliterate classes, you may want to perform this activity as a whole group.)* Have students share their lists with a partner.
3. Tell children that poets sometimes use their poetry to create written self-portraits and to express their identity. Allow students to read or listen to a variety of poems about race, racial identity or identity in general. Encourage them to think about the words and strategies these poets use to express themselves.
4. Have the students review their original lists of words. Each student should choose one or two words from the list that he or she thinks are especially poetic. Using inspiration from the poetry you read as a class, have students draft one or more poems describing themselves. At least part of the poem should focus on their race or skin color, or their understanding of how these concepts apply to their identities—they can talk about other things, too. Encourage students to use comparisons or unusual language to describe themselves as fully and poetically as possible. Remind them, though, that being poetic does not necessarily mean using a lot of words—you can use only a few to get across very powerful ideas. *(Note: If your students have worked on poetry in the past, draw on prior knowledge about the genre as they write.)*
5. Come together as a class. Discuss some important dos and don'ts of reading and commenting on another person's writing. Some helpful tips can be found at the [National Council of Teachers of English](https://www.ncte.org/Classroom-Resources/Tolerance-Lessons/Different-Colors-of-Beauty) website. Chart guidelines that students come up with, then form groups of four to five to share each other's poems. Each poet should receive at least two specific compliments and one specific suggestion from the group.

6. Using what they know about the [writing process](#), have students revise and edit their poems.
7. Allow children to publish their poems on watercolor paper using a permanent marker. When the marker has dried, they can watercolor over it to make their poems beautiful. *(Note: You can bind the students' poetry together in a class book or display them in your classroom or on a bulletin board.)* Allow time for students to read their classmates' work and celebrate the wonderful identity poetry they created.

### Applying What You've Learned

Think about what you have learned about race, skin color, beauty and identity through the creation of poetry. In your journal, respond to the following questions:

- Why can poetry be an especially useful medium for expressing ideas around race, skin color, beauty and identity?
- How did your thinking about these concepts change as you worked on your poetry?
- If you were going to write a series of poems, what would you write? Why?
- What was challenging about this activity? Explain.

### Extension Activity

It is not unusual for the work of one particular poet to really stand out to us. Choose one poem from your classroom collection that really gave you a special feeling. Think about why that poem meant so much to you. With your teacher's help or at home, find a few more poems by the same poet. Read them many times and try to understand why they are special to you. Then, when you feel you know them well, challenge yourself to write a poem that feels like it is in the same style as the poetry of your favorite poet.

### ELL Extension

Some people believe that poetry cannot be effectively translated from one language to another. Find a children's or adult poem from your home language. See if you can translate it into English. Does it seem as beautiful to you? You can also translate an English poem into your home language. Now try translating your own poem. What is your opinion about whether poetry can be translated? Share your experience and opinions with a partner or with your class.

Common Core State Standards, ELA: CCSS: SL.1, SL.4, SL.6, W.3, W.4, W.5

## LESSON FOUR

### Family Colors: Interviewing Our Families

This lesson is the fourth in a series called “The Different Colors of Beauty.” The goal is to help students develop their racial or ethnic identities in a safe and open classroom environment, while being aware of our multicultural, diverse world.

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**Grade Level:** K-2, 3-5

**Topic:** Race & Ethnicity

**Subject:** Reading & Language Arts, Social Studies, SEL, ELL / ESL

**Social Justice Domain:** Diversity

#### Objectives

Activities will help students:

- understand and implement interviewing skills, including planning, asking questions, taking notes and reporting on interviews
- consider issues from multiple viewpoints
- make connections between their family’s values and the values of their school community
- develop vocabulary for discussing race, skin color, beauty and history
- gain oral language skills for reporting and discussing information

#### Essential Questions

- What is an interview? Why do we use interviewing as a research technique?
- What are values? What are beliefs?
- What is beauty? What does it mean to be beautiful?
- Do different people have different perspectives on race, skin color and beauty? Why?
- How can it help us to see an idea from different perspectives?

## Materials

- chart paper
- individual notebooks or journals
- small digital audio recording devices (optional)

Because this lesson involves family interviews, plan to use two different class periods to give students time to conduct an interview in between the two class periods. An alternative would be to invite one family member into the classroom and do a collective interview during a class session. Students could then conduct similar interviews with their own family members as an optional homework assignment.

## Framework

Making connections between home and school environments helps elementary students feel safe and productive while they are at school. Learning specific strategies for talking to their families about what they are discovering and discussing in school is one of the best ways to make such connections. Particularly when a classroom community is working on talking about issues pertaining to bias, it is essential for students to find common ground between home and school.

This lesson aims to teach students interviewing skills so they can draw on their families' histories and perspectives. Interviewing is also a necessary skill in conducting social studies research. Furthermore, by delving into their families' narratives, students will contribute to diverse and rich classroom conversations.

## Professional Development

Interviewing is a crucial aspect of social studies research. For more insight into how to bring interviewing and other authentic skills into your social studies curriculum, read *If This Is Social Studies, Why Isn't It Boring?* by Stephanie Steffey and Wendy J. Hood. Similarly, *Social Studies for Social Justice*, by Rahima C. Wade, addresses ways to connect academic curriculum and issues of social justice.

[Strategies for Reducing Racial and Ethnic Prejudice](#) offers a variety of ideas for dealing with themes of race and racial bias as they arise in schools and classrooms. [How Schools Can Help](#) also describes ways schools can actively fight racism.

## Vocabulary

**color** [ kuhl-er ] (*noun*) the natural appearance of something, including how bright it is and what shade it is

**skin** [ skin ] (*noun*) the outer covering of a human or animal body

**skin color** [ skin kuhl-er ] (*noun*) the coloring of a person’s face and skin

**race** [ reys ] (*noun*) one of the major groups into which human beings can be divided. As a social construction, it relates to the grouping of people based on physical characteristics, such as skin color, often for the purpose of creating the perception of a superior race.

*(Note: There are many different ways to define the term “race.” We provide a working definition, but one of the goals of this series of lessons is for students to come to individual and collective understandings of the term that make sense to them and their personal, developmental and communal needs.)*

**beauty** [ BYOO-tee ] (*noun*) the part of a person—or thing—that makes us like how he or she looks

*(Note: There are many different ways to define the term “beauty.” We provide a working definition, but one of the goals of this series of lessons is for students to come to their own understanding of the term and concept.)*

**interview** [ IN-ter-vyoo ] (*noun*) a conversation where one person tries to find out information or ideas from one or more other people

**value** [ VAL-yoo ] (*noun*) something that a person or group of people thinks of as especially important or worthwhile

**belief** [ bih-LEEF ] (*noun*) something a person thinks is true and important; something a person has faith or confidence in

**perspective** [ per-SPEK-tiv ] (*noun*) a way of looking at things

## Activities

1. Values or beliefs are things that we think are important and true. For instance, some people really value honesty. Others value kindness above all. In diverse

groups or with partners, have students name one or two things they really value or believe in. They should talk about where they think these beliefs come from and why they are important.

2. Come together as a class. Explain that you will be discussing skin color, race and beauty as they relate to the students' personal values and the values of their families. *(Note: This is a good time to build on definitions your class has encountered in previous lessons about race and stereotypes. Help students understand that when they talk to their families, they will likely hear a variety of definitions and perspectives on race—and that is fine. These different perspectives are part of what help us understand race as a social construct.)* What is race? What is skin color? What is beauty? Discuss these questions with the students. Help them understand the complexity of the questions and that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Chart student responses and ask them how they think the themes of race, skin color and beauty relate to the idea of values.
3. Explain that one important source of our values is our families. As a class, help students come up with a list of questions they could ask a family member about their values and beliefs as they relate to skin color, race and beauty. Chart a large list of student questions. Some possibilities to get students started might be, “When do you first remember noticing the color of your skin?” or “Why do you or don’t you think race is important to talk about?” Kids might also have more specific questions based on what they already know about their families, such as, “How did immigrating change the way you felt about your *race*?”
4. Once they have brainstormed a lot of questions, they should work with classmates to narrow them down to four or five really important questions. Students can work with the big questions on the chart paper. Older students may vary their interviews based on what they are interested in learning. In that case, they should be more independent in writing questions.
5. Once your class has created a final interview, type and photocopy individual versions of the questions for students to take home. *(Note: As your class brainstorms questions, or later as they conduct and report on their interviews, some students might share information that devalues a group of people or that may imply that one racial group is better than another, e.g., the white race as superior. It is important to follow students' leads in this conversation, acknowledging their personal and family values but helping them see the harm in generalizations, stereotypes and perceptions of groups as either superior or inferior. At the same time, it is also crucial to remain aware of the feelings of students who are or who have been targets of*

*negative remarks, teasing or bullying related to skin color, race or any other aspect of identity. These students may not choose to speak up, but you can recognize their feelings by reminding the whole class how hurtful and devastating it is to be a target.)*

6. Conducting an interview is an important research skill, a way to find out what another person thinks or believes. As a class, discuss some skills that are important for effective interviewing. Chart students' responses and create a list of guidelines. These might include making eye contact, waiting through some silence, and, if your students do not yet write, thinking of strategies for remembering the interviewees' responses.
7. Using the questions you came up with as a class, allow students to practice interviewing skills with a partner. Encourage children to think about what they like and do not like about interviewing and being interviewed. Come together as a class to reflect on the experience.
8. Have students take interview questions home and interview a family member using the questions you created. *(Note: If your students are preliterate, you may want to send along instructions to the family member to read the questions aloud and jot down some responses. Even with older students, it would probably be helpful to send a letter home explaining the activity. Share with families the objectives of this series of lessons and explain what skills you are hoping they develop by conducting these interviews. Keep communication open between yourself and the families, just in case some family members may want to talk more in depth about the purpose of the lesson. If you have multiple home languages represented in your class, provide translations of the letter as well.)*
9. The next day give students the opportunity to share what they learned about their family's values and beliefs about race, skin color and beauty in a small group. Be sure they listen to what their classmates learned as well. Discuss the different perspectives that came up as a result of these interviews. Do you think it's complicated and challenging to define the term "race"? Why? What does race mean to different individuals?
10. Come together as a class to share the main points students learned from their interviews and their partners' interviews. Ask them if they think interviewing is a helpful tool for figuring out values and beliefs. How are their families' beliefs and values similar to students' own beliefs and values? Are they different in any way? What did students learn about race, skin color, beauty and themselves from doing this activity? Discuss these questions with your class.

## Applying What You've Learned

After conducting interviews, interviewers and other researchers often send some sort of thank-you note to the people who have helped them with their learning. The best kind of thank-you note shows explicitly what you learned from conducting the research. Independently or as a class, write a thank-you note to the family members you interviewed. Your note should include answers to the following questions:

- Why do you think this interview activity was useful?
- What was the most important thing you learned as an individual from conducting these interviews?
- What was the most important thing you learned as a class from conducting these interviews?
- How did your interview affect or change your thinking about race, skin color and beauty?
- If you were to conduct the interview again, what extra question or questions would you add?
- Make sure your note also includes a “thank you.”

## Extension Activity

Sometimes different people in one family might have totally different viewpoints, values or beliefs. Interview another family member, using the same questions. If you interviewed a man or boy the first time, try to interview a woman or girl the second time. If you interviewed a sibling the first time, try to interview a parent or grandparent the second time. Then think about how the two interviews were similar or different. Challenge yourself to think about why these similarities or differences exist. Share what you learned with your class when you return to school.

## ELL Extension

When you conduct your family interview, you may want to do so in your home language. When you are finished, choose a few key phrases or ideas that you would really like to learn how to say in English. Along with your family member, research ways to express these words or ideas. You can use a dictionary, other people or the Internet as some resources for doing this translation. Practice the new phrases you learn. Challenge yourself to use them when you report your interview back to your class.

Activities and embedded assessments address the following standards from the Common Core State Standards for ELA: CCSS: SL.1, SL.3, SL.4, SL.6, W.1

## LESSON FIVE

### Painting Beauty: Creating Self-Portraits

This lesson is the fifth in a series called “The Different Colors of Beauty.” The goal of these lessons is to help students develop their racial or ethnic identities in a safe and open classroom environment, and appreciate the broad spectrum of beauty in our diverse, multicultural world.

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**Grade Level:** K-2

**Topic:** Race & Ethnicity

**Subject:** Reading & Language Arts, Social Studies, SEL, Arts, ELL / ESL

**Social Justice Domain:** Identity

#### Objectives

Activities will help students:

- enhance observation skills which can be useful for self-reflection and inquiry
- develop vocabulary for discussing skin color, race, beauty, and racial identity
- analyze the relevance of commonly used racial terminology, labels, and language
- examine portraits and self-portraits by a variety of artists from diverse cultural backgrounds
- critique another student’s artwork, offering specific praise and constructive criticism

#### Essential Questions

- What is a portrait? What is a self-portrait?
- How can portraits and self-portraits help you think about your own and others’ identity?
- How can you use close observation skills to feel good about yourself and the people around you?
- What are some ways we can make ourselves and our classmates feel comfortable when we are talking about complex or confusing topics?
- What words are used commonly to describe skin color and racial identity?

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<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/different-colors-of-beauty>

## Materials

- small hand mirrors for each student or several large mirrors for groups to share
- heavy paper for painting
- sharpened pencils
- erasers
- tempera paints, brushes, and pallets
- smocks (optional)
- chart paper
- variety of self-portraits and portraits from diverse artists (*Note: If you do not have an ample selection of books available in your school and classroom library, use images from the links in the professional development section of this lesson.*)

## Framework

Artists often use self-portraits as a way of expressing various aspects of themselves and their identities beyond the surface of their physical appearance. Racial identity—including the relationship between race, color and beauty—is often present as a central theme in artists' works. Children, too, can use artistic expression as a way to deepen their understanding of the distinctive nature and potential richness of racial identity. Students will look carefully at themselves and the different shades of their skin. Their language for talking about racial identity will evolve so that they can work toward a fuller understanding of themselves and others. This, in turn, will help enhance each child's sense of belonging in a community.

In this lesson, students will look at self-portraits by a series of artists. The primary purpose of the lesson is for students to revisit their original portraits from [Lesson 1](#), deepening their views of themselves and their identities.

## Professional Development

Race can be a difficult topic to address. Lesson 1 in this series begins the conversation. In addition to the professional development resources listed in Lesson 1, some other helpful books include *What If All the Kids Are White: Anti-Bias Multicultural Education with Young Children and Families*, by Louise Derman-Sparks and Patricia G. Ramsey; *Diversities in Early Childhood Education*:

*Rethinking and Doing*, by Celia Genishi; and *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, by Lisa Delpit.

In *The Languages of Learning: How Children Talk, Write, Dance, Draw, and Sing Their Understanding of the World*, Karen Gallas addresses the idea of using artistic expression to get students talking about personal identity and issues of social justice.

Looking at the work of artists who have done culturally relevant portraits and self-portraits is an invaluable resource in preparing to discuss these themes with students. Some helpful websites for finding images and related analysis include those of [Kim Philipsen](#), [Frida Kahlo](#), [William H. Johnson](#), [Aaron Douglas](#), [Asian American Portraits of Encounter](#), and relevant links at the [National Museum of the American Indian](#) and [12 Faces of Latin America: Portraits of a Region](#).

## Vocabulary

**color** [KUHL-er] (*noun*) the natural appearance of something, including how bright it is and what shade it is

**skin** [skin] (*noun*) the outer covering of a human or animal body

**skin color** [skin KUHL-er] (*noun*) the coloring of a person's face and skin

**race** [reys] (*noun*) one of the major groups into which human beings can be divided. As a social construction, it relates to the grouping of people based on shared physical characteristics, such as skin color, often for the purpose of creating the perception of a superior race.

*(Note: There are many different ways to define the term race. We provide a working definition, but one of the goals of this lesson—and the other lessons in this series—is for students to come to individual and collective understandings of the term that make sense to them and satisfies their personal, developmental, and communal needs.)*

**beauty** [BYOO-tee] (*noun*) the part of a person—or thing—that makes us like how he, she, or it looks

*(Note: There are many different ways to define the term beauty. We provide a working definition, but one of the goals of this lesson—and the other lessons in this*

*series—is for students to come to their own understanding of the term and concept.)*

**perspective** [per-SPEK-tiv] (*noun*) a way of looking at things

**portrait** [PAWR-trit] (*noun*) a picture of a person done by someone else

**self-portrait** [self-PAWR-trit] (*noun*) a picture of one’s self done by one’s self

**identity** [ahy-DEN-ti-tee] (*noun*) the sense people have of themselves, who they are, and what they feel is most important and defining about them

### Activities

1. Throughout your classroom, set up copies of portraits and self-portraits by a variety of artists. Have students walk around in pairs, examining the different images. Encourage students to pay attention to what they think each artist is expressing about his or her identity. (*Note: If the term identity is new to your class, you will want to supply them with a working definition.*)
2. Come together as a class. Facilitate children’s discussion of what they noticed from these portraits and self-portraits. Some guiding questions: How do the artists show themselves as beautiful, whole and multifaceted people? What strategies do you think they are using? Which portraits did you especially like or dislike? Why?
3. Revisit these questions: What is race? What is skin color? Help students with some terms you know are commonly used to describe race and skin color. (*Note: Chart the terms listed by your students. If they have trouble getting started, offer a term like black, brown, biracial or white to start them off. Consider showing pictures of honey, mocha, tea, coffee, cocoa, ebony, eggshell.*) Ask students what they think about these words. Challenge them to consider what the artists they were examining would say about these words, and why.
4. Skin color, race, and racial identity are more complex than one simple word can describe. Help students understand that words we use to characterize race are not accurate descriptions of skin color. Drawing on students’ prior knowledge, help them understand that people come in many shades and variations. Emphasize that one is not better than the other. With partners, encourage students to make a list of more useful words that help them describe their own skin color, race, and racial identity. (*Note: If you used*

*Lesson 3* in this series, you can encourage students to draw on their work with poetry to help them.)

5. Give students time to observe the self-portraits they painted in Lesson 1. Encourage them to discuss what they like about their portraits and whether they wish they had done anything differently. Ask them what they feel their portraits show about their identity. Now that they have looked at portraits by other artists, how can they deepen what their own portraits show?
6. Place a palette of tempera paints at each table. Without hurrying, allow students to practice mixing paints together. Particularly, tell them to experiment with what happens when they combine two colors, or when they add white or black paint to another color. Then, have them paint lines on paper and hold their arms up to the line. Encourage students to notice what parts of their skin match up with various colors. Explain that every person has different shades of color in different places on their bodies, and all of these colors are beautiful. A sophisticated self-portrait shows our many different colors. Using the hand mirror, students should mix themselves palettes of the colors they think best reflect the skin color on their faces. *(Note: As students work with these colors, circulate and encourage them to delve deeply into observing themselves and their complexity. Pay attention to the sorts of language students are using to describe themselves. You may want to draw their own attention to particular kinds of description, as this will help them feel richer and unique in their own sense of self.)*
7. Once they have mixed palettes, students should use hand mirrors and pencils to sketch outlines of their faces. Some of the artists they looked at did not outline the shapes of their faces precisely, while others did. The students can decide how they want their portraits to look. Remind students that the portrait's job is to show the complexity and beauty of each individual self. Once students have an outline, they can use their palettes to paint the portraits.
8. When everyone finishes painting the portraits, leave them to dry. Come together as a class to talk about what it means to critique others' art. Remind children that when you comment on someone's artwork, you should focus on giving them specific compliments and one thoughtful suggestion. *(Note: Chart the guidelines your class comes up with for an effective workshop. If your class already has guidelines in place, you may choose to skip this step. Simply remind them of the guidelines.)* As they examine one another's work, encourage students to focus their observations on the complex and subtle ways they might have chosen to portray their own color and other aspects of their identity through their portraits. Return to the words students

brainstormed when discussing vocabulary commonly used for racial identity. Challenge students to notice how much more complicated—and interesting—diverse identities actually are. (*Note: If you think your students are ready, you can also connect this conversation to observations in [Lesson 2](#) about illustrations in picture books. This strategy can help open students' eyes to racial identities that are not directly represented in your class. It can also prevent individual students from feeling like they are obliged to stand in as token representatives of a group.*)

9. Allow children to circulate among the tables to look at their classmates' self-portraits. Then come together so students can give each other helpful feedback. Have students share anything new they noticed about themselves or their classmates during this activity. (*Note: If students struggle to talk about identity, and particularly about race and skin color, you may want to start a separate conversation about why race can be difficult to talk about and what might make it more comfortable. Draw on previous conversations about stereotypes, biases, and ideas of inferiority or superiority. Encourage students to use what they have learned about history, identity, and the social construction of race to help facilitate this conversation.*)
10. Have students reflect on why or how they thought this activity was helpful or important. Working in groups or independently, they should discuss or comment in their journals on any further questions, issues or ideas that arose during the activity. (*Note: As they work on their reflections, you will want to find a way to celebrate the students' work, either by displaying their portraits or compiling them into a class book.*)

### Applying What You've Learned

Think about this experience of mixing colors to do a deep self-portrait that genuinely expresses something about yourself and your identity. Consider the conversations you had with your class about racial identity, labels, and beauty as you did this work. Respond to the following questions in your journal:

- What did you learn about yourself and your classmates?
- How did mixing colors to match your skin influence or change your thinking about race, racial labels, identity and beauty? Why do you think this is important?
- If a friend struggled to see his or her skin color as beautiful, would you advise that person to do a careful self-portrait? Why or why not? What advice might you give your friend?

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<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/different-colors-of-beauty>

- How have your skills as a portraitist changed from one portrait to another? Which painting are you more proud of? Why? How did conversations around race, racial identity, and beauty that you had in between your two portraits affect or change your ability to create a self-portrait?

### Extension Activity

After completing the self-portrait assignment in class, discuss what you learned with someone in your home. Spend some time looking carefully at that person, then try doing a careful portrait of them to practice your close observation skills. Think about what you practiced in school with mixing different colors together. If you don't have paints, you can try using crayons, chalk, markers, or colored pencils. Depending on what materials you use, the end result of the activity may be different. Mixing is more challenging with markers, for instance. Be creative in using different strategies to shade and really show how complicated that person's skin looks. (*Note: You may want to provide students with materials for use at home to make the assignment equitable.*) Share your portrait and experience with your classmates when you come back to school.

### ELL Extension

One important set of vocabulary that comes up when thinking about portraits is the terminology used to describe the human face and body. This might include eyes, nose and mouth. For more advanced language learners, it might include forehead, cheeks, and eyelashes. When your portrait is finished, work with a partner to learn the words for as many different parts of your face as you can. Write each term on a sticky note. Once your portrait has dried, attach the sticky notes to the relevant parts of your portrait.

Activities and embedded assessments address the following standards from the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: CCSS: SL.1, SL.2, SL.3, SL.4, SL.5, SL.6, W.3, W.4, W.5

## LESSON SIX

### Different Colors of Beauty: Reflection

This lesson is the sixth in a series called “The Different Colors of Beauty.” The goal of these lessons is to help students develop their racial or ethnic identities in a safe and open classroom environment, and appreciate the broad spectrum of beauty in our diverse, multicultural world.

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**Grade Level:** K-2, 3-5

**Topic:** Race & Ethnicity

**Social Justice Domain:** Action

#### Objectives

Activities will help students:

- understand that no racial group is superior to any other
- synthesize a variety of ways for understanding the importance of tolerance
- appreciate the importance of reflecting on past work
- see the development in their own and others’ thinking over time
- apply knowledge and understandings gained to considering their role as activists in their school, home and community

#### Essential Questions

- What does it mean to reflect on our learning? Why is reflection important?
- What problems can we identify in how some people talk about race and racial identity?
- How has our thinking about skin color, race, racial identity and beauty changed, developed or deepened throughout the series?
- What new ways have we learned to be more tolerant and accepting of people who are different from ourselves?
- How can we apply our newer, deeper ways of thinking to work toward change in our schools, homes and communities?

## Materials

- student work from the series (e.g., collectively made charts or posters, independent notebooks/journals and individual work)
- depending on the norms of celebration at your school, decorations, refreshments, invitations for families, etc. (optional)

## Framework

After working with difficult and complex themes in this series, it is essential for students to reflect on the knowledge they have gained. It is also important for students to value the artistic and literary works they have created and acknowledge how their thinking has changed over time.

In this lesson, students will think about what they have learned throughout the series. They will brainstorm ways they can put their new and deeper understanding of race, racial identity and beauty to positive use in their community.

## Professional Development

Reflection is an important aspect of any kind of learning. By helping students to consolidate newly acquired knowledge and insights, teachers can ignite and accelerate young people's ability to think critically about a range of social issues. Some resources for helping students with metacognitive awareness and growth are [Reflection for Learning](#) and the overview of Reflection available on [infed](#) (the informal education homepage and encyclopaedia of informal education).

Some websites that address writing reflections include [Two Writing Teachers](#) and [Teachers College Reading & Writing Project](#).

Finally, this lesson challenges children to take on roles as activists. A particularly useful book on the topic is *Do Something: A Handbook for Young Activists*, by Nancy Lublin (with Vanessa Martir and Julia Steers), and its accompanying website, [Do Something](#).

## Vocabulary

**reflection** [ rih-FLEK-shuhn ] (*noun*) insightful thoughts on something; a careful reconsideration of experiences

**value** [ VAL-yoo ] (*noun*) an idea that holds great worth to you, or the worth that you attribute to an object, a relationship or a cause

**celebration** [ sel-uh-BREY-shuhn ] (*noun*) festivities to mark a special event or occasion; to congratulate oneself or others

**activism** [ AK-tuh-viz-uhm ] (*noun*) engaging in work toward the achievement of a particular goal, often of a political or social nature

## Activities

Ask students what they have learned from listening to their classmates' reflections.

1. Remind students of the work they have done over the course of this series. In their journals, have them sketch a picture or write a paragraph about race, racial identity and beauty. If they need help getting started, use one or more of these prompts:
  - What are some of the ideas my class helped me understand about race, identity or beauty? How can I use my new understandings to challenge others to rethink their ideas about race, racial identity and beauty?
  - What are some of the ways that these activities—looking closely at myself, writing poetry, examining picture book illustrations, making a self-portrait and talking to my peers—helped me see myself, my skin and my race as beautiful?
  - What piece of work from this unit makes me feel the most pride? Why?
  - What was the most challenging part of this series? Why?
2. Now, explain that it is time to look back over the work everyone did as a class and take pride in what was accomplished. Talk about why it is important to value and celebrate the work that students completed as a class. Discuss some guidelines for making sure a celebration runs smoothly. (*Note: If you do not have a protocol for end-of-unit celebrations, you will want to chart a list for your class. The list might include appropriate behavior during an exciting time, strategies for making guests feel welcome in the classroom and reminders about how to comment respectfully on someone else's work.*)
3. Have students prepare displays of the work they did over the course of the series. Encourage children to spend some time circulating around the room, either independently or with partners, looking at their own and others' work. If

there are guests present for the celebration, let children showcase their work using whatever method makes most sense.

4. After everyone has had a chance to look at their classmates' work, come together in a circle as a group. (*Note: You can decide whether to include guests.*) Go around the circle and have each child choose and comment positively on another child's work. Comments should stress one especially impressive aspect of the chosen work. Then go around the circle once more and ask the students to share one thing about changes in their own work or thinking that gives them particular satisfaction. This is a celebration, but also a reflection.
5. Ask students to think about one way they wish they could positively change the thinking of others in their school, home or community about race, racial identity and beauty. Brainstorm and chart a list of changes they wish they could make. Once you have a list, let children work with a partner or in a small group to write a letter or create a poster for the person or people they hope to influence. Explain that learning about issues like these often leads to activism. Define the term if it is unfamiliar. Activism is hard work toward making a change. It cannot be accomplished in one small step, but it has to start somewhere. If your students are inspired to keep working with these issues, have them write lists in their journals, or make a list collectively

as a class, of other ways the students think they can work toward change.

### **Extension Activity**

#### **ELL Extension**

Now that you have come to the end of this series, choose 10 to 20 key vocabulary words for concepts that have been part of this series. Write the words in your language journal or notebook. Write a sentence to help you remember each word; then, challenge yourself to include this vocabulary in the poster or letter you create in Step 5.

#### **Extension Assignment**

Reflective thinking around important and challenging issues often leads to activism, which can take a lot of time and energy. Form working groups in your classroom around the ideas for creating change that you brainstormed in Step 4. Set aside one or two periods a week to work on these projects over the course of the year. For

instance, maybe you want to create your own picture book with a positive impact on racial identity. Perhaps you can write letters to people who you feel use oversimplifying racial labels, or start a poster campaign in your school or neighborhood. Get creative—the possibilities are endless. Build in time for community meetings and reflections to report on how the work is going. Put your thoughts and hard work into action!