

What we know about bias in children & What we can do



Kids are smart, compassionate, and observant but they do need help from adults to help shape their ideas about people both like and unlike themselves. Many studies have shown that “color-blindness” or avoiding discussions of race, gender or physical ability with children, does not result in a child free of bias. Nor does simply raising a child in a diverse neighborhood or classroom.

Research studies and experience shows:

- Even **6 month old babies** notice and pause to consider faces a different color from their parents.
- **By age two**, children are already picking up on stereotypes about people both like and unlike them in gender, skin tone, language, and physical ability.
- **Children ages 2-6** begin to draw their own conclusions—right or wrong. They observe their parents’ and society’s verbal and non-verbal clues. For example if they never see a parent engage with a person of a particular race, they will subconsciously draw conclusions about what that means.
- **By ages 6-8** internalized stereotypes and biases about gender, race, and ability, both about themselves and others, may be turning into “truths” in their mind.
- **By age 9-10** children’s attitudes have been formed. For some it will take a significant experience to change their beliefs or behaviors after that age.

Bias:

prejudice in favor of or against a person, group, or thing, usually in a way considered to be unfair.



The good news:

- **By age 4** children can understand that teasing and calling someone a name because of their looks, gender, ability, or background is unfair and will hurt someone’s feelings.
- Young kids are widely receptive to adults drawing attention to positive images, and listen when adults interrupt bias. (Interrupting bias means to stop, condemn, and/or correct a depiction, statement, or other occurrence of bias when you encounter it.)
- **By age 6, 7, 8** kids are capable of understanding unfairness, equity, and privilege and can begin having those types of conversations with adults.

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Reading diverse books provides a great way to have positive conversations with your children!

The *We Need Diverse Books Campaign* says diverse books:

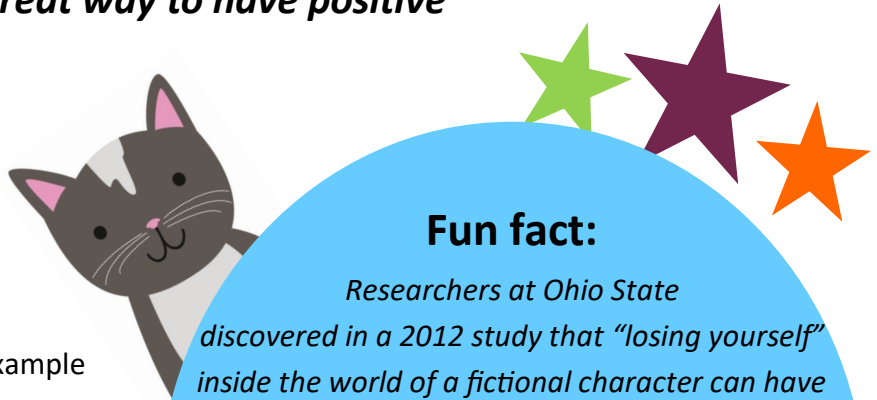
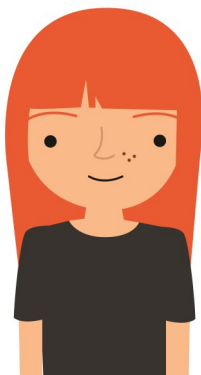
1. Reflect the world and people of the world
2. Teach respect for all cultural groups
3. Serve as a window and a mirror and as an example of how to interact in the world
4. Show that despite differences, all people share common feelings and aspirations
5. Create a wider curiosity for the world
6. Prepare children for the real world

Tips

- Look for books written and/or illustrated by people of color and of the cultures they are writing about/illustrating.
- Ask your children's librarian for suggestions!!
- Chose books with non-biased depictions of diverse peoples.
- Bias can hide in beloved favorites. When you encounter bias unexpectedly, explain immediately why it's wrong.

For more help talking about race: <http://www.raceconscious.org/2016/06/100-race-conscious-things-to-say-to-your-child-to-advance-racial-justice/>

Only 22% of books published for children each year are by or about people of color. One reason given for this is that some publishers/editors think there isn't a market for diverse books. You and your kids can help change that!



Fun fact:

Researchers at Ohio State discovered in a 2012 study that "losing yourself" inside the world of a fictional character can have significant effects on your opinions and thoughts. Depending on how immersed people became in the story, the more likely they were to positively identify with the character. The researchers were clear that movies do not recreate the same engagement and identification with the character as books/reading.

References and More Reading:

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- Anti-Defamation League - <http://www.adl.org/> and specifically: <http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/early-childhood/c/the-question-corner.html>
- We Need Diverse Books Campaign - <http://diversebooks.org/> and specifically <http://weneeddiversebooks.org/faq/>