



Greater Good in Education

SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

TAKE-HOME SKILL: STORIES ABOUT OVERCOMING BIAS FOR KIDS

"The most valuable possession you can own is an open heart. The most powerful weapon you can be is an instrument of peace."

—Carlos Santana

OVERVIEW

Read and discuss stories related to inclusivity and forming friendships across differences to help kids rethink prejudice and connect with diverse groups of individuals.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To encourage your child's interest in forming relationships with students from different backgrounds
- When you notice your child isolating themselves from children who appear different
- To help your child understand the many events happening in our society

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School

MATERIALS

- N/A

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Children will:

- Listen to or read stories about individuals seeking to build bridges across differences
- Reflect with parents on the stories, their meaning, and how the stories relate to their personal lives
- Consider how they might get involved in creating more inclusive environments

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Growth Mindset
- Humility
- Kindness

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused attention
- Non-Judgment
- Open Awareness

How to Do It

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- For parents/caregivers: Take a moment to think about your own understanding of prejudice in our society. Do you see prejudice as fixed, meaning there is not much we can do to change people's minds about out-group members?

- For instance, do you think that people are either naturally inclined to think positively of all groups and to be open to getting to know them or inclined to think poorly of groups that are different from one's own and closed off?
- Or, do you think prejudiced attitudes can be changed over time with commitment from individuals to remain open to others and to work through differences or uncomfortable moments?
- How do you think your views of prejudice shape your interactions with others? How could you challenge yourself to form more positive relationships with individuals who are very different from you?

INSTRUCTIONS

- Reading books can be a powerful way to help kids learn about themselves and others, because stories can serve as "[mirrors and windows](#)," as the scholar Rudine Sims Bishop once described. One important lesson that kids can learn through stories is that our own and others' biased attitudes about other people, like racism, can be overcome.
- While our collective anti-racism work as a society is far from complete, you can highlight how biased attitudes can change over time when you're sharing stories with your child about history and current events. For example, if you're talking about the civil rights movement or even contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter, you might share important lessons like these:

Prejudice is just like any other attitude, and attitudes change all the time. Prejudice is not permanent, because even after it develops, it can be changed. Leaders of the civil rights movement courageously helped people get rid of their prejudice. In life, changing the future is always possible. Anyone can learn to like people for who they are. Hard work is important, because with enough effort, even people who are prejudiced can change for the better. The civil rights movement shows us that we must be open to change our attitudes. Many times, people who start off with prejudiced attitudes change their views. Changing prejudice is important because with commitment to work at it, even prejudice deep down can be overcome.

- You can share your own or your family's stories about resisting and overcoming your biased attitudes to show your child that even someone close to them has been able to do this. What's more, the children's librarian at your local library can help you find stories with themes of learning inclusivity and developing friendships across differences like race.
- Finish the conversation by reflecting on how each of you can help create more inclusive environments.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did your child respond to the reading and your conversation? Did anything surprise you about their response?
- Have you noticed any changes in your child's behavior, particularly in their interactions with other kids who have different backgrounds?
- How else might you support your child in developing a malleable perspective of prejudice and in forming positive relationships with children of different backgrounds?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [study](#), a diverse group of children between 10 and 12 years old were randomly assigned to hear a storybook about students putting on a play that presented prejudiced attitudes as either fixed or malleable. In the fixed attitudes story, the message was that prejudice is permanent and does not usually change. In the malleable attitudes story, the message was that prejudice is not permanent and can be changed. In the next part of the study, the children had live video chats with a child they didn't know from another school. Ultimately, white children who heard the story that prejudice is malleable and talked with non-white kids had increased interest in future cross-race interactions, and their partners—who hadn't received a lesson about prejudice—did, too.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Although prejudice begins in early childhood, it [peaks](#) in middle childhood, around five to seven years old. Cross-race friendships start to become [less stable](#) in later childhood. But there are ways to help children question their own biases, overcome their prejudices about others, and make friends with people who are different from them.

When kids make friends across differences, it can [improve](#) their attitudes toward other social groups and reduce their anxiety when interacting with people of other races. Finding ways early on in development to help children foster ties across differences is important for the future of a compassionate and equitable pluralistic society. Furthermore, some research suggests that cross-race friendships are beneficial to childrens' [social and academic adjustment](#) in diverse classrooms.

SOURCE

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