

Your families may have been having some difficult conversations the past few months. The pandemic has brought drastic changes to life as we know it, and the Black Lives Matter protests have rocked the country. Young people want to know what's going on and why, and it's hard to always know what to say. Books can be so useful in helping to explain big questions or in broaching a topic for the first time. If you're a white family and if your kids are asking questions about racism, or you want to start talking to them about it, books can be really helpful. And there are lots of additional resources for parents who want to learn more, too.

It's never too early, or late, to start talking to kids about race. Babies as young as 6 months old can categorize people by gender and race, and by three-five years they have formed biases based on race. So it's great to start conversations about racism when children are young.

For guidance, caregivers can visit a website created by The National Museum of African American History and Culture, a Smithsonian museum in Washington, D.C., called "Talking About Race." It was developed specifically to help educators and parents with facilitating conversations about race. Visit the site at nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race.

Embracerace.org is another excellent website, created by a husband-wife team "who set out to create the community and gather the resources they needed (need!) to meet the challenges they face raising children in a world where race matters." You'll find articles, webinars, book lists, and action guides.

If you're looking to dive in a little deeper, check out "Raising White Kids: Bringing Up Children in a Racially Unjust America" by Jennifer Harvey. It's available as an e-book on Hoopla right now! The author discusses how to talk about white privilege in age-appropriate ways.

Of course, don't forget the books for kids! Books can be both windows and mirrors to children: mirrors that reflect themselves and their experiences, and windows that let them look out and see something different. If your kids are white, there are many books that are mirrors for them. Choosing "window" books can help them connect to characters who are different from them.

Even board books for babies can serve as windows. Books like "Global Babies" or "Smile!" have photos of babies with all different skin colors. Your little ones will love the photos of the babies' expressive faces, and you'll have an opportunity to use descriptive words to talk about how the babies are different and similar.

Choosing picture books with non-white characters can open more windows for white children. Try "The King of Kindergarten" and "Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut" by Derrick Barnes. Read "Hair Love" by Matthew Cherry, "B is for Baby" by Atinuke, "Thank You Omu!" by Oge Mora, "The Day You Begin" by Jaqueline Woodson, and "Islandborn" by Junot Diaz. And then talk to your librarian when you're ready for more!

There are so many wonderful books for middle grades that feature nonwhite main characters. Some of my recent favorites are "From the Desk of Zoe Washington," by Janae Marks, "Clean Getaway" by Nic Stone, "The Only Black Girls in Town" by Brandy Colbert, and anything by Jason Reynolds or Jacqueline Woodson.

There are also many great young adult books to choose from. "Pet" by Akwaeke Emezi and "Piecing Me Together" by Renee Watson are sophisticated and beautiful books about racial identity, among other things. "On the Come Up" and "The Hate U Give" by Angie Thomas should be required reading, and Jason Reynolds' remix of Ibram X. Kendi's "Stamped" gives a nonfiction history of racism written for young people.

Reach out to your local librarians for more recommendations!