

STARTER GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

We all deserve to have “mirrors” that reflect ourselves and “windows” offering views into the worlds of others. When educator and researcher Rudine Sims Bishop developed this concept, she was referring to the disproportionality of White characters within children’s literature. White characters have been greatly overrepresented in most forms of popular culture in the United States. Art—and how we learn it—is no different. Children, including children of color, are rarely encouraged to draw characters of color or shown how to do so. **EmbraceRace** would like to change that. We collaborated with three fabulous art teachers to create the **Drawing Differences** curriculum.

Representation matters. When people of various backgrounds are not represented visually, unfortunate lessons about race are learned by all – that people with certain skin colors and features are “normal,” “beautiful,” and worthy of close artistic attention and that those with different skin colors and features are not. With the **Drawing Differences** curriculum, we hope to normalize noticing, naming, and representing a wide diversity of skin colors, hair textures, and facial features.

Our multiracial democracy benefits when each of us is seen and celebrated. We believe that one way to help kids learn to embrace and celebrate differences is by creating space for them to draw people who don't look like them as well as to closely notice and draw their own features. Three of the greatest barriers to drawing differences include the following:

- Many of us have grown up in homes that discouraged us from talking about differences—especially race
- Many of us are not taught how to draw people who do not look like us using tools that are easily accessible
- Many of us are not encouraged to appreciate and embrace diversity

To help children and adults embrace racial diversity, **Drawing Differences** offers 3 affirmations as motivation:

AFFIRMATION #1: WE SEE COLOR.

AFFIRMATION #2: WE SEE INDIVIDUALS.

AFFIRMATION #3: WE FEEL SEEN.

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AFFIRMATIONS

INTRODUCTION: WE LOOK CLOSELY. This first video introduces the theme of observation, or looking closely to notice, name, and draw differences between individuals – whether that's individual, unique trees or individual, unique people. This video also previews the idea that skin color and race are not the same thing.

AFFIRMATION #1: WE SEE COLOR. Children learn ways artists can mix colors to represent our vast array of skin colors. No need to run out and buy more art supplies. They can blend unique skin tones using tools that are likely available at home or in school. Three media—crayon, colored pencils, and watercolor paint—are explored.

AFFIRMATION #2: WE SEE DIFFERENCES. Children are encouraged to notice how hair and facial features are similar and/or different with reference to curly afros, thick braids, straight bangs, head coverings, and tight fades, among other styles. They also see differences in sizes and shapes of lips, eyes, and noses.

AFFIRMATION #3: WE FEEL SEEN. Children explore and draw diversity in community. They start by reflecting on paintings of various people by some popular, professional artists. They are then invited to a playful Portrait Party to draw family and friends in booklets.

Each affirmation section includes the following:

- An **activity guide** featuring specific ideas and suggestions for educators, families, and librarians
- An assortment of **handouts and visual resources** that support planning, creating, and reflecting on the affirmation
- A **video guide** offering a kid- and adult-friendly overview of the featured affirmation
- A **conversation tip sheet** to help adults respond thoughtfully to children's questions about race and physical differences
- A student-facing **slide deck** geared to teachers as an instructional tool

Slowing down to truly observe and talk about our skin, hair, and facial features brings us many steps closer to seeing and affirming each other's unique humanity. By drawing and coloring ourselves side-by-side in our booklets, we embrace the beauty that exists in each of us and in the communities we build together.

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TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- We recommend communicating with families about the plan to use **Drawing Differences**.
- The Big Ideas and Big Questions on the first page of the Activity Guide for each affirmation can be used as Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions.
- Consider partnerships between art teachers and classroom teachers to cover more of the **Drawing Differences** content. For instance, book reading and discussions, and observation activities may be done in students' home classrooms, while art activities can happen in the art room. If going this route, make sure that as teachers, you have opportunities to check in with each other about how the conversations and activities are going.
- Have a brief conversation with students at the beginning of **Drawing Differences** lessons, reminding them of the classroom norms that have been agreed to—like treating each other and ourselves with kindness, using respectful language, and supporting each other. It is best if students have actively participated in creating these norms and agreements together!
- Consider inviting families, including parents, grandparents, or other community elders to join in these lessons. They can help support students and importantly, can add diversity related to race, ethnicity, age, and appearance to classrooms where the students and/or teachers are racially homogeneous.

TIPS FOR FAMILIES

- Consider bringing together multiple kids and caregivers and hosting a **Drawing Differences** party – or better yet, a series of them! Kids will look forward to these days, and caregivers can support each other in community.
- **Drawing Differences** can be adapted for many age groups. Engage older siblings as helpers for younger children. We also encourage you to indulge your inner child and explore the activities alongside kids!
- Remember that practicing talking about race and difference with children also helps us learn how to have these conversations as adults. Everyone benefits!

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TIPS FOR LIBRARIANS

- Consider centering picture books even more intentionally in the **Drawing Differences** activities. You might lend books out to the children before the first meeting or start off using a fiction book to engage children in a story. You can invite children to look closely at the images in some favorite books to explore the different skin tones and facial features that illustrators create for their characters. During drawing activities, children may choose to draw characters from books who look different from them, or may have the option to make up their own character with different features.
- Particularly in library or other community spaces where children don't know each other well, you may end up with a relatively quiet group. That's OK! While **Drawing Differences** offers many opportunities for important conversations around identity, race, and difference, the art-making activities are valuable in and of themselves!
- Consider having children identify goals for themselves at the beginning of a **Drawing Differences** journey. What are they hoping to learn by the end? For example, are they eager to learn how to make different skin colors, how to draw their own hair or get better at drawing eyes, or do they want to create a portrait as a gift for someone they love?
- Take a few minutes at the beginning to set norms with children for the conversations and activities you'll engage in together. Guide children toward identifying agreements like treating themselves and each other with kindness, using respectful language, and not expecting perfection.
- Consider inviting families, including parents, grandparents, or other community elders to join in the **Drawing Differences** sessions. They can help support children and importantly, can add diversity related to race, ethnicity, age, and appearance to racially homogeneous settings. You might invite these guest elders to share their own experiences related to drawing themselves or related to books and illustrations that helped them see themselves when they were children.

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ABOUT US

EmbraceRace is a national nonprofit that supports parents, guardians, educators, and other caregivers working to raise children who are thoughtful, informed, and brave about race. We identify, organize, and create the tools, resources, discussion spaces, and networks needed to nurture the community members US multiracial democracy needs to thrive. Since our founding in 2016, **EmbraceRace** has become well-established as a national leader in the space of children's racial learning and socialization. To learn more, please visit us at [embrace**race**.org](https://embracerace.org).