

Exploring Identities

2

Alyssa (Cameron) Likens read *Emmanuel's Dream* by Laurie Ann Thompson to her fifth-grade class (Figure 2.1). The story, based on the life of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah, includes both visible and invisible disabilities. Emmanuel was born with only one fully formed leg, but it didn't stop him from walking to school, playing soccer, and becoming a cyclist who advocated for others with disabilities. Jake (pseudonym), a student with a hearing impairment, instantly engaged with how Emmanuel viewed his disability as a difference, not as an inability. As the class talked through Emmanuel's view of a disability, there was a shift in the classroom tone. Other students who shared frequently, and sometimes dominated class discussions, made space for their classmates to share while they listened.

FIGURE 2.1 Ms. (Cameron) Likens's Class Discusses *Emmanuel's Dream*



Stories offer opportunities to share, connect, and raise questions. Stories allow us to witness life from a different perspective. For Jake's classmates, *Emmanuel's Dream* served as a window (Bishop, 1990) to his experience that helped them to think about Jake as having a hearing difference rather than being disabled. For Jake, *Emmanuel's Dream* served as a mirror (Bishop, 1990) through which he was able to see himself and beyond his differences to imagine new possibilities. Stories situate us to recognize our common humanity while appreciating and celebrating the differences that make us who we are. Stories open the doorway into insight, questions, and conversation. Stories—something so simple—can have such a profound impact.

The focus on identity in this chapter is the bedrock for the work we invite you to do as you engage in reading, writing, and teaching with a critical lens. We contend that it is necessary for all of us as educators to examine our own social identities and how those identities influence our thinking and our teaching. As such we encourage you to do the work yourself by first examining your own identity and how it positions you in the world and in your teaching.

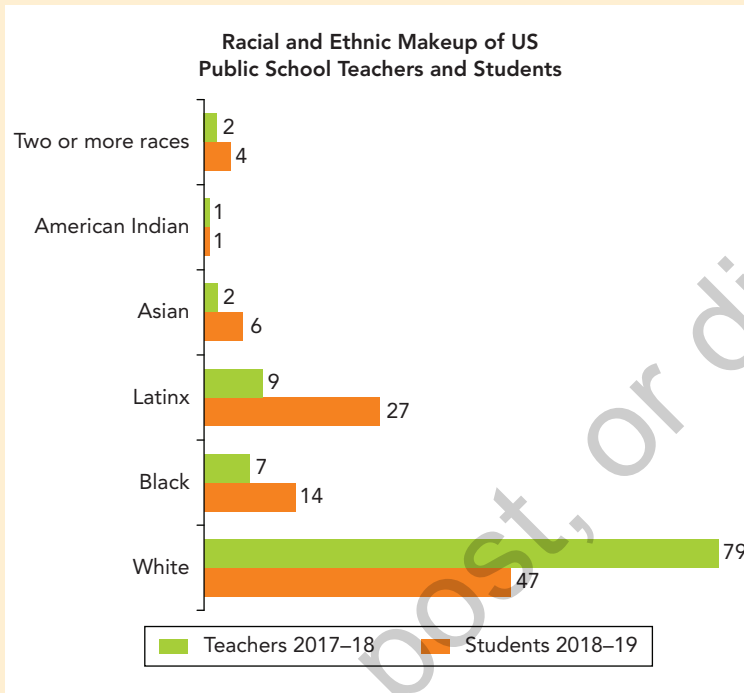
Who Is Teaching America's Children?

Although the demographics of K–12 students continue to become more diverse, teachers remain predominantly white and female. According to Pew Research data, 47 percent of students enrolled in K–12 schools in 2018–19 were white, and 79 percent of teachers identified as white in 2017–18.

When children of color have a teacher who looks like them, they are more likely to do better academically, graduate from high school, and have more positive feelings and attitudes toward school (Egalite & Kisida, 2017). So, it is imperative that school district teacher recruitment practices and hiring policies focus on hiring Black and Brown teachers who represent their students, especially in areas where there is a large percentage of children of color.

In addition to discrepancies in race and gender, there is an absence of gender nonbinary individuals in statistics representing the teacher workforce. Showing respect for gender identity and expression can be affirming for students who identify as nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and/or transgender, and creates a culture of inclusion and diversity in education (Roberts et al., 2020).

FIGURE 2.2 Percentages of Teachers and Students by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Adapted from Schaeffer, K. "America's public school teachers are far less racially and ethnically diverse than their students." Pew Research Center, Washington D.C. (2021) <https://pewrsr.ch/3rSsNLB>

Setting a Foundation for Exploring Identity

A strong foundation for learning begins by cultivating a community where all individuals feel visible and valued. Toward that goal, we provide a series of lessons featuring intentionally selected literature using the instructional framework (see Chapter 1) to spark conversations and exploration of our individual and social identities.

Young people are in a constant state of discovery—about themselves, others, the world, and their place in the world. Their thoughts and ideas are forming and reforming as they participate in the world and interact with others. Providing students with a safe space to explore identity is essential to help build a classroom community and help each child find their place within the larger society.

We can help students discover and celebrate who they are as individuals. Oftentimes we start this work at the beginning of the year with “getting to know you” and “all about me” activities. However, going beyond basic interests (e.g., liking dinosaurs) to learn about students’ complex identities is essential to understanding them, connecting with them, and creating culturally relevant and sustaining student-centered learning opportunities. As Enriquez (2021) notes, “Identities never comprise single descriptors; a student’s identity is a rich mosaic of experiences, values, perspectives, and cultural ways of knowing, being, doing, and communicating” (p. 104). Therefore, this work is ongoing, not limited to beginning-the-year “getting to know you” activities.

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Critical Comprehension Lesson Series

Exploring Identities

This lesson series begins with an exploration of identity in a broad sense, then explores more nuanced aspects that shape identity. Each lesson features one book, but also includes a list of alternatives for additional work to extend thought and insight. As is the case with all the lessons in this book, we offer these ideas as a starting point and encourage you to adapt them based on the interests and inquiries of students.

We encourage you to do the work alongside your students and to share your ideas and experiences regularly as a model of how thinking and insight evolve. Doing so will provide students with a window into your identity and help build classroom community as well.

Table of Lessons for Exploring Identities

LESSON FOCUS	ANCHOR TEXT
1. Exploring our identities	<i>I Am Every Good Thing</i> by Derrick Barnes
2. What is identity?	<i>Skin Again</i> by bell hooks <i>This Book Is Anti-Racist</i> by Tiffany Jewell
3. Hair and identity	<i>I Love My Hair</i> by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley
4. Telling our stories	<i>The Day You Begin</i> by Jacqueline Woodson
5. Being your truest self	<i>The Proudest Blue</i> by Ibtihaj Muhammad with S.K. Ali

Note: The blank spaces are an invitation for you to add your own related topics and texts.

Defining Identity

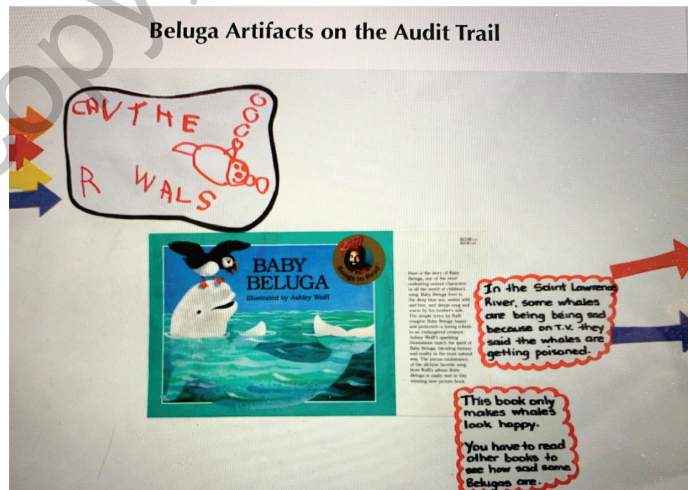
When introducing this lesson series, begin with an invitation for students to co-construct a definition of identity. Record their thinking on a chart or audit trail (see Figure 2.3) (Vasquez, 2014) and return to it over time to show how their thinking is changing and growing.

Second graders from Jessica Roberts’s class defined identity as “what you look like or what you’re known as” and “It’s kind of like your history and your family and who you are” (Laminack & Kelly, 2019). Bryan Woods’s kindergarten students shared examples of how other people’s words and actions caused them to want to act and talk in certain ways (Vasquez et al., 2022). These students remind us that who we are, who we perceive ourselves to be, and how we move through the world are shaped by many factors including when we were born, where we live and with whom, our lived experiences with others, and events we see unfold in our social worlds.

FIGURE 2.3 Audit Trail



Beluga Artifacts on the Audit Trail



After constructing a definition of identity, have students engage in the following activity on identity and naming.

What Is an Audit Trail?

An audit trail is a visible articulation of learning over time (Vasquez, 2014). Instances of learning are captured and represented using various artifacts, including photographs, drawings, writing, and book covers (see Figure 2.3).

An audit trail is a powerful tool for showing the children's in-process thinking over time, generating topics for study, constructing meaning, and circulating meaning.

An audit trail is meant to be visible not only to the people in a classroom community but to others in the school community as well. This public visibility makes the audit trail a participatory site for becoming involved in the children's learning. Students and teachers research their world together and produce representations of that research, in the form of an audit trail displayed on a bulletin board, or another surface, covered with various artifacts of learning. Throughout the year, previous learning events can be revisited using the artifacts as trigger images that serve as reminders of work done and the learning that has taken place.

Hello My Names Are/Hello My Names Are Not

Vivian created this strategy after participating in a Podcaster conference where she noticed participants writing not only their real names but also their podcast names and social media names on their nametags. The strategy, therefore, creates space for children and adults to understand we don't have a single identity but rather multiple identities and that those identities are constructed in particular ways through our experiences and the situations we are in. It is also about helping learners to understand how their naming of others contributes to the identities of those individuals (Vasquez et al., 2022).

Hello, My Names Are . . .

To begin a conversation about names, **say to students:**

- *No matter what each of us believes, we must listen and respond to each other respectfully. So, we need guidelines to help us know what to do when we disagree or when we have hard conversations. To help us do so, we will create a class agreement together.*

- *Make a list of all the names you would respond to.*
- *Where do your names come from?*
- *Which names matter to you? Why do these names matter?*
- *Which names don't matter to you and why?*
- *Which names would you readily respond to?*
- *Which names would you not readily respond to?*
- *What effects do these names have on you?*
- *Do these names affect your actions or decisions in some way?*

Hello, My Names Are Not . . .

Next, **say to students:**

- *Make a list of names people call you that you ignore or that you find problematic.*
- *Where do these names come from?*
- *Are there any biases underlying these names?*
- *Are there any stereotypes underlying these names?*
- *How do you feel when you are called these names?*
- *What effects do these names have on you?*
- *Do these names affect your actions or decisions in some way?*

Names matter. Naming practices matter. These matter because they help shape who we see ourselves as being. Reflecting on your “namings” is a good first step in doing identity work and thinking about how our identities influence our thinking and our teaching. Muhammad (2020) reminds us that it is typically through our names that we are first introduced to the world and “they carry our cultures, values, traditions, and past” (p. 75).

For Younger Students

Rather than simply having students list their names, begin by giving them one name tag that has “Hello My Names Are” across the top. The children then write or draw their names using a variety of writing/drawing tools. As a class, discuss the same sorts of questions as those listed above.

Following this, give students a second name tag with “Hello My Names Are Not” across the top. The children once again write and draw their names. This time, to ensure the children are not made vulnerable, give them a chance to think about those names on their own instead of sharing them aloud. To wrap up, students can engage in a general conversation about naming practices and the importance of names, including why names matter, the history of our names and the names we choose for others, and the positive and negative effects of names. Use this activity at the start of the year as one way to begin to establish what it means to be a classroom community.

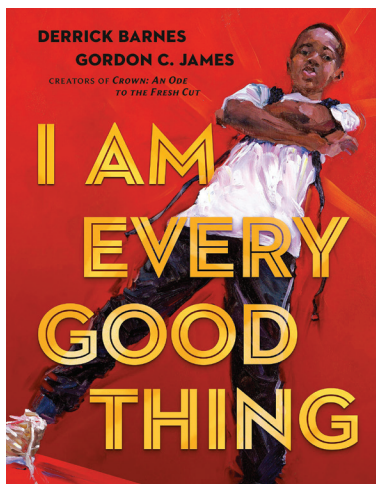
For a name tag template, visit <https://bit.ly/3A6XtfX>.

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Lesson 1: Exploring Our Identities

I Am Every Good Thing • by Derrick Barnes

FIGURE 2.4



A teaching guide
for *I Am Every
Good Thing*.



First Read: Movie Read

This first visit, the “movie read,” focuses on taking in the story without interruption (see Chapter 1, p. 21). *I Am Every Good Thing* celebrates the wonders and genius of young Black boys in a playful but potent style. The young Black narrator is proud of the things that make him who he is, such as being creative, smart, and funny. Other times he’s afraid of being misunderstood and called what he is not. The book creates space for engaging in important conversations about identity and how identity works to shape who we believe we can and cannot be and what we believe we can and cannot do.



Second Read: Reading With the Text

Before you begin the second read, display the cover and read the title.

Ask students: *What makes you feel happy, proud, seen, heard, and valued?*

As you read with the text, point out the repeating language “I am . . . I am every good thing.”

Ask students: *Do you have any theories for why the author uses this repeating phrase?*

After reading, invite students to create a found poem. A found poem is a literary collage that consists of using words and phrases from existing texts and organizing them into a poem.

Begin by recording the student’s favorite line or phrase on a sentence strip. Have them share why they selected that particular line. For example, “I am good to the core, like the center of a cinnamon roll” evokes sensory details, or “I am one eye open, one eye closed, peeking through a microscope, gazing through a telescope” is important because it highlights Black scientists and astronauts, such as Katherine Johnson, Ron McNair, and Mae Jemison.

Ask students:

- *Why did you choose that line?*

- *Did it remind you of something or someone?*
- *What is your connection to that line?*
- *Why did you choose that line over some of the other lines?*

Ideas come from somewhere. They are rooted in our past experiences and encounters. Asking questions like these helps students to reflect on where their ideas come from and what has influenced or shaped those ideas.

If multiple students select the same line, they could co-construct one sentence strip together to contribute to the found poem. Because it resonates with many, that line may become a refrain or repeating line in the poem. Read the poem aloud together.

Together with the students, begin to organize the sentence strips to create a poem. Read the poem aloud by having the students read their own sentence strips.

Ask students: *What effect did the combined sentences have?*

Alternative Second Read

If during the second read students begin sharing specific “I am” connections (e.g., a student shares something about being an avid reader), other students could be encouraged to add their own connections to their “I am” statements. Help students notice what they have in common with their peers and interesting things they learned about their peers. For instance, if Maxine likes to ride the skateboard, maybe she can teach Josh how to do an ollie.

Point out that learning more about each other helps us avoid making assumptions resulting from having a limited notion of one another. Students’ “I am” statements could also be compiled into a poem or a class book or posted on a wall. This information could result in a class expert list, which may lead to informational writing to teach about various subjects (e.g., Maxine can create a multimodal informational piece about how to do an ollie, including writing, images, and maybe even video clips of her in action).



Return Read: Reading Critically

Begin by reading aloud the dedication page and making note of the publication date. Pause and ask students to notice the names on the dedication page.

Ask students:

- *Why did the author Derrick Barnes deliberately choose to add a list of names?*
- *What effect does the listing of the names have on you as a reader?*

Ask if they recognize the names of Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, and others. You may pull up photos and provide some background information about the seven people whose names are included in the dedication.

Ask students:

- *Why do you think the author dedicated the book to these specific people?*
- *What might the author want you to know, think, feel, or wonder?*
- *Why is this important?*

Read the book, stopping in a few strategic places along the way to invite conversation. For example, pause when you get to “Although I am something like a superhero, every now and then, I am afraid. I am not what they might call me, and I will not answer to any name that is not my own. I am what I say I am.”

Ask students:

- *Can you share connections?*
- *Do you have questions?*
- *What are you thinking or wondering?*
- *What do you think the author’s message is?*

Write the following excerpt on chart paper:

I am afraid.

I am not what they might call me,

and I will not answer to any name that is not my own.

I am what I say I am.

Ask students:

- *If someone is afraid, then is there someone or something that they fear? Who or what is feared in the line “I am afraid”?*
- *Who are “they” in “I am not what they might call me”?*
- *What do you think “they” are calling the child narrator in the book?*

- Why would someone call another person a name that is not their name? What effect does that have on a person?
- Why do you think the narrator in the book said, “I will not answer to any name that is not my own”? What did they mean by “I will not answer to any name”?
- What is the difference between saying “I am what I say I am” and “I am what they say I am”?

Invite students to turn and talk if they need more time for conversation. After, give students the opportunity to reflect on the group discussion and their conversation with their peers. Ask students to write their own “I am/I am not” statements to reflect their identities (see Figures 2.5 and 2.6).

FIGURE 2.5 “I Am” Statement

I Am Equivalent to everyone like Fractions, I'm a snowflake
different from others I am Brave Like Lions Protecting But
Like a vase fragile I am Worthy of trust,

FIGURE 2.6 “I Am” Statement

I am a pusher I am the bird that is being held back
by the wind but still manage to get somewhere

I am like a super hero. always has atleast 2 weak-
nesses.

I am a cricket who is small but can make a differe

I am worthy of a good friendly relationship and friends
of some kind.

Students could select a favorite line from their “I am” poem to contribute to a class poem, which could be posted in the classroom or the hallway. Invite each student to read their own line.

Additional Return Read Options

The return read options included in this chapter are additional experiences to explore identity, based on the students’ responses and conversations. For each of these books, highlight how **who we are is shaped by those who come before us**.

Exploration of Stereotypes

A possible return read can engage students in various conversations, such as the importance of getting to know a person more fully by avoiding making decisions about them with limited information. This could lead to a powerful exploration of stereotypes. For example, Gordon James, the illustrator of *I Am Every Good Thing*, discusses the decision to include the illustration of the children swimming to dispel the stereotype that all Black people are afraid of the water. Further, it was important to acknowledge the history of access to swimming pools for Black people. If the conversation takes this direction, we invite you to explore the lessons featured in Chapter 4, “Examining Stereotypes.”

Author’s Craft

For another return read focused on the author’s craft, invite students to examine the repetition of “I am.” Ask students what the effect might be of the repeated use of “I.” What difference does it make to use the sentence frame “I am” repeatedly? They may apply the technique to their own writing using the sentence frame “I am” to write affirmations about themselves.

Layering Texts

Looking Like Me by Walter Dean Myers is an excellent book to explore the author’s craft and additional ideas related to identity. Myers’s focus is embracing who you are, your strengths, and the qualities that make you uniquely yourself. *Looking Like Me* tells the story of a boy named Jeremy who comes across people and places in his life that remind him of who he is. Jeremy encounters his father, his sister, his brother, his teacher, and several others and realizes his relationship to each of them. For example, he is a brother to his sister, he is a son to his father, he is a writer to his teacher, and so on. Jeremy embodies the idea that no child

should feel limited in any way and that they are much more valued and cherished than they imagine.

Older students can read the “I Am What I Am” essays from Romano’s (2004) book, *Crafting Authentic Voice*, and craft their own “I Am What I Am” pieces: bit.ly/3GWS9PZ

Language for Liberation

Discuss how some words can be used to make people feel powerful while other words can be used to strip people of their identities and position them in inferior ways. Reclaiming who we are and who we come from is a way to position ourselves with love and liberation.

Read *The 1619 Project: Born on the Water* by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson and make connections to the line “I am brave. I am hope. I am my ancestors’ wildest dreams.”

Read *The Year We Learned to Fly* by Jacqueline Woodson and compare and connect with the line “My grandmother had learned to fly from the people who came before. They were aunts and uncles and cousins who were brought here on huge ships, their wrists and ankles cuffed in iron, but, my grandmother said, nobody can ever cuff your beautiful and brilliant mind.” Notice the illustration on the page and compare it with what students discussed in the book *Born on the Water* by Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson.

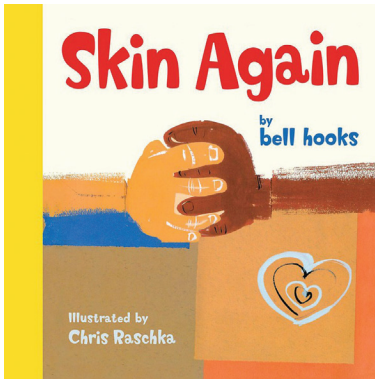


Scan here to access *An Educator’s Guide to The 1619 Project: Born on the Water*.

Lesson 2: What Is Identity?

Skin Again • by bell hooks

FIGURE 2.7



First Read: Movie Read

This first visit, the “movie read,” focuses on taking in the story without interruption (see Chapter 1, p. 21). *Skin Again* makes the point that race matters, but what’s most important is who we are on the inside and celebrating all that makes each individual unique and different.



Second Read: Reading With the Text

After reading a second time, invite students to create self-portraits and sketch or list aspects of their identities around the drawing (see Figures 2.8 and 2.9). Note: You will be returning to these portraits. When finished, ask students to share with a partner and then invite those who wish to share with the whole group. This can be done during the lesson or during morning meeting time (see Chapter 1).

FIGURE 2.8 Identity Self-Portrait





Return Read: Reading Critically

For the return read, invite students to notice the illustrations in *Skin Again* and share thoughts about the illustrator's decisions.

Ask students:

- *What do you notice?*
- *Why do you think the illustrator included a snake and an onion in the illustrations?*
- *What might they symbolize?*

Discuss bell hooks's use of snakes and onions as a metaphor for talking about the skin we are in. The peeling of an onion or a snake's shedding of its skin are shown as ways for us to think about getting inside our skin to make our identities visible and how we shed the old as we grow and evolve into our new selves.

Reread the page:

If you want to know who I am
you have got to come inside.

Engage students in a discussion about how we have both outside and inside identities and have layers like an onion.

Have students return to their portraits and affix them to the center of a larger sheet of paper. Then ask them to list who they are on the inside and who they are on the outside (see Figure 2.9).

Post the revised portraits around the room. Have the students do a gallery walk to look closely at each other's portraits.

Ask students:

- *What have you learned about your peers after viewing their inside-outside portraits?*
- *Why is it important to get to know our peers, including their inside identities?*

Take this opportunity to reiterate that we do not have a single identity; rather we have multiple identities. Remind students that our identities have been shaped, and will continue to be shaped, by our participation

FIGURE 2.9 Revised Portrait



in the world through using words, being with people, going places, and interacting with things around us.

You might also discuss with students that in the same way that we are shaped by our participation in the world, we also contribute to shaping the world around us by our words and actions.

Layering Texts for Older Students

This Book Is Anti-Racist by Tiffany Jewell includes twenty lessons on how to take action and do anti-racism work with young people. Layering it with *Skin Again* can help students come to understand that their identity is multifaceted and influenced by many factors.

Revisit this excerpt from Chapter 1:

Your identity is what makes you, YOU: it's all the parts that make you unique. You are made up of your family, your friends, your neighborhood, your school, what you see on social media and read in books, what you hear and listen to, what you eat, what

you wear, what you feel, your dreams, the stories you cannot wait to share and those you don't want to tell and everything in between and all around. YOU ARE EVERYTHING WITHIN YOU AND EVERYTHING THAT SURROUNDS YOU. You are all the ancestors who came before you: those you've never known, never heard of, never seen—and those you've passed on the street, sat next to, and snuggled near. (p. 10)

Highlight this statement:

YOU ARE EVERYTHING WITHIN YOU
AND EVERYTHING THAT SURROUNDS YOU.

Invite students to say something about this statement.

Ask students:

- *What does "You are everything within you" mean?*
- *What does "You are everything that surrounds you" mean?*
- *How does our environment at home, at school, in the community, and in the broader society affect who we are?*

Next, have students do a close read of their surroundings. Focus on the posters in the school hallways or classroom walls as well as advertisements in magazines, websites, and so on.

Ask students:

- *Do you see yourself in these posters?*
- *What do these posters say about you?*
- *In what ways do these posters tell you who you can and cannot be or what you can and cannot do?*

After some discussion, invite students to redesign the school posters in a way that makes their identity visible or that speaks to celebrating one's identity. Display posters for others in the school to see.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Re-create the following on chart paper and read with students.

**YOU ARE EVERYTHING
WITHIN YOU
AND EVERYTHING THAT
SURROUNDS YOU.**

*(This Book Is Anti-Racist
by Tiffany Jewell)*

**If you want to know who I am
you have got to come inside.**
(Skin Again by bell hooks)

Ask students:

- What do you think of these two definitions?
- How are they different?
- How are they the same?
- How does each define identity?
- How would you define identity, based on these quotes?

Dominant Culture and Identities

When Beverly Tatum (2017) asks people to complete the statement "I am . . ." she finds that white people rarely mention race, men rarely mention gender, and heterosexuals rarely mention sexual orientation. That is because the categories with which these groups identify are dominant ways of being that position men, whites, and heterosexuals in privileged and powerful ways. These are categories that contribute to making up our identities. Kendi (2019) argues that it is incorrect to conceive of race as a social construct rather than as a power construct. The same can be said for being heterosexual and for being male. Dominance is about having power and influence over others. The flip side then is not having dominance, not having the same power and influence over others.

Jewell, in Chapter 2, p.18, of *This Book Is Anti-Racist*, states that these identities or categories have been created, named, framed, and defined by society for a very long time. As such, undoing these categories takes time. However, since these have been socially constructed, they can be deconstructed and reconstructed to create more equity-based categories.

For Older Students

Ask students to reflect on their “I am/I am not” statements, inside/outside identity maps, or self-portraits. Invite them to examine and name (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, body size/shape) the aspects of their identity they included and those they excluded (whether intentional or unintentional). Make space for students to talk about what they notice.

Ask students:

- *How many of you noted race/gender/religion/etc.?*
- *Do the results align with Tatum’s observations?*
- *What might have led you to include or exclude certain parts of your identities?*
- *How do certain parts of your identities afford you more (or less) privilege or opportunities?*

For Younger Students

To introduce the idea of power structures and identity to younger students, guide them through a series of picture books, such as those listed at the end of this lesson.

Ask students:

- *Which characters are the main characters in the story?*
- *What do they look like?*
- *Which characters have important roles in the story?*
- *Who are they and what roles do they play?*
- *Which characters don’t have important roles in the story?*
- *Who are they and what roles do they play?*
- *Which characters do you see or hear a lot from in the story?*
- *Which characters do you rarely see in the story?*
- *What kind of characters do you think are missing from the story that should be added?*

Follow the children’s lead, helping them to name issues (e.g., gender representation), and from there build on their understanding. You can do this by inviting them to come up with an alternate storyline that shifts the characters’ roles or have them sketch and describe a character they think should be added to the story.

Pause to Reflect

We encourage you to engage in this work before you begin with students. Be attentive to aspects of identity you may want to layer into your list. Then examine what was NOT included. It is important for us, as adults, to acknowledge and understand our identities and to recognize how that shapes the way we move through the world and how it positions us in our spaces of teaching, learning, and life.



Consider the role of intersectionality (the way people's social identities can overlap) as you listen to Kimberlé Crenshaw's TED talk.

Additional Texts to Explore the Concept of Identity

- *A Place Inside Me* by Zetta Elliott
- *All Are Welcome Here* by Alexandra Penfold
- *Drawn Together* by Minh Le
- *Drum Dream Girl* by Margarita Engle
- *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners* by Joanna Ho
- *Let's Talk About Race* by Julius Lester
- *Our Skin: A First Conversation About Race* by Megan Madison, Jessica Ralli, and Isabel Roxas
- *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz
- *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Woke: A Young Poet's Call to Justice* by Mahogany L. Brown with Elizabeth Acevedo and Olivia Gatwood
- *Yo Soy Muslim* by Mark Gonzales
- *Maddie's Fridge* by Lois Brandt
- *Red: A Crayon's Story* by Michael Hall
- *Under My Hijab* by Hena Khan
- *When We Were Alone* by David Robertson

Lesson 3: Hair and Identity

I Love My Hair • by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley



First Read: Movie Read

This first visit, the “movie read,” focuses on taking in the story without interruption (see Chapter 1, p. 21). Keyana discovers the beauty of her hair and celebrates her hair as part of her heritage.



Second Read: Reading With the Text

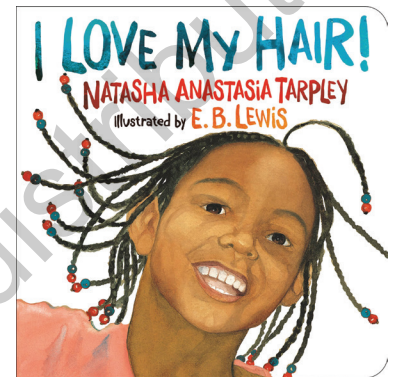
Begin the second read by reminding students about Keyana’s nightly routine of Mama combing her hair. Her mom reminds Keyana how beautiful her hair is and how she can wear it in many styles.

Turn to the spread where Keyana describes why she loves her hair using a series of similes.

Ask students:

- *What is your favorite way to style your hair?*
- *Follow a similar structure to share or write about your hair: “I love my hair because . . .”*

FIGURE 2.10



For Younger Students

Invite students to sketch their favorite hairstyle. Ask what hairstyle makes them feel their best. They can respond using the sentence frame “My favorite hairstyle is . . . It makes me feel . . .” or “If I could wear my hair any way I like, I’d . . . because . . .”

Ask students:

- *What does your hair feel like?*
- *What does it look like?*
- *How does it make you feel?*

These descriptors could be developed into a collection of poems.



Return Read: Reading Critically

For this return read, focus on the way this book offers a tribute to the beauty of Black hair and how hair is part of our identity.

Ask students:

- *How does Keyana's mom influence Keyana's identity?*
- *What hairstyles come to mind when you think of your culture?*

When Keyana was teased for wearing her hair free in an afro, Keyana's teacher told her it is a way to demonstrate pride.

Ask students: *How does Keyana's teacher influence Keyana's identity?*

For Older Students

Before this return read, begin by sharing the following quote from *The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. Du Bois with students and ask them to reflect on it as they read the story again.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness . . .

After reading, ask students what they think Du Bois means by this statement and how it aligns with the book.

Layering Texts

Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut by Derrick Barnes focuses on Black boys' hair.

In the end pages, the author writes,

The fresh cuts. That's where it all begins. It's how we develop swagger, and when we begin to care about how we present ourselves to the world. It's also the time when most of us become privy to the conversations and company of hardworking Black men from all walks of life. We learn to mimic their tone, inflections, sense of humor, and verbal

combative skills when discussing politics, women, sports, our community, and our future.

The book is a wonderful text that can serve as a mirror for Black boys to see themselves reflected in a story in a joyous way. The images and the words in combination are truly a celebration of Black boys as elucidated through barbershop culture.

Additional Books About Hair

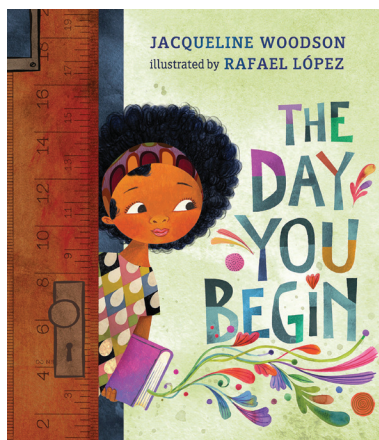
- *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* by Derrick Barnes
- *Don't Touch My Hair!* by Sharee Miller
- *Hair Love* by Matthew Cherry
- *My Hair Is a Garden* by Cozbi A. Cabrera

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Lesson 4: Telling or Sharing Your Stories

The Day You Begin • by Jacqueline Woodson

FIGURE 2.11



First Read: Movie Read

This first visit, the “movie read,” focuses on taking in the story without interruption (see Chapter 1, p. 21). *The Day You Begin* is a story about those times when you walk into a room and no one there is quite like you. In lyrical free verse, Woodson takes a moment of desolation as an opportunity to respond to the question “So what are you going to do?”



Second Read: Reading With the Text

Read the first spread of the book:

There will be times when you walk into a room
and no one there is quite like you.

Ask students:

- *How do you think she is feeling?*
- *What might she be thinking?*
- *Do you have any connections?*

Alternatively, you could lay out art cards on a table (approximately five cards per student) and ask students to pick one that reflects what comes to mind when they hear or read the sentence. (Art cards are art-inspired postcards or cards that contain images of art pieces from around the world. You can purchase ready-made art cards from museums, art galleries, and shops. You can also use calendars with works of art on them in place of the postcard-type art cards.)

Using art cards allows students to represent their thinking about a topic or issue. As students share why they have selected a particular card, they inadvertently connect to the text. For some students using an art card to represent what is on their mind creates a space for them to get at more complex ideas that they are not able to articulate using words. In this case, the cards become a tool for articulating their thinking.

Have students share their chosen art card and explain why they selected it. You could also have the students create their own art cards to represent their learning as a culminating experience for the lesson. The art cards can be shared and then added to the class art card collection for future use.

Free Access Art Pieces for Art Cards

Rather than using paper-based art cards, you could have your students choose an art piece online. Following are online art sources.

Art Gallery of Ontario
[bit.ly/3EPPRPN](https://www.ago.on.ca/3EPPRPN)

Barcelona Museum: Fundació Joan Miró
[bit.ly/3GWSAd5](https://www.fundacionjoanmiró.org/3GWSAd5)

MoMA: Jacob Lawrence
<https://www.moma.org/artists/3418>

McMichael Art Collection
<http://collections.mcmichael.com/collections>

NGAkids Art Zone
[bit.ly/3ueOG7O](https://www.nga.gov/kids/3ueOG7O)

Saatchi Art
<https://www.saatchiart.com/paintings>

Tate Kids
<https://www.tate.org.uk/kids/explore>

Students can use art cards to

- introduce themselves
- share their opinion or understanding about a particular topic
- create space for conversation
- represent their understanding of a lesson or class conversation
- do some meta-analysis of their own thinking, reflecting on the process behind why they chose their card
- show teachers what's on their mind

(Vasquez et al., 2021, p. 34)



Return Read: Reading Critically

To read critically, begin by pointing out the various examples of ways we can differ from others (physical features, language, location, clothes, food, talents, etc.). Invite students to share other examples.

Read the fifth spread and look closely at what the children in the spread are doing:

There will be times when the words don't come.

Your own voice, once huge, now smaller

When the teacher asks *What did you do last summer?*

Tell the class your story.

Some students may have a clear understanding of what it means to have “voice” while others may need time to clarify their ideas. What follows is some language to engage students in a conversation about voice.

Explain that having voice is not just the sound you make through your vocal cords or the thoughts you communicate using gestures and signs or a communication board.

Having voice is

- when others respect your thoughts and ideas
- when others listen and value what you have to say
- when you can speak your mind
- when you have a say over matters that affect you in some way
- when you have opportunities to share your experiences, your questions, and your comments and ideas
- when you are not forced to say or believe things you do not want to say or believe
- when you can be you and not what others say you should be

Ask students:

- *What does it mean to have “voice” or for someone’s voice to be heard?*
- *In the story, whose voice has gotten smaller?*

- *What or who caused that child's voice to become smaller?*
- *Why don't the words come? What does that mean? Where would the words come from?*
- *What or who caused the words not to come?*

The children may note that it was the question “What did you do last summer?” that contributed to the child feeling voiceless as if she had nothing to say. If they do not come to this conclusion, you could ask follow-up questions.

Ask students:

- *How did the question “What did you do last summer?” cause the child's voice to become smaller?*
- *How could the teacher and students create a space for everyone in the class to participate in the conversation?*

Reread and discuss the ninth spread where the boy feels left out at recess. This could connect with other books, such as *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig or *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson.

Ask students:

- *How is the boy feeling in this scene? How do you know?*
- *Does this remind you of any other books you've read?*

Highlight the shift in the eleventh spread where the boy's reflection offers a glimpse at an alternate story. In his reflection, he is seen smiling with an open book with beauty and life depicted by the flowers pouring out of it.

Ask students:

- *What does this illustration suggest about how the boy has changed?*
- *What do you think has caused this change?*

Additional Return Read Option:

Tell Your Own Story

Invite students to craft the story they want to share as their truth. Ask, “What are the stories you want the world to know about you and people like you?” Consider the frame, “What others say . . . What I want the world to know . . .” When we empower students to tell the stories

of their lives, they control the narrative and disrupt assumptions and stereotypes.

You could begin by modeling this with your own story. Think about something that would likely be of interest and easily relatable for children. For example, using the frame “What others say . . . What I want the world to know . . .” the teacher could model *I’m 45 and some people say that I’m too old to sled downhill, but I want the world to know that I am 45 and when it snows, I get out my sled and slide down the big hill in front of my house all afternoon.*

This lesson lends itself to narrative writing and/or storytelling. Once students have crafted their stories, invite them to share as a storyteller, as a writer, or in a multimodal presentation.

Additional Books for Telling/Sharing Our Stories

- *All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold
- *All Because You Matter* by Tami Charles
- *Emmanuel’s Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofose Yeboah* by Laurie Ann Thompson
- *I, Too, Am America* by Langston Hughes, illustrated by Bryan Collier
- *Island Born* by Junot Diaz
- *Mama, Where Are You From?* by Marie Bradby

Lesson 5: Being Your Truest Self

The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family • by Ibtihaj Muhammad with S.K. Ali



First Read: Movie Read

This first visit, the “movie read,” focuses on taking in the story without interruption (see Chapter 1, p. 21). Asiya selects a blue hijab to wear to school, and her sister Faizah thinks it is the most beautiful hijab, but children at school make fun of it. Faizah remains resilient, strong, and proud.



Second Read: Reading With the Text

Before rereading the book, display the cover and discuss the illustration.

Ask students:

- *What is a hijab?*
- *What can you infer based on the illustration and the title?*

Students may recall that Asiya wears her blue hijab proudly and how it’s like the ocean and the sky and that her younger sister Faizah admires her.

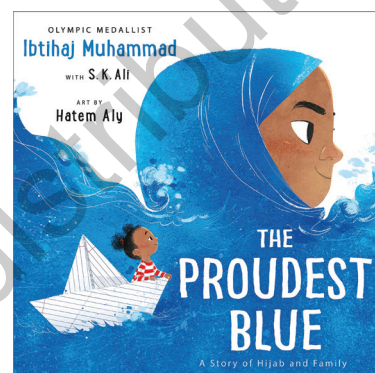
Begin rereading the book. From the beginning of the story, Faizah looks up to her big sister, Asiya. She calls her a princess, and she feels like one too. When a classmate asks Faizah what’s on her sister’s head, she whispers “a scarf.” She then speaks up louder and names it as a “hijab.”

Ask students: *Why did Faizah whisper and then speak up louder?*

Read the next page: “Asiya’s hijab isn’t a whisper. Asiya’s hijab is like the sky on a sunny day. The sky isn’t a whisper. It’s always there, special *and* regular.” Point out the seesaw structure of the language as well as the simile and record on an anchor chart.

Asiya’s hijab isn’t . . .	Asiya’s hijab is like the . . .
The sky isn’t . . .	It’s always . . .

FIGURE 2.12



The italicized print on the bottom right page reveals Mama’s reminders that wearing the hijab for the first day is important and means being strong.

Continue reading and pause to discuss the page where a boy points and laughs at Asiya.

Ask students: *What do you notice about Faizah’s reaction in the illustration?*

The next page compares Asiya’s hijab to the ocean using another simile: “Asiya’s hijab is like the ocean waving to the sky. It’s always there, strong and friendly.” Notice the repeating phrase “It’s always there” although the language shifts from “special and regular” to “strong and friendly” here.

Notice similar seesaw structure in the language in this spread.

Asiya’s hijab isn’t . . .	Asiya’s hijab is like the . . .	It’s always . . .
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Read the italicized print of Mama reminding her that some people won’t understand. “But if you understand who you are, one day they will too.”

Ask students: *What do you think Mama means by this?*

Continue reading. At recess, she hears a boy tell Asiya he’s “going to pull that tablecloth off [her] head!” Asiya runs off to play and we see Mama’s words again in italics reminding her to drop hurtful words. “*They belong to only those who said them.*”

After school, Asiya is waiting for Faizah and is a model for how to be strong in times of adversity. Discuss the notion of calling someone out or calling them in.

Ask students: *Why might it be important to speak out and speak up to the boy?*

The bond between the sisters is strong. They are always there just like the ocean and the sky with no line between them. Discuss the notion of barriers (connect with the lesson for *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson in Chapter 3) and the use of blue as a symbol of connection, continuity, and unity.

Calling In and Calling Out

When someone says something harmful, it is important that we interrupt and have a brave conversation to avoid escalating conflict and offer opportunities for learning. Rather than calling someone out to shame them, we can call them in with love to foster deeper reflection and understanding. Begin by sharing the concern (e.g., I'd like to talk with you about what you just said . . .) and asking questions (e.g., What was your intention when saying/doing that? How might the impact of your words/action be different than your intention?). For example, if someone tells an offensive joke, you can interrupt by saying something like, "I'd like to talk about why that joke is not appropriate. I don't find that funny. Would you have said it if someone from that group were in the room? Have you considered the impact of your words on others?"



Find more suggestions in this article from Learning for Justice.



Return Read: Reading Critically

Read the author's note at the back of the book. Ibtihaj Muhammad describes how she started wearing a hijab regularly at age twelve. She experienced bullying and a classmate asked why she was wearing a tablecloth on her head. She felt "othered" by her hijab as a child, an adolescent, and an adult.

Ask students:

- *What do you think the term "othering" means?*
- *What are some ways people might be "othered"? Or who else might experience being "othered"?*

Note: Responses could lead to further discussion and intentional selection of books. For instance, if a child responds that they feel othered for having two moms, you could read a book like *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman.

The author says she wants the book to serve as a mirror for other girls to see how she and her sister took such great pride in the hijab. “So that children of color, Muslims, and those who are both (like me) know they aren’t alone and that there are many out there who share our experience . . . My hijab is beautiful . . . so is yours.”

Ask students: *How can we help everyone be welcomed and included for being who they are?*

Additional Books

- *Black Is Brown Is Tan* by Arnold Adoff
- *I Am Enough* by Grace Byers
- *Introducing Teddy* by Jessica Walton
- *Just Ask!* by Sonia Sotomayor
- *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* by Monica Brown
- *Red: A Crayon's Story* by Michael Hall
- *Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon* by Patty Lovell
- *Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun* by Maria Dismondy
- *Sulwe* by Lupita Nyong'o
- *The Kindest Red* by Ibtihaj Muhammad and S.K. Ali
- *Three Hens and a Peacock* by Lester Laminack
- *Under My Hijab* by Hena Khan

Additional Resources

- “My Identity is A Superpower” TED talk
[bbit.ly/3XJ2epz](https://www.ted.com/talks/bbitt/3XJ2epz)
- Learning for Justice’s Social Justice Standards: Unpacking Identity



READING FOR ACTION

After reading a collection of texts focused on exploring individual and collective identities, invite students to reflect on what they have learned and how their thinking has changed.

Ask students: *What will we do with this new insight? How can we take action?*

SOME IDEAS/SUGGESTIONS

- Connect with a peer they don't know as well to learn more about them.
- Research to learn more about different identities they are less familiar with.
- Explore stories of those who have been historically marginalized or silenced. Whose stories do we need to learn more about? How will we collect and share those stories with others?
- Brainstorm ways to honor students' names and others' names and identities. Commit to pronouncing others' names correctly and explore how to help others when they mispronounce names.

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