BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING AN ABAR ENVIRONMENT
Conversations about race and racism are more likely to be productive and valuable when they take place in a classroom or program with established anti-bias, antiracist (ABAR) values and practices. Use this resource to review some best practice fundamentals of building an ABAR environment, review clear terminology and definitions, check out our collection of curated resources to support your work, and take account of some do’s and don’ts that First Book’s Network of educators informed and found helpful. Start here with Assess Yourself and then explore the other sections in this resource: Educate Yourself About the History of Race & Racism in the U.S., Create Brave & Safe Spaces, Incorporate ABAR Year-Round, Teach the Joy, and Engage Families.

Although we may not be aware of our unconscious (or implicit) biases, we’re all biased. Doing the work to uncover and understand our biases allows us to become aware of how they inform our thoughts and actions and impact others. This is especially important for educators because interactions with and assessments of students can have long-lasting and significant effects on their identity and achievement.

**BEFORE TALKING ABOUT RACE AND RACISM, REFLECT ON YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY:**

- When did you first think about race and become aware of your own?
- What do you remember from your childhood about how you made sense of differences?
- What childhood experiences did you have with people who were different from you?
- Did adults talk to you about these differences?

Source: Talking About Race | National Museum of African American History and Culture

**DEFINITIONS & TERMINOLOGY**

**UNCONSCIOUS BIAS**
also known as implicit bias, happens when we allow our own attitudes, feelings, stereotypes, or beliefs to impact our judgment or understanding of other people. It’s called unconscious because it’s an involuntary process based on our deep-seated thoughts. Unconscious bias is the result of social conditioning, belief systems, life experiences, attitudes, exposure (or lack of exposure) to people who are different from us, and other factors that influence how we perceive and relate to the world around us.

**EXPLICIT BIAS**
refers to the conscious attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group of people. Often, the expression of these biases is the result of a perceived threat. When people feel threatened, they are more likely to draw group boundaries to distinguish themselves from others. Explicit bias includes discrimination and hate speech.

**FACTS ABOUT UNCONSCIOUS BIAS:**

We all have unconscious bias. There are different types of bias, including:

- **Affinity Bias:** the tendency to gravitate toward people with similar appearances, backgrounds, and beliefs

- **Confirmation Bias:** the tendency to interpret new information in a way that confirms existing beliefs

Unconscious biases can be recognized and addressed.

“The beauty of anti-racism is that you don’t have to pretend to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in yourself. And it’s the only way forward.”

IJEOMA OLUO, WRITER, SPEAKER & ACTIVIST
ASSESS YOURSELF

RESOURCES WE LIKE

Unconscious Bias: An Educator’s Self-Assessment from First Book
Discover areas where you hold unconscious bias and explore which personal narratives may have informed your biases. Learn how to disarm biases by interpreting situations from different viewpoints and use the power of books to gain insight into the lives of those with different lived experiences.

A video series that explores real-life examples and studies of implicit bias and demonstrates the impact of unconscious decisions and judgments.

What Is White Privilege Really? from Learning for Justice
A webinar for educators that explains the origins of Whiteness, the legacy of White supremacy, and what White privilege is and is not.

Preparing for Conversations About Race and Racism from The New York Times and Learning Network
Four teachers discuss the important first step of recognizing personal biases.

27 Mistakes White Teachers of Black Students Make and How to Fix Them from Education Post
A White teacher reflects on the ways White teachers can do harm by failing to recognize their privilege and not understanding the legacy of segregation and racism in the classroom.

“You cannot effectively teach students if you are not reaching them. And you cannot reach them if you do not understand them.”
JAMILAH PITTS, EDUCATION CONSULTANT

“Most of us fail to reckon with the fact that America is a country built on a foundation of slavery, genocide, and white supremacy.

“When classroom conversations about race or racism cannot be avoided, many of us repeat a variation on the lesson we learned in childhood: “I don’t see color. I just see students.”

Some of us have grabbed the word “woke” and held on to it a little too tightly.

Source: 27 Mistakes White Teachers of Black Students Make and How to Fix Them
Race is a defining social construct in our country, and racism has a major impact on our lives. Not addressing the legacy of racism or current instances of injustice and oppression sends the message to kids that these issues aren’t important. To competently facilitate conversations about race and racism, educators need to understand the history of race and racism in the United States.

**Why It’s Important**

“I think it’s really important to be conscious of yourself and the world around you. For me, that meant reading a lot and reporting.”

TA-NEHISI COATES, AUTHOR & JOURNALIST

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**RESOURCES WE LIKE**

**What Is Systemic Racism? from Race Forward**

A video series that explores the wealth gap, employment disparities, housing discrimination, government surveillance, incarceration, drug arrests, and immigration arrests among other issues facing communities of color.

**Educator Resources from the National Museum of African American History and Culture**

Includes information, videos, and guides related to bias, antiracism, community building, self-care, racial identity, systems of oppression, Whiteness, and the historical foundations of race.

**Step 1 in Empowering Educators from First Book**

Download this guide to review the evolution of race as a social construct and the history of race and racism in the U.S.

**What Are Structural, Institutional, and Systemic Racism?**

A short video that reviews different types of racism and how they relate to education inequity, the school to prison pipeline, redlining, immigration, and more.

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An example of systemic racism is redlining, a discriminatory system used by banks and real estate agents to marginalize the Black community. Red ink was used to outline Black communities on maps, and banks were less likely to grant loans to people living within those boundaries. The practice was banned in 1968.
DEFINITIONS & TERMINOLOGY

There are four main levels of racism. In general, people spend most time discussing and thinking about the first two (individual) and not the second two (institutional).

INDIVIDUAL

1 INTERNALIZED – prejudice, bias, and blind spots that individuals internalize
2 INTERPERSONAL – when we act out internalized racism on each other

INSTITUTIONAL

3 SYSTEMIC – racist policies and practices in schools, workplaces, and government agencies that produce unjust outcomes for people of color
4 STRUCTURAL – unjust, racist patterns and practices that play out across institutions in our society

ABAR:
Anti-bias, antiracist; ABAR education is teaching against bias and racism.

MICROAGGRESSION:
A statement or action regarded as indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a certain group.

PRIVILEGE:
A special right, advantage, or immunity granted only to a particular person or group.

RACE:
The grouping of humans based on shared physical and/or social qualities into distinct categories.

SEE MORE DEFINITIONS HERE >

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

Even those who strive to be actively antiracist and who carefully consider their words may make insensitive comments that hurt others. Instead of getting defensive, use the opportunity to reflect on the biases you have internalized, consciously and unconsciously, through socialization, education, and media exposure.

DO:

1. Apologize, and keep it simple and to the point.
2. Listen to what the other person has to say and acknowledge their feelings.
3. Learn from the experience.

DON’T:

1. Argue that what you said or did was not racist.
2. Say you can’t be racist because you have friends who are a different race.
3. Suggest the other person is too sensitive or misunderstood you.

“The shards that cut me the deepest were the ones that intended to cut. Knowing that after eight years of working really hard for this country, there are still people who won’t see me for what I am because of my skin color.”

MICHELLE OBAMA, FORMER FIRST LADY OF THE UNITED STATES
RESOURCES WE LIKE

How to Deal with Microaggressions from Woke Black Teacher
A video for teachers who want to create emotionally safe classrooms and protect students from microaggressions and prejudice.

Teenagers Discuss Microaggressions and Racism from #HatchKids
Kids discuss common microaggressions, how these offenses make them feel, and how they respond.

Speak Up at School from Learning for Justice
It can be difficult to respond in the moment when you witness offensive comments or behavior. Use this guide (there’s also a printable pocket version) from Learning for Justice to have appropriate responses at your fingertips. Know when to Interrupt, Question, Educate, and Echo.

What not to say...
1. All lives matter.
2. I don’t see color.
3. Can I touch your hair?
4. I’m not racist. I have a ______ friend.
5. White privilege doesn’t exist.
6. Don’t blame me. I didn’t own slaves.
7. You are so articulate. You don’t sound _____.

Interrupt:
“I don’t like words like that.” OR
“That phrase is hurtful.”

Question:
“What do you mean?” OR
“What do you mean?” OR
“Tell me more.”

Education:
“What do you mean?” OR
“Tell me more.”

Echo:
“Thank you for speaking up. I agree that word is offensive, and we shouldn’t use it.”

Source: Woke Black Teacher
Source: Racial microaggressions: examples and phrases for productive dialogue | CNN Health
Source: Speak Up at School | Learning for Justice

How to Respond to Microaggressions from The New York Times
It’s natural to be surprised by offensive comments and behavior, but don’t let your silence be mistaken for indifference or agreement. Be an ally and speak up.

Ask for More Clarification:
“Could you say more about what you mean by that?” “How have you come to think that?”

Separate Intent from Impact:
“I know you didn’t realize this, but when you _______ (comment/behavior), it was hurtful/offensive because _______.
Instead, you could _______ (different language or behavior).”

Share Your Own Process:
“I noticed that you _______ (comment/behavior). I used to do/say that too, but then I learned _______.”

Source: The New York Times

DEFINITIONS & TERMINOLOGY

Environmental Microaggressions occur when something in the physical or social realm sends a negative message to members of a certain group. Although microaggressions may seem subtler than other forms of discrimination, research has shown they can have a cumulative effect over time and affect mental health.

Example: Sports teams using Native-themed mascots, nicknames, and logos
Underlying message: Your heritage and traditions can be appropriated for entertainment and marketing purposes.

Microassaults are overt attacks intended to communicate discriminatory or biased feelings about a person or group.

Example: An educator calls on White students before calling on students of color.
Underlying message: I don’t see you as equal to White students.

Microinsults often come across as compliments, but they convey insensitivity or rudeness that demeans a person’s identity.

Example: “You are so articulate.”
Underlying message: It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent.

Microinvalidations are verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or dismiss a person’s or group’s feelings and lived experiences.

Example: “I don’t see color.”
Underlying message: I don’t see your race or acknowledge that part of your identity.
Establishing a safe and respectful classroom environment is important in general and even more so when handling challenging topics and intense conversations. Establish expectations and boundaries at the beginning of the year and use classroom contracts to abide by the rules and values students agree upon as a group. Classroom contracts and conversation guidelines should include listening, confidentiality, handling put-downs, and how to deal with bias and stereotyping.

**WHY IT’S IMPORTANT**

**TO CREATE SAFE SPACES...**

- Find out students’ preferred pronouns and use them.
- Learn how to pronounce students’ names correctly.
- Teach social emotional skills.
- Model positive relationships and conflict-resolution skills.
- Focus on understanding and appreciating differences.
- Challenge bias and exclusion.
- Apologize simply and sincerely if you make a mistake or offend.
- Check in with how students are feeling about difficult topics using an anonymous survey and then validate their feelings.
- Consider implementing a zero-indifference policy or incorporating restorative justice into your classroom.

**IN BRAVE SPACES:**

- Students are not afraid to be challenged.
- Students are prepared to learn from each other.
- Students may not always feel comfortable.

**RESOURCES WE LIKE**

**Moving from Safe Classrooms to Brave Classrooms from the Anti-Defamation League**

In brave spaces, we accept that we’ll feel uncomfortable and maybe even defensive when exploring issues of bias, injustice, and oppression. A brave space requires risk, care, and compassion.

**Let’s Create a Brave Space and Two Lessons on Creating Brave Space from First Book**

Educator Britt Hawthorne explains why brave spaces are essential to ABAR instruction. Educator Skye Tooley teaches her students about microaggressions using a poem and a T chart that asks students to take notes about what they notice and what they wonder.


A timely resource addressing the trauma educators, students, and communities, especially communities of color, are experiencing during the pandemic.

“I choose resources over kids sharing their own experiences because it’s not OK for us to ask students to relive their trauma.” — SKYE TOOLEY, EDUCATOR
DEFINITIONS & TERMINOLOGY

ZERO-INDIFFERENCE
means not letting harmful or offensive behavior go unchallenged. In a zero-indifference environment, educators always name and respond to behavior and language that violates the classroom contract but do not necessarily use referrals, suspensions, and other punishments.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE
is prioritizing healing and relationship-building over punishment. It begins with a classroom contract or code of conduct ensuring a safe and respectful culture. When students violate the code, they own the problem and reflect on the impact of their actions. Using restorative inquiry, a nonjudgmental discussion technique, educators help students repair harm and make things right with themselves and others. Learn more here.

Source: Let’s Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students | Learning for Justice

EXAMPLES OF RULES FOR A COMMUNITY AGREEMENT:

• “Listen with respect to the experience of others.”

• “Try to understand what someone is saying before rushing to judgment.”

• “Put-downs of any kind are never OK.”

Source: Learning for Justice

WAYS TO CREATE COMMUNITY FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

SHOUT OUTS > sharing positive feedback

SNOWBALL TOSS > identifying and dealing with stress

APPRECIATE, APOLOGY, AND AHA > finding time to reflect on the day

Source: Edutopia

See the First Book Marketplace for books about social and emotional learning. ★★★
Anti-bias, antiracist instruction should happen year-round, not only during themed months or after news coverage of acts of racism and injustice. Embed an ABAR mindset into classroom culture and daily practices and routines. This work is too critical to be an add-on or afterthought.

"Won’t it be wonderful when black history and Native American history and Jewish history and all of U.S. history is taught from one book. Just U.S. history.”
MAYA ANGELOU, AMERICAN POET, MEMOIRIST & CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

RESOURCES WE LIKE

Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice
Anti-Defamation League
When incidents of bias and injustice are covered in the news, students likely have questions and concerns. Whether through a short conversation or lesson, help students evaluate sources, express their feelings, and ask questions.

Let’s Bring Current Events to Life in the Classroom
Anti-Defamation League
IDEAS FOR HOW TO ADDRESS NEWS STORIES:
Follow the story on social media
• Such as following Colin Kaepernick’s activism on Twitter:
  Colin Kaepernick (@Kaepernick7) / Twitter
• Make a video or produce a podcast
  Such as listening to NPR’s Student Podcast Winner, Climate Change Is Racial Injustice
• Explore the celebrity angle
  Such as discussing Meghan Markle’s experience with racism
See the Using News Articles & Videos section in Teaching Strategies & Lesson Plans.

Six Ways to Be an Antiracist Educator from Edutopia
This video explains how educators should approach every interaction, decision, and instructional opportunity from an antiracist and equity lens.

SIX WAYS TO BE AN ANTIRACIST EDUCATOR:

1. PRACTICE SELF-AWARENESS.
2. LEARN TOGETHER.
3. HOLD EACH OTHER ACCOUNTABLE.
4. AFFIRM YOUR STUDENTS.
5. THINK ABOUT THE LARGER CONTEXT.
6. ASK STUDENTS WHAT THEY NEED.

Source: Edutopia
RESOURCES WE LIKE

Kamala Harris, Shirley Chisholm, and the Power of Representation from Facing History and Ourselves

Kamala Harris made history as the first woman, first Black American, and first American of Asian descent to be elected vice president of the United States. This lesson relates her inspiring achievement to the ground-breaking career of Shirley Chisholm.

Reflecting on Amanda Gorman’s “The Hill We Climb” from Facing History and Ourselves

A lesson that celebrates Amanda Gorman’s achievement as the youngest inaugural poet and her inspiring recitation of “The Hill We Climb.”

“That even as we grieved, we grew
That even as we hurt, we hoped
That even as we tired, we tried”

Empowering Educators Guidebook from First Book

See steps 7 & 8 in the Empowering Educators Guidebook to learn how positive books promote self-love and why to avoid the danger of a single story.

“Find books celebrating diversity on the First Book Marketplace”

ENGAGE FAMILIES

In addition to teaching about racism and injustice, celebrate accomplishments and successes. Students of color deserve to see themselves reflected in classroom resources, books, and lessons that reflect a range of environments and emotions.

“‘The injustice is inescapable. So yes, I want the world to recognize our suffering. But I do not want pity from a single soul. Sin and shame are found in neither my body nor my identity. Blackness is an immense and defiant joy.’”

IMANI PERRY, AUTHOR & SCHOLAR

“‘If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.’”

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, POLITICIAN, EDUCATOR & AUTHOR
RESOURCES WE LIKE

Home Visits from Learning for Justice
Provides an overview of best practices and checklists for before, during, and after the visit.

BEFORE:
- Participate in home-visit training.
- Call each student’s home, and explain the purpose of the visit.
- Schedule the visit.
- Determine if a translator is needed. The student should not serve as a translator.
- Confirm the day before or the day of the home visit.
- Before the visit, reflect on the reason you’re there in the first place: to build a relationship with the family and collaborate with them for the well-being of the child.

HOW TO WELCOME ALL TYPES OF FAMILIES IN YOUR CLASSROOM:

- Have books that show a range of family types and experiences.
- Use inclusive communication and language: Instead of “Mom and Dad,” use “Parents, guardians, and families.”
- Keep activities general: Mother’s Day and Father’s Day aren’t relevant to all students.
- Present familial diversity visually in books, posters, and PowerPoints.

The exhaustion of being a Black teacher in a school when you’re one of too few educators of color from The Boston Globe
An important read, whether you’re a Black educator or an ally interested in understanding how educators of color experience institutional racism and tokenism. The article also offers advice about how to handle talking about race in homogeneous communities.

“...We can’t expect teachers to do this right without training. We have evidence, particularly around George Floyd, if we only have white teachers in the room, we’re going to mess it up.”
MALCOLM CAWTHORNE, EDUCATOR

Source: Boston Globe

DO:
Show up and learn from racism awareness courses provided by your school or district.
Understand educating students about systemic racism and violence is everyone’s responsibility.

DON’T:
Depend on Black teachers and educators to educate you about racism and police violence.
Share articles that link to videos showing violence.

Source: Let’s Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students | Learning for Justice

Engaging families improves achievement and results in fewer disciplinary issues and better relationships among children, teachers, and guardians. Curriculum decisions, family nights, guest speakers, and field trips are opportunities to engage your students’ families and caregivers. Homework assignments, such as read-alouds and interviews, can also be designed to encourage caregiver involvement. Source: Welcoming Diverse Family Structures in the Classroom | Education World

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

WE LIKE

The Boston Globe
Let’s Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students | Learning for Justice

ENGAGE FAMILIES

Source: Welcoming Diverse Family Structures in the Classroom | Education World
American students are diverse in terms of family structure as well as ethnicity and language(s) spoken at home. These are some of the types of families you may encounter:

- Single parent (divorced or never married)
- Foster parent(s) (or state as legal guardian)
- Adoptive parent(s)
- Blended (biological parent and another parental figure to whom they may or may not be married)
- Unmarried biological parents
- LGBT parent(s)
- Non-parent relative(s) as guardian(s) (grandparent, aunt, etc.)

Share antiracism resources with families so they can continue these important conversations at home.

**How to Talk to Kids About Race** from the Antiracism Academy

**10 Tips for Teaching and Talking to Kids About Race** from EmbraceRace (PDFs available in English and Spanish)

**TIPS FOR TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT RACE**

1. **START EARLY:**
   By 6 months, babies notice racial differences. By age 4, they show signs of racial bias.

2. **FACE AND KNOW YOUR OWN BIASES:**
   We're less likely to pass on the biases we face and work to overcome.

3. **BE HONEST:**
   Make sure kids know the struggle for equality is still going on and they can and should be part of the struggle.

Source: Embrace Race
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