

Dear Friends,

Raising our children to be anti-racist is no different from raising them to embody any other Christian value in that what we do in front of them matters far more than the words we say to them.

Step one is being transparent about working for racial justice and unrooting the weeds of racial bias (conscious or unconscious) in our own hearts.

That being said, I think a strong case can be made for reading books with Black protagonists being the second most impactful thing we can do as parents, not just during February, but as a matter of course year-round.

The stories we read with our children spark their imaginations, build their inner landscapes, sharpen their empathy skills, and invite discussions. Stories are how we make sense of ourselves and the world.

It matters deeply for Black children (and adults) to see themselves reflected in a multidimensional way in our culture. To see characters who look like themselves in stories that touch on all facets of human experience bears witness to the value and worth of their own lives.

White children (and adults) will certainly experience culture that affirms the value of their stories, the worth of their existence. If that's *all* they experience, though, there is great risk that they will (unconsciously) believe that their stories are the only ones that matter.

Being intentional about the books we choose to read with our children can help them identify with all kinds of people and help counteract the damaging message that whiteness is normative.

"Diverse kids' literature gives children of color a chance to see themselves as heroes, which is vital. But smart, thoughtful books with non-white protagonists can also give white children a chance to see black people and people of color as something other than anxiety-producing others or stereotypes."

<https://psmag.com/social-justice/answer-implicit-racism-might-childrens-literature-95094>

"Rudine Sims Bishop...introduced the concept of children's literature as either a window that provided readers a glimpse of a world outside their homes, or a mirror that reflected the reader through the lives of relatable characters. ...(K)ids need both."

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/family/2020/07/diversify-home-library-raise-an-anti-racist-child/#close>

I encourage you to read both those articles; they are brief, I promise, and worth the click.

Each Wednesday in February, I'll share a few recommendations to consider adding to your home library. These choices center Black characters, and almost all are the work of Black authors and illustrators. This list is just a starting place; if you have a favorite to recommend, please let me know!

The need for representation is true for all marginalized groups. It's worthwhile to scan the books you read at home to see what gaps you might have. Do you have books that reflect your child's race? What about other races and ethnicities? How about gender? Are there protagonists of varying socio-economic status? With disabilities? Etc...

May we all be blessed with an ever-expanding circle of love for all of God's children!

Peace and grace,

Lindley Traynor  
Director of Children and Family Ministry