

‘The Colour of Us’ – storybook ideas

“The colour of us” is an interactive board book which has been identified by Diversity and Anti-Racism Professional Learning (DARPL) to provide a first conversation with children about skin colour. Interactions within the book include; a wheel to spin on the cover and first page, and a skin colour rainbow with a hole so children can add their own skin colour to the page. Simple questions throughout the book also help to expand the conversation beyond the page and encourage children to relate what they have learned to their own lives.

This factsheet explores why using books and stories to explore diversity and inclusion is beneficial to children’s learning and development and also offers ideas to support you in using ‘The Colour of Us’ with children to explore the concept of skin colour.

Why is it important to talk to children about diversity and inclusion?

We know that young children’s ideas and thoughts are reinforced by their surroundings and influenced by what they see and hear every day; this includes ideas about diversity, skin colour and identity. It is imperative that children experience and see diversity and positive messages about skin colour to help them develop healthy positive attitudes to the differences between people.

You will of course, incorporate the theme of diversity within your practice and provision in many different ways, but it is also important to talk about the topic of skin colour directly. Children are impacted by race at a very early age:

- [As early as 3 months](#), a baby's brain can notice racial differences in the people around them
- By age 2, children repeat stereotypes about race
- By age 4, children can directly express bias regarding race by teasing
- By age 8, children are aware of social norms and can express bias in more subtle forms
- And, by age 12, many children become set in biased thoughts, actions, and decisions.

Do not be afraid of talking about diversity and inclusion ‘too early’ in a child’s learning and development. Talking about diversity and inclusion regularly and positively is the first step towards making a positive social change.

To support the course of this work, the Welsh Government have published the [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan](#). This plan sets out recommendations for settings and practitioners for supporting anti-racism in the childcare sector.

Why use books to explore diversity and inclusion with children?

Books and stories can include a range of characters that represent all readers and support children with exploring emotions – from fear and sadness to relief and excitement – and to think about the actions of cause and effect. In the early years, we use books as an opportunity to teach our children about kindness, compassion, and empathy for others and this should include diversity and inclusion. Books and stories enable practitioners to support children in drawing comparisons from real life to support their understanding about the world and people around them. Having access to a diverse and inclusive range of books allows children to see themselves represented, learn about other people, and recognise similarities and celebrate differences. They not only have the power to explore complex emotions in children, but books and stories also help to develop a foundation of story language, imagination and creativity, and act as a springboard for children's own story telling and a precursor for writing.

What does the curriculum say?

"We know that children are influenced by their environment and the adults around them and that they learn from everything they see, hear, and do. We have a responsibility to influence children's development positively through creating an accessible and inclusive environment in our setting, one that values and celebrates everyone."

Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, 2022.

Exploring the book 'The Colour of Us' with children, meets many of the statements throughout the developmental pathways and supports children's holistic development.

Reflecting on our effective environments

"Our environment should:

- *Be well organised to ensure accessibility for all*
- *Include diverse and authentic representation within resources, images, and text (in terms of gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion, etc.)*
- *Make appropriate adaptations to remove barriers to participation*
- *Offer open-ended resources that reflect diversity and are not gender-specific."*

Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, 2022.

Children should have every opportunity within the setting to experience a language-rich environment that immerses them in the spoken and written word. They should be able to access provision and communicate at their own developmental stage.

- Provide role play items and clothes relating to your book/stories in the role play area and outdoors if possible. Include examples of international clothing e.g. sarees, kanga. Use it as an opportunity to connect with parents and ask them to contribute/donate items
- Resources for children to recreate a place in the story for use in their role play. E.g. cardboard boxes and other resources for the children to make houses, dens, tunnels, caves
- Ensure there are further resources within the creative area to recreate other things from the story, e.g. story about the night sky - include shiny materials, dark cloth etc.
- Put suggestions within a larger space (ideally outdoors) to challenge the children to move like the character in the story, e.g. 'giant footsteps'
- Place visual aids with your musical resources if there are any songs or rhymes connected with the story – if not, challenge the children to make one up

Engaging experiences: small group/circle time learning opportunity

Exploring the book 'The Colour of Us' is an excellent small group or circle time learning opportunity. The below offers guidance on how the book could be explored with children. The examples given below, are not an exhaustive list and you may wish to use and adapt parts from them or have fantastic ideas of your own that meet your children's individual communication needs, interests and learning characteristics.

Resources:

- Copies of the book
- If possible, prepare laminated pictures of the story- particularly the skin colour page
- Links to videos which consider diversity. E.g. Sesame Street have a 'D is for Diversity' YouTube playlist that you may find useful
- Large pictures of staff/practitioner faces
- Individual/small/handheld mirrors
- Pictures of children's families
- Word banks
- Video recording of story being read (NDNA Cymru website)

Enabling adult:

Read the book to the group of children:

- Front cover: Spin the wheel and encourage the children to say what they see appearing in the circle
- Pg 1/2: Can spin the wheel again. Explore with children what we mean by skin? Why is skin important - what does it do?
- (If using a video, play here. E.g. Sesame Street's "Lupita Nyong'o loves her skin", ask the children about the video: What colour is Lupita's skin? What colour is Elmo's skin?)

- Pg 3/4: Model to children placing your hand behind the square and asking which colour matches you best? Take it in turns for children to place their hand behind the empty square- what colour is their skin? Can they match it on the page?
- Pg 5/6: Talk about the different details we might see on skin, use either the pictures in the book or staff/practitioner pictures to talk about features: skin colour, freckles, birth marks, hair etc. Share out mirrors to the children- ask them to take a look at their own skin- what do they see?
- Pg 7/8: Explore the family photographs, asking what skin colours are in your family?
- Pg 9/10: Ask children to share why they love their skin? How can we take care of our skin?

Possible follow up learning opportunities and experiences:

- Self-portraits- supporting children with paint colour mixing to match their skin tone. If using crayons/pencils/pens, it is essential to include ones that reflect diversity within your setting. E.g. Crayola colours of the world, Staedtler Noris People of the World
- Creating your own skin colour rainbow display within the setting with pictures of children, families, practitioners. When creating the rainbow, discuss what is missing and use photographs of celebrities/people well known to the children to fill the gaps and complete the rainbow
- Thinking positively about similarities and differences between people: discuss the answers questions such as; What month is your birthday? What is your favourite food? What colour is your hair? What colour are your eyes? Do you have a favourite song? What languages do you speak?
Compare all the answers and discuss: Is there a 'right' or 'wrong' answer to these questions? Does it matter if people have the same or different answers? Why? Create a large poster/display about similarities and differences. Consider expanding to talk about different children's homes e.g. on water, in snow, in trees etc
- Share vocabulary being used in the setting around the book/stories with parents and families to further support its use and understanding.

Welsh language development

eisteddwch i lawr – sit down

lliwiau - colours

gwahanol - different

distaw - quiet

croen - skin

yr un peth - same

gwrandewch – listen

amryliw – multi-coloured

amrywiaeth – diversity

edrych - look

enfys - rainbow

Cymru- Wales

Considerations for selecting high quality diverse and inclusive books and stories for your setting.

Choose books and stories that:

- Include characters facing real-life experiences
- Include characters who share your children's race, ethnicity, cultural and religious beliefs, as well as characters who do not
- Tell stories that challenge myths or stereotypes E.g. Hair Love by Matthew A. Cherry, illustrated by Vashti Harrison, a book about a Black father doing his daughter's hair (There is also an Oscar®-winning animated short film of the book)
- Tell stories that normalise daily life among all racial identities E.g. Corduroy, written and illustrated by Don Freeman, a book that features a Black mother and child going shopping.

Try to be mindful of books that may promote stereotypes. Avoid books that focus on generalisation or one view, in particular of: food, clothing, celebrations and/or folklore. If choosing books on these topics, it is important to reflect on whether the book is reinforcing stereotypes and be sure to also to select additional books that feature the racial or ethnic group in other ways.

Further support and NDNA resources

- NDNA Cymru FREE Guide to Good Practice - Tackling Racism: <https://ndna.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Wales-Guide-to-Good-Practice-Tackling-Racism.pdf>
- DARPL (Diversity and Anti-Racist Professional Learning) Childcare, Play and Early Years: <https://darpl.org/childcare-play-and-early-years/>
- CWLWM anti-racism resources: <https://darpl.org/cwlwm-anti-racist-resources/>
- CWLWM newsletter, Spring 2022 focused on racism and promoting race equality: <https://www.cwlwm.org.uk/our-work/newsletters>
- The World Reimagined Learning Programme- is an experiential and transformative journey created with artists, teachers and educationalists that empowers learners, practitioners, and education communities to create a future for racial justice: <https://www.theworldreimagined.org/learning/>
- Black History Wales- information and resources on Black history: <https://blackhistorywales.org.uk/black-history-cymru-365-bhc365/>
- Arts Council for Wales- Cynefin project video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=td0aSYCHbA8>