



Liz Kleinrock



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for giving your hearts and souls  
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I miss you every day.



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# INTRODUCTION

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

[T]he more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side.

—PAULO FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

**THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS** people don't tell you when you write a book. When I first embarked on this project almost two years ago, the world was a different place, and I was a different person. No one tells you how much you will change, evolve, learn, and unlearn throughout the process. As I look through my earliest chapter drafts, I sometimes struggle to recognize the person who wrote those words. Many of my earlier thoughts and ideas are no longer my truth, nor do they apply to the future ahead. Even as I sit here proofreading my final draft, I caught half a dozen instances of ableist language that I did not have the lens to identify when I began writing two years ago. I wonder what else I will have learned and unlearned by the time I hold the finished book in my hands.

Things have changed since I started writing.

When I started writing this book, students were still gathering in classrooms. Teachers were able to give high fives as the school day began, and children could crowd together and play tag at recess. In March 2020, everything changed. More than half a million lives have been lost in the United States due to COVID-19, and nearly two million around the world. By the time this book is published, who knows how



many more will no longer be with us. In the past months, video footage of Ahmaud Arbery being killed by a group of white men while jogging surfaced online. A Black woman and EMT named Breonna Taylor was shot and killed in her own home by police officers. The world watched a policeman suffocate George Floyd for nearly nine minutes as he lay on the ground gasping, "I can't breathe." The deaths of Black trans men and women continue to be ignored by the mainstream media. We've watched a mob attempt an insurrection on the United States Capitol, with people proudly sporting shirts with antisemitic propaganda. As I scramble to finish the final copyedits of this book, six Asian women were brutally murdered in Atlanta. These murders are following the attacks of numerous Asians and Asian Americans, many of them elderly, throughout this country. According to a study from California State University, San Bernardino, anti-Asian hate crimes have jumped 150 percent. This is the world our children and students are living in and watching unfold every day. How will we respond to them, hold space for them, and help them to dream of something better than what's on the screen in front of them?

My parents always told me to hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

As a child, I rolled my eyes because this seemed to be just another idiom they would toss out whenever I was struggling with an endeavor. However, now as an adult and having spent over a decade in the classroom, I've come to see the weight and wisdom of my parents' words.

My own racial and cultural identity and upbringing have largely shaped my approach to teaching, and what it means to be an aspiring antibias, antiracist, culturally responsive educator. I was born in South Korea and was adopted by a white-presenting, Ashkenazi Jewish family in Washington, DC. I spent my entire childhood at a prestigious prep school close to my home. I was challenged academically and learned many skills that would benefit me throughout college and graduate school. However, I grew up with a very narrow idea of what it means to be successful, and how success should be measured.

Aside from a few typical years of teenage angst in high school, I've always had a strong relationship with my parents. My parents were taught to not see race, and that it was best to try to ignore racialized identity in order to treat everyone equally. As a little kid, my parents read me picture books about adoption, and I have memories of demanding my



parents tell me about the day I arrived as a bedtime story. On one occasion, my parents sent me to a Korean cultural camp for adoptees, which made a less than lasting impression. My dad tells the story of driving me and a few other kids to school one morning in our neighborhood carpool, and I announced to the car, "I'm Korean!" The other kids responded, "Well I'm Korean too!" "Yeah me too!" which my father found extremely humorous because all the other children were white. Aside from these small moments, my race and ethnicity as a Korean Asian American were rarely mentioned growing up. When you're a person of color raised in an environment where people claim to not see race and you grow up assuming that everyone is treated equally regardless of their race, it's difficult to "prepare for the worst," because you have no idea how harsh the world can be. To the readers who are opening this book and believe they do not "see color," I want you to know that I love my appearance and identity as an Asian American woman. When you claim to not see race, you are saying that you do not see or acknowledge personal identifiers that I love. You are viewing me through a lens of how you want to see me, rather than how I see myself.

Rather than recite all of the experiences I've had with racism, antisemitism, and xenophobia, I wish to focus more energy on healing myself. Despite my struggle to define my identity when I was younger, I now come to view this duality as a gift. I recognize that my identity and my upbringing have put me in the unique position to be able to navigate spaces held by people of color, as well as those occupied by whiteness. As an East Asian American woman, I know that people may look at me and buy into the problematic model minority myth. It is unlikely that I will be accused of being angry, sassy, or aggressive when I speak out on issues of racial inequality. This is a privilege that I have been granted and hold myself accountable to spend it every day of my life.

The purpose of divulging my experiences is to explain that, throughout my childhood, I felt like I was often navigating this alone. I often wonder how this journey would have been different if the adults in my life had made space for me to talk about the issues I was facing, rather than assume I was fine because I appeared to be handling things OK. It's the silence that speaks volumes. Whether it's a predominantly white school or a school that mainly serves students of color, the impact of racial and socioeconomic inequity reverberates in every community. We can continue to sit comfortably in that silence and maintain the status quo, or we



can begin the conversations that allow students to feel seen and heard, and to participate in dismantling oppressive systems. The conversations, topics, and lessons I present in this book most likely dramatically deviate from your own educational experiences, as well as traditional educational pedagogy. However, claiming “This is how things have always been done” doesn’t mean certain practices should be perpetuated. Deviating from the norm can be intimidating, but at the end of the day, we’re here to meet the needs of our students rather than center our own comfort.

All students deserve a structured environment where they can feel safe to ask questions, express themselves, and share aspects of their identity. But to many educators, it feels as though we’re navigating through a minefield in the dark. There is an urgency to invite students to share their lives and experiences in the classroom, and often their stories are intertwined with structures of systemic racism, classism, homophobia, and neurotypical standards. But if so many of us have been raised to pretend to not see race, confronting our own discomfort can often be the largest obstacle we face in cultivating an antibias antiracist classroom. So what can we do? We can take steps to set ourselves up for success, while also preparing ourselves for mistakes that will be made along the way.

I have had the opportunity to speak and work with teachers throughout the United States over the past few years, and two trends stand out: One is the desire of teachers to address current events, politics, race, and social justice issues in the classroom, and the other is the climate of fear surrounding it. The second is a fear that educators have expressed about doing this very thing. I’ve heard countless worries about the lack of support from administration, parents and caregivers lashing out, and feeling unequipped to facilitate these conversations. The goal of this book is to be transparent about the challenges that educators committed to antibias and antiracism face every day, and to provide concrete strategies to overcome some of the barriers that prevent us from engaging in this work.

While I recognize that my experience in the classroom has largely been successful due to the support of my community, not all teachers work in schools that accept this type of work. To be mindful of this reality, I have sought out the perspectives of teachers and administrators across the country to shed light on strategies that have been successful in diverse, homogenous, conservative, liberal, urban, and rural schools. My hope is that any educator will be able to pick up this book and identify a strategy they feel could be implemented or adapted to fit their own needs.



## Let's Get on the Same Page

In each chapter, you'll see some repetitive language, and it's important to get on the same page before we begin.

I describe both *race* and *gender* as social constructions, meaning these ideas were created by people, for specific purposes and categorization. There is no biological basis for race. *Gender*, *sex*, and *sexuality* are all different words with different meanings. Gender reflects the cultural norms and expectations of a society based on biological sex, while sexuality refers to one's sexual orientation. The concepts of both race and gender are also proven to be socially constructed ideas because they differ depending on cultural context (for example, when I received a fellowship to study in South Africa, I quickly learned that certain East Asian groups are considered "white"). For the purpose of this book, examples are contextualized within United States history and culture. Additionally, there are many disagreements about what constitutes *racism*. I lean toward the definition that racism is the product of power and prejudice. Racism is also multifaceted, and exists on individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels. While it's easy to point out a racist in a white hood and robe, we must pay attention to how our individual actions and beliefs uphold racial inequities. In the Point Made Learning documentary "*I'm Not Racist . . . Am I?*" a group of students and their facilitator note that even if all of the overtly racist people in the country were shot into outer space, we would still exist in a racist society due to the presence of institutional and structural racism within every industry. Whenever any person reinforces white dominant culture or values, this perpetuates racism. As activist Angela Davis reminds us, "In a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist." It is simply not enough to excuse ourselves from this work because we see ourselves as a good, nonracist person. It requires a constant practice of taking action to dismantle white supremacy and pushing back against white dominant culture and anti-Blackness.

- » When I talk about *race*, this is a socially constructed hierarchy based on power and prejudice, with whiteness perched at the very top.
- » While there is often disagreement about whether BIPOC can be racist, it is important to remember that everyone, regardless of their identity, is capable of colorism, bigotry, and holding biased beliefs.



- »» When I talk about *gender*, this is also a socially constructed idea, and is not meant to be confused with *sex*. There is also nuance between *gender identity* (how one identifies their gender) and *gender expression* (how one outwardly expresses themselves).
- »» You'll also see the acronym *ABAR*, which stands for antibias antiracist. ABAR is rooted in action by identifying our biases in order to dismantle white supremacist beliefs, values, and culture.
- »» I also use the term *BIPOC*, which stands for Black, Indigenous, people of color. However, this should not be used as an umbrella term when specifically identifying a community. For example, we must name that Black students are disproportionately suspended in schools and face harsher disciplinary actions compared to white students, rather than BIPOC students.
- »» BIPOC and nonwhite are not synonymous. For example, Ashkenazi Jews whose descendants are of Eastern European roots are not considered white (especially in the eyes of white supremacists) but are not considered people of color.

## What You'll Find in This Book

Teachers are notorious self-critics. Every day, we are expected to perform miracles with limited resources, time, and too often, support. In order for us to make progress in this work, it is important to be vulnerable and transparent. The barriers I address in this book were chosen based on feedback from educators all over the United States when asked, "What prevents you from pursuing social justice in your classroom?" You will read stories from educators, administrators, and family members, many of whom are struggling with the same questions and challenges you are currently facing. These include

- »» How do I get started if I'm new to ABAR work?
- »» There are so many things I need to get through in a school day. How can I make time for ABAR work?





- » How can I hold space for difficult conversations in my class?
- » Parents and caregivers have a lot of strong feelings about ABAR work. How can I work with them?
- » My administration seems reluctant when it comes to ABAR in the classroom. How can I convince them to support this work?
- » What does ABAR look like if all or most of my students are white?
- » What does developmentally appropriate ABAR look like for younger students?
- » What does ABAR look like if I teach STEM subjects?

So, what will this work look like in practice? Each chapter is organized in a similar format and provides a framework for tackling each barrier from a proactive stance.

## Setting Yourself Up for Success

In a tribute to my parents' words of wisdom, this section will help you hope for the best and plan for the worst through proactive strategies that should be set up before you even begin teaching. While I can only speak from my experiences in the classroom through my own personal lens, it is important to me that a variety of perspectives are represented. For example, if you're a STEM educator wondering how to incorporate ABAR into your work, I can share my experiences, but it will also be helpful to hear the successes of other STEM teachers, and learn from the resources that have supported their work. You'll also hear from a number of educators, administrators, and family members from different schools and communities who are committed to finding ways to create sustainable cultures around ABAR and culturally responsive teaching.

A huge key to success in this work is the ability to invite in and respect different perspectives, both with students and adults. My hope in bringing in a diverse variety of voices is to help educators understand where families, administrators, and colleagues are coming from.



The key is to remain solutions-oriented and identify the root cause of concerns in order to best address them.

## Taking Action in the Classroom

I have a strong dislike for educator books or trainings that live solely in the abstract. When I read a teaching book or attend a professional development session, I want to be able to walk away with something concrete that I can implement right away. In this section, you'll find sample lessons, conversation starters, anchor charts, communication templates, student samples, and real conversations that have occurred in classrooms.

## Creating a Sustainable Practice

As often as we ask our students to reflect upon what they've learned, are we creating space to ask ourselves important questions? How did this strategy go? What parts were successful? What lesson can we take into a future interaction? Teachers must be able to identify what is working, and what isn't, in order to avoid placing energy into impractical and unsustainable habits. Sometimes this may be a personal reflection, a class or family survey, or an observation of the classroom climate and culture.

There is no "one and done" lesson or book when it comes to social justice and culturally reflective teaching. This book is meant to help educators break habits that are holding them back from this work, as well as build positive, sustainable teaching for the future. Once you've found success in one lesson or unit, it's important to identify what worked, and what needs to be adapted for the long term. This section also includes additional resources, organizations, books, and trainings that will help educators build their practice over time.

One of my former school's operating norms for staff is "Use your airplane mask," meaning you have to be able to take care of yourself before you can take care of others (especially children!). Teaching is a marathon, not a sprint. When approximately half of teachers quit before spending five years in the classroom, self-care and burnout awareness are crucial. The nature of ABAR work can deplete not only your energy,



but also your emotional capacity. It can often be a way to invigorate and energize teachers, but it can be extremely taxing when you don't advocate for your own well-being along the way.

As intimidating as this work may seem to those just getting started, the consequence of not talking about ABAR, equity, and inclusion in schools is far more severe. No one is born knowing how to be an active and engaged citizen. This is something we have to learn, and this is where schools and educators have a responsibility to ensure that students understand how our society operates, and how to communicate with people across the political and cultural spectrum. At the end of the day, we cannot fix problems we do not talk about, or that we cannot name. We can't hope to eradicate systemic racism if we don't understand race. We can't bridge political polarization if we don't teach our children to seek to understand, rather than argue to win. Our personal discomfort as educators cannot become barriers that prevent us from creating brave spaces for our students.

Before you dive into this book, I also want to own that I am a biased, imperfect, evolving individual. My identity and positionality have shaped my experiences and the way I see the world, and despite being in this field for some time, I am still incredibly ignorant. I am sure that for some readers, this book will fall short. Please know that I truly believe that the more I become aware of my limitations and the more I learn, the better I can do. If I get something wrong, I invite you to call me in.

I warn you now that there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to ABAR work. For some schools, this might look like encouraging your students to give up or spend their privilege and power to ensure equity and access for others, and in other schools it might look like helping your students use their own voices to advocate for themselves and their communities. The strategies in this book may not work for everyone, but my hope is that they empower educators to take the first step toward reimagining the possibilities of how ABAR can transform schools and the world at large. There will be moments of discomfort. You will be questioned, others might push back, and there will be moments when you feel isolated in this work, but at the end of the day, I promise you that you are not alone.

It's been months since schools moved away from brick-and-mortar buildings and into virtual spaces. While some have returned to classrooms, nearly every student in the United States has been impacted by



distance schooling or crisis schooling. We do not know when students and teachers will be able to gather and co-create a physical learning community. Everywhere you look, we are experiencing collective trauma as our country burns.

I try to keep reminding myself that fire can be cleansing. Fire can be used to purify and start over. We knew that inequities were prevalent in education before the pandemic began, and distance schooling has only exacerbated these injustices. The number one request I have of educators as we face an uncertain future is this: When we experience trauma, it is in our nature to crave what is comfortable and familiar. We have to remember that not only are students experiencing and processing trauma, but so are educators and caregivers. Where we are getting it wrong is that we're expecting teachers to go back to the comfortable and easy places when we know these practices weren't benefiting students in the first place. When we resort to traditional methods because they're familiar yet harmful, this is engaging in a trauma response.

However, we're not interested in returning to normal. As my friends and colleagues Kass and Cornelius Minor have said, "Normal left too many of us in the margins." While nostalgia and comfort keep calling us back, remember that this is a truly unique opportunity to build something better for our children, our schools, and ourselves. This is our opportunity to reinvent normal and dismantle oppressive systems that we always knew existed, but have a new light shed upon them. Antibias and antiracist education is not optional. Educators, parents, and caregivers need to commit themselves to ensuring that their non-Black children will not endanger the lives of their Black peers. All people need to educate themselves about the insidious nature of white supremacy, and correct the imbalance that places Black, Brown, disabled, under-resourced, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ lives on a lesser plane than others. It is not enough to proclaim your hatred of injustice, but rather ask how you are showing love to your most marginalized students. The world we seek to build has never existed, but we must be courageous, remind ourselves that what is right is often not what is easy, and continue to dream. Amid the chaos, our path ahead is clear. This is our chance to dream big and build something better.

{1}

# How Do I Get Started If I'm New to ABAR Work?



**I'M AN AVID HORROR MOVIE FAN.** My friends find it simultaneously amusing and strange that my idea of a relaxing evening is scrolling through streaming apps trying to find a horror film that I haven't seen. Not long ago, a friend and I were talking about an upcoming movie and he asked me, "What do you think makes people feel scared?"

As a horror enthusiast, I've always been fascinated by this question and I've come to believe that fear comes from a lack of control (aside from the amygdala in our brain). It's not about not knowing the outcome of a situation. It's the inability to predict how, what, or when something is going to happen. Take the example of riding a roller coaster. You know it's going to drop. You know that slow ride up the hill is going to make your heart race. Even though you know exactly what's going to happen, the fear comes from not having any control over the impending drop. For some people, this fear is thrilling and exciting, and for others, their worst nightmare is a trip to Six Flags.



For educators who are new to antibias and antiracist (ABAR) work, there may be a myriad of worries coming from different directions. The good news is that you do not have to take on everything at once. We can start to make progress by confronting what makes us nervous and be proactive by setting ourselves up for success. I believe the insecurities that can hold educators back stem from the same place—the unpredictability of classroom conversations, recognizing your own ignorance, the fear of making mistakes or not knowing enough, and not knowing how students, caregivers, and administrators might react. Over the past few years, I've spoken to hundreds of teachers about why they're not engaging with their students in conversations surrounding ABAR issues. Given the history of racial injustice and social inequality in the United States, as well as events unfolding every day, it's extremely hard to ignore these topics. The majority express their desire to engage but avoid ABAR topics because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. In these moments, we must remember that too much is at risk to avoid this work, and centering our own comfort is a reflection of the privilege we hold.

When educators wonder how they can work around defensive caregivers and unsupportive administrators, some fear being accused of pushing a political agenda on students, and others feel completely overwhelmed by finding resources, self-educating, and educating their students. Despite having read up on critical race theory and culturally responsive practices, they have no idea what concrete steps to take in order to actively engage with students or write a lesson plan.

If any of these concerns resonate with you, rest assured that you are not alone. Taking the first step to address issues around ABAR can be intimidating. Before you begin, it helps to accept that mistakes will be made. Sometimes the lessons and conversations with students will be complicated and messy, and you should get comfortable saying, "That's a good question, I don't know!" To build a student-centered community of learners, educators have to engage in deep self-reflection and identity work, de-center themselves, and relinquish some control of their classroom. While this may sound scary, it's possible to set yourself up with strategic, proactive choices.



## Setting Yourself Up for Success: Develop a Lens for Antibias Practices, and Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Every educator I interviewed for this book was asked the same question: What advice would you give to a teacher just starting out with developing their ABAR lens and practice? Nearly everyone gave a variation of the same response: You have to start with yourself. An ABAR teaching practice does not solely exist between the time the school bell rings and the time students are dismissed. While I have been engaged in this work for a number of years, I'm constantly reading and listening to people who have lived experiences different from my own. Like most folks, I sometimes feel uncomfortable when presented with a perspective that pushes against a preconceived notion, but I try to view these moments as opportunities to grow and learn. Accept that ABAR work is open-ended and abstract. Because our learning and comfort exist on a spectrum, there is no finish line to cross.

### Get to Know Yourself

If you've never reflected on your identity and experiences, it is crucial that you begin before engaging in ABAR work with students. You cannot expect or ask your students to share parts of themselves that you yourself have not unpacked. Have you spent time reflecting on the intersections of your own identity? How do you experience privilege and oppression? How did your identity impact your own experience as a student? It's difficult to help guide students to develop their personal identities or address their biases if you're not familiar with your own.

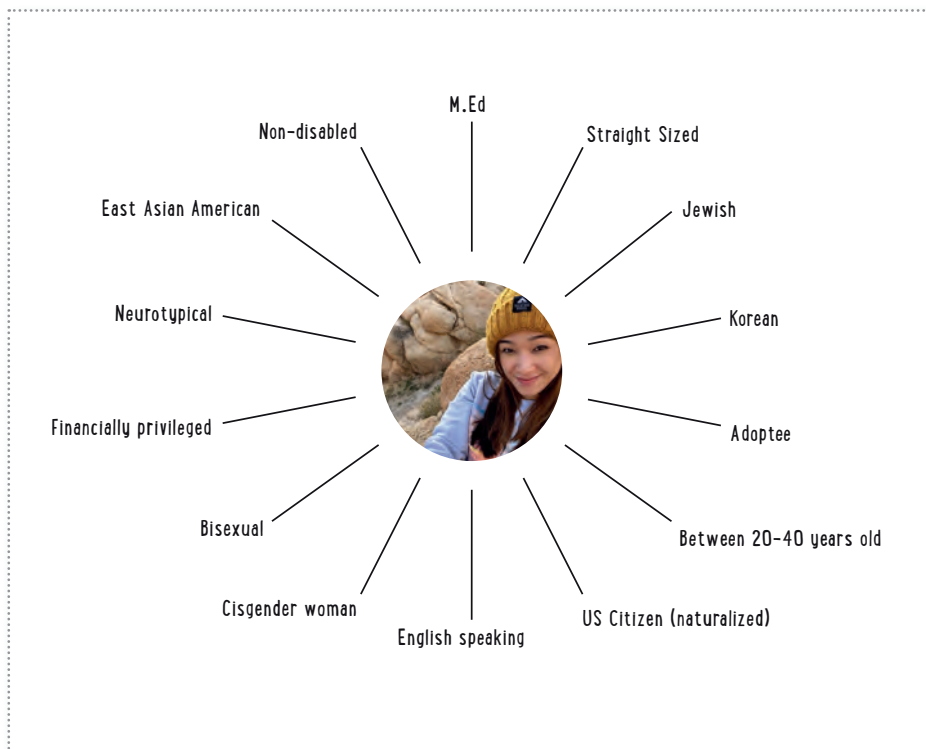
The three images in Figures 1-1a, 1-1b, and 1-1c are personal identity maps I created based on the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black female legal scholar and activist who coined the term *intersectionality*. The term appeared in the *Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography* in 2013, defined as "The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems



of discrimination or disadvantage” (Castree, Kitchin, and Rogers 2013). In these identity maps, I’ve shown my personal identity markers (race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so on), and highlighted the parts of my identity that are important to me, contrasted with the parts of my identity that I felt were the most validated by my teachers and schools.

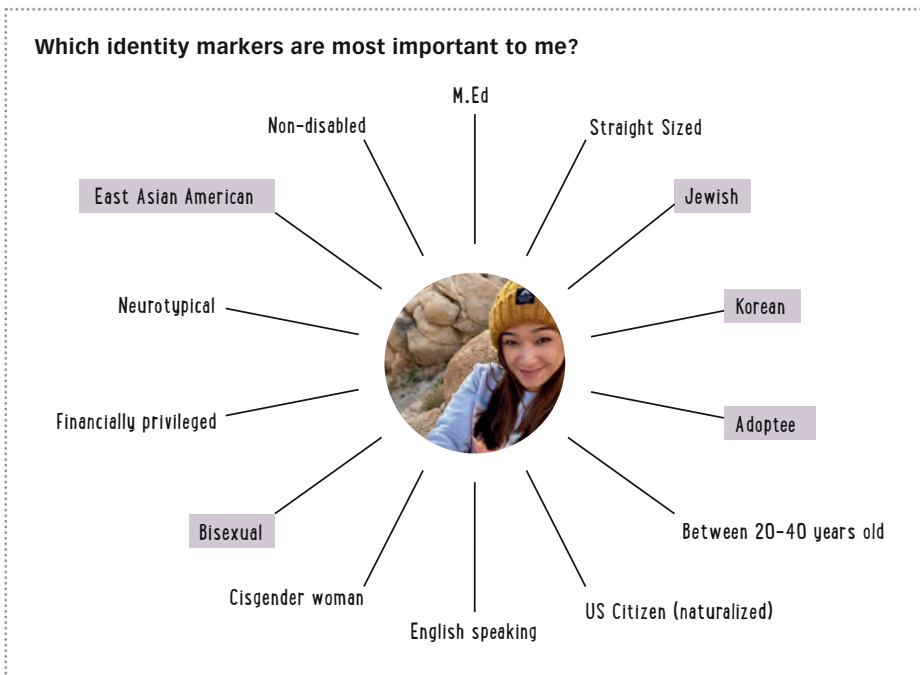
As you can see in the last map, the parts of my identity that were the most validated did not overlap with the parts of me that I deem to be the most important. Additionally, these specific social identity markers are also where I hold the most privilege (when I say *privilege*, I think about the ways in which I’m set up to thrive in our society due to my social identities). Processes like these have helped me to reflect upon the ways in which I see and value my students in class, as well as where I might hold biases or preferences, and how I can become more aware in order to dismantle them.

Try creating your own identity map. Use the template in Figure 1–2. While it certainly doesn’t include all possible identity markers, it’s a good place to start.

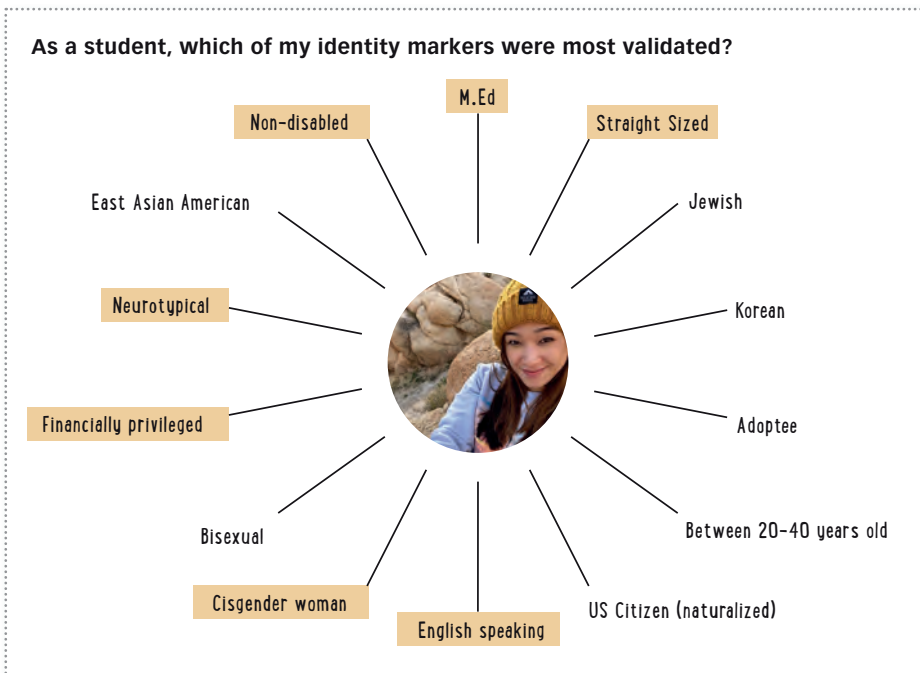


**FIGURE 1-1A** Personal Identity Map





**FIGURE 1-1B** Personal Identity Map with Most Important Characteristics Highlighted



**FIGURE 1-1C** Personal Identity Map with Characteristics Validated in School

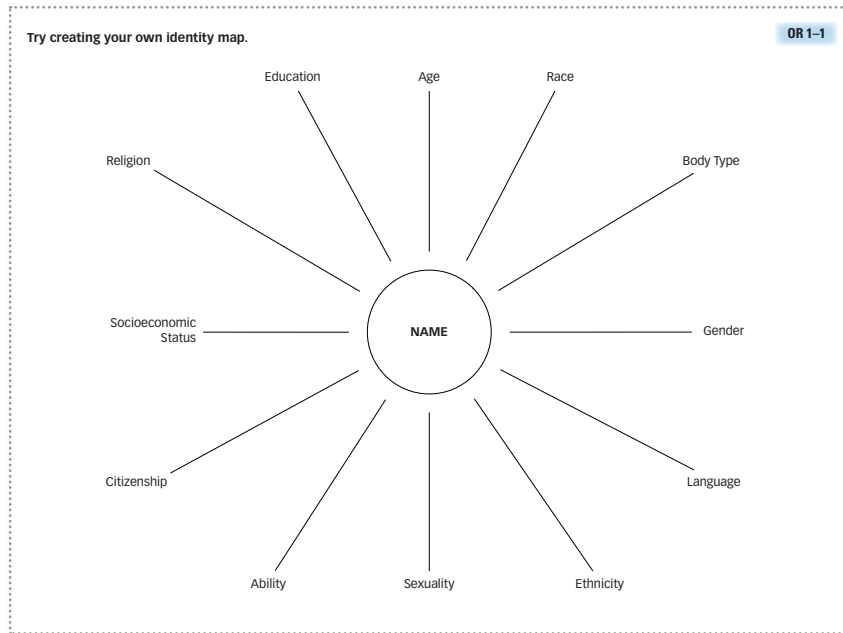


FIGURE 1-2 Identity Map Template

## Practice Viewing Students, Families, and Communities Through an Asset Lens

Looking back at my own journey, I cringe when I think about how I used to proudly share that I taught in a Title-1 school. There are so many words used to describe students and schools, like *urban* and *disadvantaged*, that carry so much negative weight, yet educators use them to convey defining characteristics of their environments. Think about the language you use when you refer to your students and ask yourself whether you use phrases that focus on what they can do as opposed to what they can't. For example, the label *English Language Learner* views the student through a deficit lens because they are not fully fluent in English, while an asset lens may view the student as an *emerging bilingual*, which celebrates their access to two languages. Education researcher and teacher Gloria Ladson-Billings wrote about the "education debt," which focuses on inequitable systems, as opposed to the "achievement gap," which blames students for their perceived lack of success (Ladson-Billings 2006). While new ABAR terminology



is constantly becoming more visible in mainstream spaces, I personally use social media to keep up to date, especially by learning from people who have very different identities than my own.

Once you know who your students are, how are you continuing to educate yourself about their identities and backgrounds? Understanding the broader social and political contexts that have shaped students' identities is also an integral part of community building. I recently coached a teacher who was concerned about supporting her Southeast Asian students. Together we discussed the impact of US participation in the Vietnam War (this history is almost always told from the US perspective), but this time from the voices of Vietnamese scholars and writers. We also studied postwar immigrants' stories and the impact of immigration policies on the community. To be culturally responsive, you have to recognize and understand the cultures your students are coming from.

### **Think of Yourself as a Community Educator**

Dr. Sara Kersey (she/her), who teaches and advises graduate students in UCLA's Teacher Education Program, asks her cohort to shift their lens from classroom teachers to community educators and to think about how teachers participate as community members in places where they teach. Dr. Kersey (2019) emphasizes the importance of viewing students, families, and communities through an asset lens. Many teachers do not live in the neighborhoods where they teach due to biases they hold about the communities, and despite working in these schools week after week, they remain outsiders.

So how can teachers think of themselves as community educators if we do not live where we teach? First and foremost, Kersey suggests we spend time in the areas around our school, even if we do not live there. "Are you aware of local shops, restaurants, and community spaces? Do you know where your students spend time outside of school? When you ask them about what they do in their free time, do you listen without judgment? Before the school year begins, try to go out and familiarize yourself with the community around your school. Don't just drive around as an observer but try to engage with the people you encounter. Ask what they love about their neighborhood, how long they've lived there, and try to listen and learn about the wealth of the community and the resources that exist."



## Taking Action in the Classroom: Create Space for Students' Identities with Community-Building Activities

A practical way to get started is to plan community-building activities that allow space for students' identities. We want students to be able to share their thoughts and feelings about who they are—similarities, differences, and personal experiences. The beginning of the year is the best time for both teachers and students to practice their fluency when describing personal feelings, experiences, and opinions. It will help establish a strong foundation for the year. However, you'll want to revisit community-building activities throughout the year.

### "I Am From" Poems

One community-building activity that invites students to share about themselves and also gives insight into their lives outside of school is an "I Am From" poem. This activity is inspired by George Ella Lyon's poem "Where I'm From" (1993). Figure 1-3 is an example of one student's poem.

Start with the organizer in Figure 1-4. Use it to model how students can think about and describe the uniqueness of their homes, families, and identities. You can brainstorm as a class

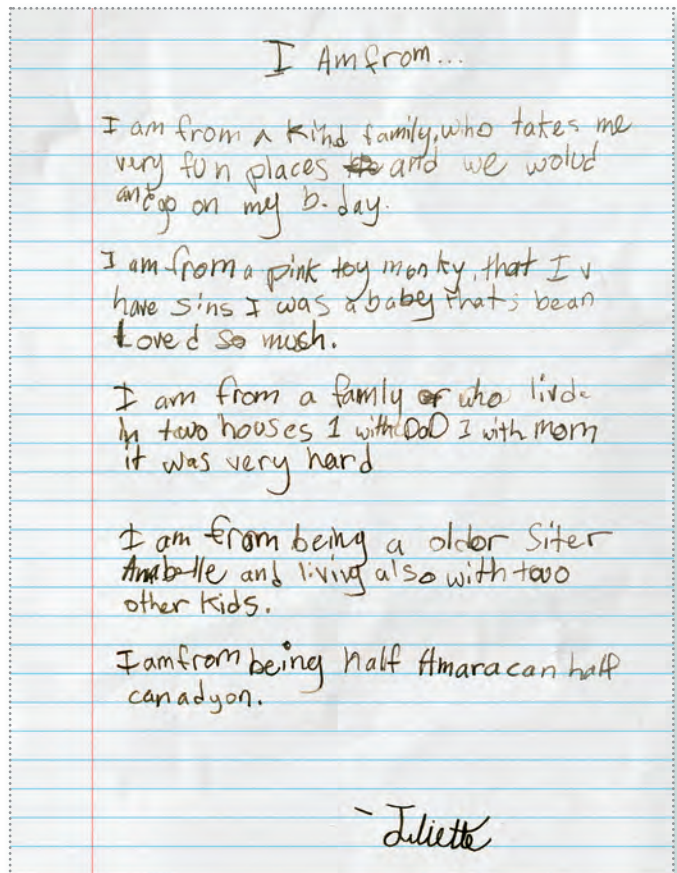


FIGURE 1-3 Student "I Am From" Poem



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ OR 1-2

**"I Am From" Poem Organizer**  
 (Think about your **FIVE SENSES!** What do you **SEE, HEAR, SMELL, TASTE, and FEEL?**)

Favorite things in your home	What does your home look like?
Your family members (names, nicknames)	Favorite foods (and foods you eat on special occasions)
Family traditions	Things that people in your family always say to you

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**FIGURE 1-4**  
 "I Am From" Planning Organizer

Countries, states, or cities where your family is from	Languages spoken in your family (words/phrases your family says to each other in your language)
Where do you keep important things in your home?	Things, people, or places you see in your neighborhood
Favorite places you go with your family	Your hobbies, and what you like to do in your free time

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one prompt at a time or allow students to go at their own pace by giving them the organizer (either online or a hard copy). I ask quick finishers to reread and add sensory details to bring their descriptions to life, or specific moments in time. For example, if I wrote, “I am from my pet bunny,” I can add, “I am from my pet bunny *who is soft, fluffy, and twitches her nose.*”

With younger students, slow down the process; it might take a few days to teach them how to write “I Am From” poems. Start by showing examples (use your poem!) and reading them aloud. Then brainstorm ideas. You might have students turn and talk as a way to rehearse their thinking. Once students understand what they’ll be working on, use an organizer that breaks down the sections of the poem. Use the organizer in Figure 1–5 or change it to fit the needs of your students. Remember, this activity can be tailored to your students based on what they are comfortable sharing, and there’s no one correct way to craft this poem.

If you’re asking your students to be vulnerable with you and their classmates, it’s important to remember that trust and respect go both ways. I strongly believe that educators have to work consistently to humanize themselves to their students, and must view themselves as partners, not leaders, in this work. Modeling how to brainstorm ideas for this poem is an effective way for me to share aspects of my childhood, interests, and personal experiences. See Figure 1–6 for my “I Am From” poem.

As I drafted and modeled the writing process for this poem, different parts of my story resonated with my students. Some were delighted to learn that I had a stuffed animal that I loved, and a few related to not physically resembling members of their own families. “I Am From” poems can be used in different ways and at different times—as beginning of the year introductions, end of the year reflections, poetry unit extensions, and as tools to develop writing through elaborative details and figurative language.



OR 1-3

**I am** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Your name)

**I am from** \_\_\_\_\_  
(What do you like doing? What are you good at?)

**I am from** \_\_\_\_\_  
(People who are important to you)

**I am from** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Family traditions)

**I am from** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Favorite foods or special foods you like from home)

**I am a** \_\_\_\_\_  
(What do you look like?)

**I am from** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Important events in your life)

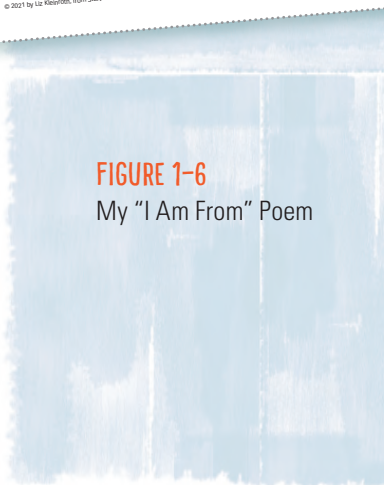
**I am from** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Your favorite books, movies, shows)

**I am from** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Where you live)

**I am** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Your name)

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**FIGURE 1-5**  
"I Am From" Organizer  
for Younger Students



**FIGURE 1-6**  
My "I Am From" Poem

Ms. Liz

**I AM FROM**

I am from a yellow house on a quiet street, where the snow never gets plowed in the winter.

I am from a stuffed animal monkey that has been loved so much for so long, its fur is falling out and its eyes have become scratched and worn.

I am from hot porridge on bad days, and waffle breakfasts on weekend mornings.

I am from a family full of love, even though my parents and I do not look alike.

I am from a lamp shaped like a goose, magical night lights, and checking for aliens under the bed.

I am from Friday night Shabbat dinners, and watching TV sandwiched between my parents on the couch.

I am from Chinese food and horror movie marathons with friends, and hiding under the covers.

I am from merry-go-rounds of flying horses, capturing rings, and salt water taffy.

I am from, "Work hard, play hard," and, "Don't sweat the small stuff."

I am from the life of a transplant, moving from the east to the west coast.

I am from places where I'm not sure if I belong.

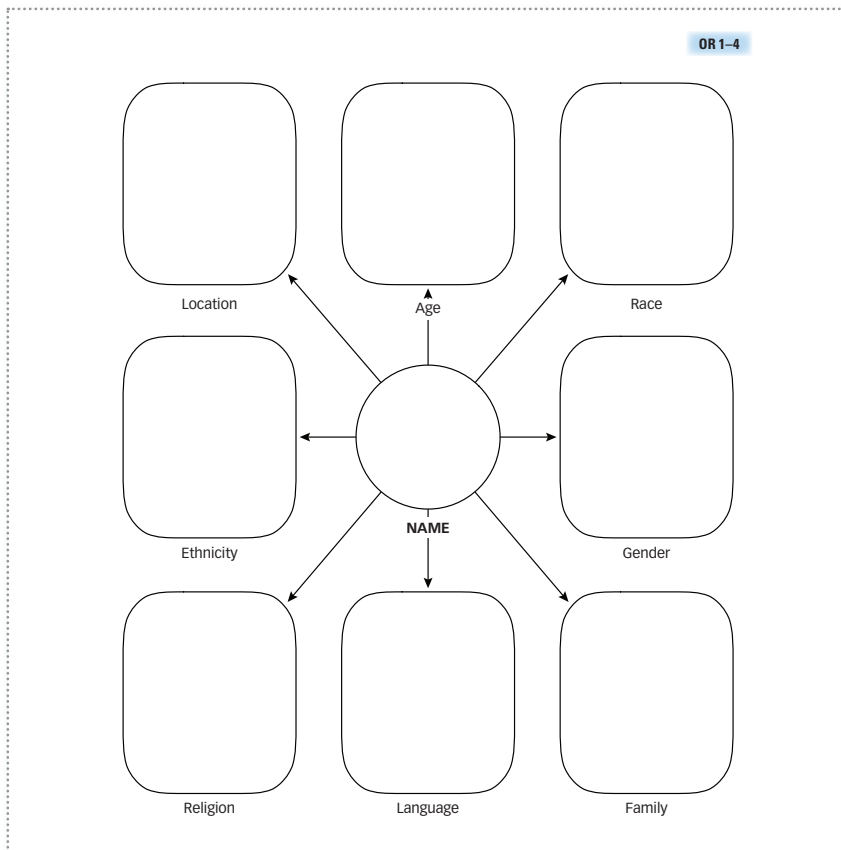


## Identity Maps

After creating and reflecting on your identity map, have students create their own. Use the template in Figure 1–7 or create your own.

It can be helpful for students to make identity maps at the beginning and end of the year. For younger students, it's a tremendous opportunity for them to see their writing progress side by side. For all students, it's an opportunity to reflect on how much they've changed in a year and recognize their own growth and self-understanding. Figures 1–8a and 1–8b show third grader David's identity maps from the beginning and end of the year.

Identity maps can also be created in different ways, and students do not have to be restricted to a particular design or layout. For students who love to draw or enjoy graphic novels, identity one-pagers



**FIGURE 1-7** Identity Map II Template





like the one in Figure 1–9 are another way to share about themselves or their families. In this activity, students can choose to illustrate and

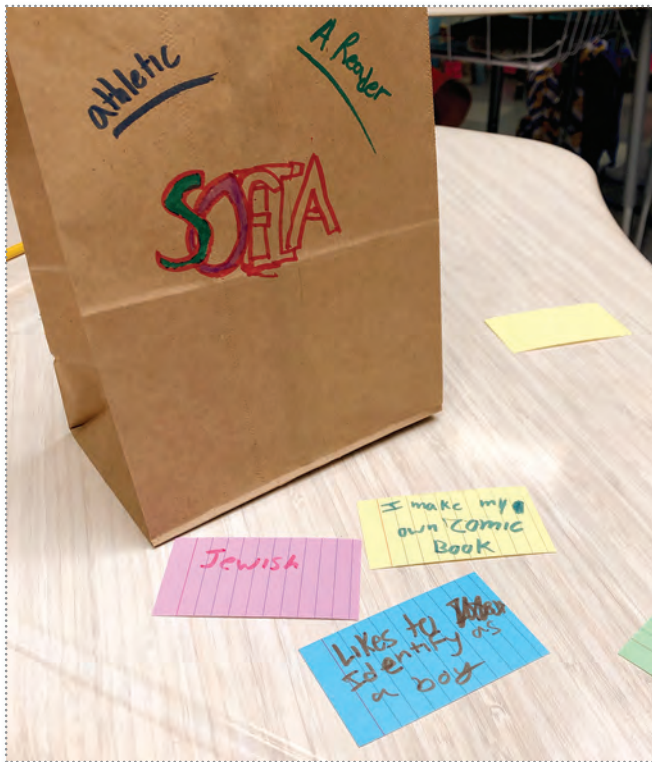


**FIGURES 1-8A AND 1-8B**

A Student's Beginning and End of the Year Identity Map







**FIGURE 1-10**  
A Student's Bio Bag Reveal

may be easy to process, while others may require days or weeks to grapple with and understand.

Sometimes when I'm working through my emotions or learning about an upsetting event, it helps to talk about how I'm feeling. Sometimes I like to journal. Sometimes I need to shut down and take a break and come back to it later. From my own self-understanding, I know it's important to create multiple ways for students to reflect and process.

Sometimes we're aware of how a conversation makes us feel in the moment, and at other times we feel the weight hours or days later. When we ask students to reflect on or process emotions and events, there should be no time limits. Give students choices about how and when they reflect. The responses in Figures 1-11 through 1-13 came from third- and fourth-grade students after they were asked questions about privilege, race, and age. Oftentimes the best way to gauge your students' emotional state is simply to ask, "How did learning about \_\_\_\_\_ make you feel?" Here are some additional reflection prompts:

- » Did you feel any personal connection to what we learned about today? If so, what did you connect to?
- » What questions do you still have about this topic?
- » On a scale of 1–10, how challenging was it to learn about this topic and why?

**FIGURES 1-11A AND 1-11B** Student Responses to the Question:  
 “What would you say to adults who think you’re too young to learn about current events?”

We can think the same way you do.

I would say I think we are big enough to learn about these things because most problems are about happening where we live

I feel it is important to learn about. I also feel uncomfortable talking about race. But I feel students should learn about it to learn how to stop racism.

**FIGURE 1-12** Student Reflection on Race

Some privileges I have are going to school and having enough money to sustain my family and having a working body and have both of my parents alive and not being discriminated by what color skin I was BORN with. I finally notice that I am very lucky to be who I am and all of these privileges I was born with.

**FIGURE 1-13** Student Reflection on Privilege



- »» Are there any ideas connected to this topic that you'd also like to learn about?
- »» As your teacher, how can I support your learning about this topic?

## Discover What Students Already Know

It's difficult to know what to teach unless you understand what your students already know. It's also hard to track your students' understandings unless you have some baseline data for comparison (especially if you teach in a school where data and testing are the be-all and end-all).

During the first few weeks of school, and again at the end of the year, I ask my students to answer a series of questions that reflect their understanding of terms and concepts such as *race*, *stereotyping*, *equality*, and *diversity*. Not only do these surveys show what my students know or don't know, but they also identify any misconceptions the students may have. Figure 1–14 shows a variety of questions that educators can use to identify prior knowledge and misconceptions.

One of the most rewarding parts of committing to ABAR work in the classroom is seeing how your students' understanding grows as you dig deeper into these conversations and lessons. Asking students to answer these questions at the beginning and near the end of the year allows you to quickly obtain information about how your students have grown and address any misconceptions that may still exist. Figures 1–15 and 1–16 show one

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ OR 1-5

**Social Justice Survey**

1. What are some things that you know about your identity?
2. Who are some people in your community?
3. What is race? What is racism?
4. What is gender?
5. What is diversity?
6. What does it mean for something to be equal?
7. What does it mean for something to be fair?
8. What is a stereotype? Can you give an example?
9. What does it mean for a person to have rights?
10. What is an activist? What are things that activists do?

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**FIGURE 1-14** Social Justice Student Survey Template



student's responses in August and May. Notice the reluctant and blank responses in August compared to the more confident and extensive way the student responds at the end of the school year.

Date: 8/30

**Social Justice Survey**

1. What is social justice? What do you think it means?  
I dont know
2. What is race?  
I dont know
3. What is racism?  
IDK  
I dont know
4. What is a stereotype? Can you give an example?  
for example a boy has pink shoes  
you are a girl and you say you cant where  
pink because your a boy
5. What does it mean for something to be "equal"?  
the answer to a math  
problem
6. What does it mean for something to be fair?  
Someone wants a dress at  
the mall and the another person wants it the store manager  
gives it to her friend that didnt even  
ask for it
7. What does it mean to have rights?  
I dont know
8. What is diversity? What is an example of diversity?  
I dont know
9. What is an activist? What are things that activists do?  
someone who invents something new?
10. What does it mean to be an ally or an advocate?  
I dont know

**FIGURE 1-15** Social Justice Student Survey August

**FIGURE 1-16** Social Justice Student Survey May

Date: 5/18

**Social Justice Survey**

1. What is social justice? What do you think it means?  
for me social justice is  
people with rights and problems  
trying to solve them.
2. What is race?  
Skin Color
3. What is racism? (cant really explain)  
people getting judged  
by skin color? or discrimination
4. What is a stereotype? Can you give an example?  
1) girls can only wear pink  
2) what people think is right
5. What does it mean for something to be "equal"?  
1) everyone gets the same
6. What does it mean for something to be fair?  
1) people get what they  
need.
7. What does it mean to have rights?  
? dont know how  
to explain .... (something they want to solve?)
8. What is diversity? What is an example of diversity?  
1) diversity (when people are different  
than each other)
9. What is an activist? What are things that activists do?  
1) someone who solves  
problems. 2) solve problems.  
3) save the world
10. What does it mean to be an upstander or an advocate?  
1) it means to stand up for someone  
who needs help.

## Creating a Sustainable Practice

Developing an ABAR practice is a lifelong journey without a finish line. There's no list of boxes to check. It sounds daunting, but this also means that we can self-pace and monitor our progress. Even when units and lessons go beautifully, we are never done. There is always more to learn and unlearn. In any industry, but especially in education, it is dangerous



when we get to a place where we think we've learned all there is to know. This is when we stop growing, and our students notice.

## How Do I Know If It's Working?

While there is no binder of answers or a script of how to talk to your students, there are questions that can help you assess your practice, build upon what is successful, and focus on areas of need.

- »» How did students respond to the community-building activities? Which one should I repeat?
- »» What did I learn about my students through the community-building activities?
- »» What evidence do I have that students feel seen in my classroom?
- »» Who speaks up the most? How are all students participating?
- »» Which students did I spend the most time with this week? Did I praise or redirect certain students more than others? Are there any patterns?
- »» Did I use deficit-based language to describe any of my students (even if it's internal self-talk)?

## Don't Reinvent the Wheel

While many educators new to ABAR work may feel lost when it comes to locating resources, it's important to know that you do not have to create everything from scratch. When I first entered the classroom, I felt there was a severe lack of books and resources for elementary classrooms, and I spent a lot of time modifying lessons that had been written for middle and high school students. These days, there is a myriad of fantastic ABAR material for all age groups, but some of the best resources aren't widely circulated.

### Organizations and Publications with Curriculum and Lessons:

- »» Learning for Justice, [www.learningforjustice.org](http://www.learningforjustice.org)
- » Teaching Hard History, [www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery](http://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery)



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- » Facing History and Ourselves, [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)
- » Rethinking Schools, <https://rethinkingschools.org>
- » Zinn Education Project, [www.zinnedproject.org](http://www.zinnedproject.org)
- » Museum education websites:
  - › Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, <https://nmaahc.si.edu>
  - › Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, <https://smithsonianapa.org>
  - › Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, <https://americanindian.si.edu/visit/washington/nnavm>
  - › Wing Luke Museum, [www.wingluke.org](http://www.wingluke.org)
  - › Museum of Tolerance, [www.museumoftolerance.com](http://www.museumoftolerance.com)
  - › US Holocaust Memorial Museum, [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)
  - › Arab American National Museum, <https://arabamericanmuseum.org>
  - › The Mexican Museum, [www.mexicanmuseum.org](http://www.mexicanmuseum.org)
  - › National Civil Rights Museum, [www.civilrightsmuseum.org](http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org)
- » Lee and Low Books, [www.leeandlow.com](http://www.leeandlow.com)

### Additional Self-Education

- » *Code Switch*, podcast created by NPR
- » *Nice White Parents*, podcast created by Serial and the *New York Times*
- » *Intersectionality Matters!*, podcast created by the African American Policy Forum
- » *Good Ancestor Podcast*, created by Layla F. Saad
- » *Asian Enough*, podcast created by the *Los Angeles Times*
- » *Disability After Dark*, podcast created by Andrew Gurza