



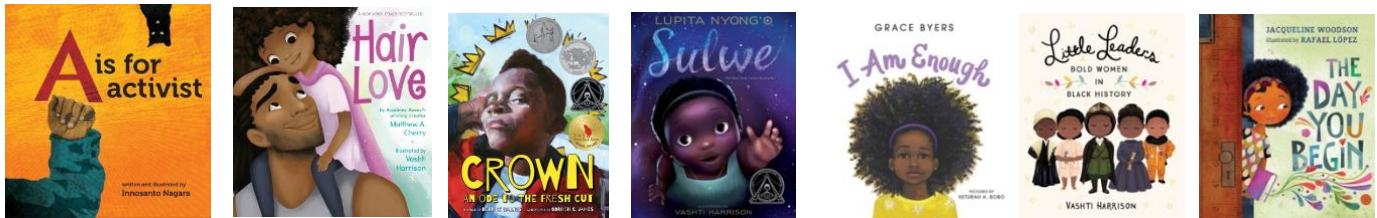
## Reach Out and Connect #14 Using Children's Books to Discuss Racism



We welcome **Shauntee Burns-Simpson**, Manager of School Support at The New York Public Library and the incoming President of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association.

### Q: Can you tell why children's books can be such a great tool to talk with young kids about race and racism?

- Kids pay attention to everything we say and do but they pay particular attention to our silence. So, we have to have these conversations and it can start at an early age.
- Research has shown that as early as 3 months, babies recognize race. They look more at faces that match the race of their caregivers. Many of us may worry if I point out race it will encourage racial bias, but the opposite is true. If you don't acknowledge race it forces children to draw their own conclusions.
- Parents, teachers, and all adults in kids' lives play an important role in helping children of all ages develop positive attitudes about race and diversity. And books are ultimately a gateway to make that happen.
- Children's books provide a good context for starting the conversation.
- When the characters look like them, they can relate to the story, they ultimately see themselves in the story. Then we have windows where the books provide a view into reality.



### Q: What role can pediatricians play in facilitating conversations about race and racism with the patients and families they serve?

- Pediatricians are uniquely positioned to both prevent and reduce racism as a key and trusted source of support for pediatric patients and their families. Pediatricians are in a position to plant the seeds early on that a diverse world is better and the way that the world should be.
- The clinics who are affiliated with Reach out and Read have the opportunity to infuse culture into programs to ensure that there is a representation of authors, images, and stories that reflect the diversity of children served in their pediatric practice.
- And I'm sure some folks are like, 'I don't have time to do this,' but it can be as simple as giving a book with a set of general questions to support it, and/or asking some of these questions during their well child visit.
- "We must dismantle racism at every level, from individual to institutional to systemic," said AAP President Sara "Sally" H. Goza, M.D., FAAP. "Our nation did not get here overnight, and the road to progress and healing will be long and difficult, but the work we have before us is essential. Our children's future will be built on these moments of reckoning."

### Q: What are some tips you have about having these conversations with young kids?

- These are things that youth librarians do all the time and we call it reference interviews. In short, it's a set of questions we ask so we can better understand what someone is really asking.
- When race comes up don't freeze up or be alarmed. Find out why they are thinking. Children can harbor biases from images, conversations they hear or maybe an experience they had in the playground/daycare. You have to be able to listen to them and learn. It's okay to not have the answers and say let me find out and really find the information out for them.

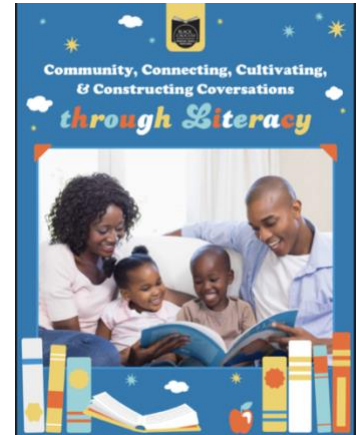
- Young children need caring adults to help them construct a positive sense of self and a respectful understanding of others.

#### Additional Resources:

- [Talking to Kids About Race](#), National Geographic
- [Q&A: How To Talk To Kids About George Floyd](#), NPR
- [On Point Radio: How To Talk To Your Kids About Race, Racism And Police Violence](#), Embrace Race
- [Let's Raise a Generation of Children Who Are Thoughtful, Informed, and Brave About Race](#), Embrace Race
- [How to Talk to your Children about Protests and Racism](#), American Academy of Pediatrics and CNN
- [How to Talk to Kids About Race: Books and Resources That Can Help](#), Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich
- [The development of implicit intergroup cognition](#)
- [Reading Is Only a Step on the Path to Anti-Racism](#)

**Q: Can you share with us a booklist of some great books that can help start these conversations?**

- [BCALA Book List](#)
- [Schomburg's Black Liberation List for Young Readers](#)
- [The Open Book Blog](#)
- [We Need Diverse Books](#)
- [The Brown Bookshelf](#)

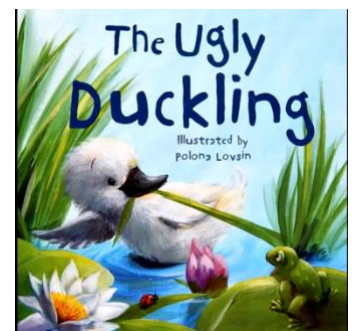


#### Read Aloud Demo with The Ugly Duckling

- Shauntee read, [The Ugly Duckling](#), illustrated by Polona Lovsin. This story follows a duck that looks different than his friends and is treated differently because of that. This clearly relates to the racism we unfortunately still see in our society today. The story gives us an opportunity to talk about these issues with young kids.
- NYPL has a great list of guided [suggestion questions](#) you can use to help foster these discussions.

#### Read Aloud Questions:

- Page 1- The eggs are hatching! Do you think mommy duck is happy to see her ducklings? I think so too!
- Page 2- Who can tell me what special means? For example, I say you are a very special person, I'm telling you I think you are great because you are unique in some way, something that makes me favor you.
- Page 3- Do you think the duckling like being stared at by the farm animals?
- Page 4- Why is the duckling leaving his family? Why is he sad?
- Page 5- Is it nice to call someone ugly or strange because they look different?
- Page 6- Look at the picture, what do you see? I see a cute duckling and frog in the water?
- Page 7- What does tease mean? Tease means making fun of someone and it can make the person upset or sad. Does the duckling look different?
- Page 8- Is he happy to be a swan? Why?
- Page 9- How did the duckling feel when he was young and not accepted? How did he feel when he was a swan?
- Page 10- Why do you think he was teased?



**Activity:** Use a piece of paper to draw your own duckling and color it anyway you want! This activity can be done at home, at school, or at the doctor's office. We want to make the duckling as special as we are!

For any questions about the content or our virtual programming, please email Kristen Rocha Aldrich at [krochaaldrich@reachoutandreadnyc.org](mailto:krochaaldrich@reachoutandreadnyc.org).