



early risers

Waking up to racial equity
in early childhood.

Discussion Guide

Season 6, Episode 3: *Sparkling Early Childhood Conversations About Race* – released
October 9, 2024

Learning Goal: Using videos and other media to give us conversational prompts about
race

Suggested Conversation Length: 60 minutes



Early Risers is a podcast focused on how to talk with young children about race. Hosted by Dianne Haulcy, the podcast invites early childhood experts into conversations about how parents, caregivers and early childhood educators can tackle this big topic with the little ones in their lives.

Background

Wouldn't it be great to play games for a living? That's a big part of John Sessler's job for PBS Kids. He tells Early Risers host Dianne Haulcy the work is fun, but not simple. PBS Kids content is required to meet learning goals while also expanding what children know about race and culture. PBS Kids starts with diverse teams of content creators and ends with children as active and curious consumers of media.

Guest Bio

Now with PBS Kids, John Sessler has spent 20 years designing experiences that develop young learners' empathy, curiosity, reflection, and critical thinking skills.

General Facilitator Tips

- Read through all the questions first.
- Reiterate that the purpose of the discussion is to learn from each other.
- Create an agreement with everyone in the discussion group that helps create a safe, nonjudgmental atmosphere—talking about race can be difficult.
- Be sensitive as to how people identify.
- Be prepared for a response to any remarks that might be offensive. The person saying it may not be aware that it is offensive, so be gentle in pointing it out.

Group Agreements

Ground rules and group agreements are a way to respect safety. Ask members to brainstorm and collectively determine group agreements. Here are some agreements tools to use as a reference:

- [Group agreement information from Seeds for Change](#)
- [Community Agreements tool from Just Lead Washington](#)
- [Sample group agreement from GSAFE](#)

Questions for Discussion

- John says that he does not remember having a conversation about race until he was much older, perhaps in high school or college. Do you think this is a common experience for white people? Why or why not?
- John says PBS Kids thinks about representation in their media and that children notice when they are not represented in media. How might an African American, Asian or Latino child notice and be aware of representation in the media you share with them?
- John explains that the [PBS KIDS Talk About: Race & Racism](#) videos were created after the murder of George Floyd. Review one or two of these videos and discuss how these might be helpful in getting you prepared to have a tough conversation about race with young children.
- According to John, one of the purposes of the videos was to help give parents and adults prompts to have conversations about race. After watching at least a couple of these videos, talk about which prompts you will take with you to use in the future.
- John recounts a family bus trip he took when he was six years old in Chicago and how he noticed they were the only white people on the bus. His parents never said anything about the experience, but he never forgot it. He tells Dianne he wished his parents had the language to talk to him about their experience. Discuss a missed opportunity you experienced, either as a child or as an adult, to talk about race. Talk through the conversation you wish you could have had.
- John talks about the importance of young children learning socioemotional and executive functioning skills, which is a focus for PBS Kids. Discuss how talking about race with young children can build up a child's socioemotional skills.
- John talks about "Lyla in the Loop," a new PBS Kids show about an African American family that owns a diner in the city. He discusses the importance of Lila wearing her hair bonnet when she goes to bed. Why do you think this is so important? What other pieces of cultural representation that show young children's experiences more authentically might be important for them to see??
- What are ways you can encourage young children to create their own media, so they learn about race and racism and how to talk about it?
- John and Dianne talk about stereotypical images that may be built into AI. John mentions that you could use Chat GPT to draw certain images with certain commands (i.e., a basketball player). This activity could be a great opportunity to teach children how to ask questions about the results they receive, which may be stereotypical (e.g., "Are all the basketball players Black?"). Try using Chat GPT to draw a basketball player, or something else, and discuss the response you get with the group.

Closing the Discussion

As you close your discussion, acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Share additional resources participants can use to continue learning.

Additional Resources

- [Lyla in the Loop](#)
- PBS Kids [video on playful learning](#)
- PBS Kids [How to Talk to Children About Race](#)
- Sesame Workshop: [Explaining Race](#)

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