



# early risers

Waking up to racial equity  
in early childhood.

## Discussion Guide

Special Episode: *How Children's Books can be Tools for Resistance: A Conversation with Dr. Ibram X. Kendi* released November 30, 2022

**Learning Goal:** To develop a deeper understanding of the importance of racially diverse authors in the development of all children and the importance of children of color seeing themselves in literature.

**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

While there is more racial diversity in children's books today compared to a decade ago, progress has been slow. For instance, in 2020, children's books written about racially diverse characters or subjects represented only about one third of all new children's books. Data shows that in 2019 there were more books with animals as the main characters compared to books with main characters from diverse backgrounds. In this episode we discuss the importance of representation in children's books.

Dr. Kendi's books for children are great tools for opening up conversations with young children about the past and how it's relevant now, including a legacy of Black and Indigenous resistance.

## Guest Bio

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi is an award-winning author and historian known for his work around antiracism, including the best-selling book "How to be an Antiracist." Kendi is also a father to a young daughter. A few years ago, he started writing books for children. His most recent picture book, "Magnolia Flower," was inspired by a short story by Zora Neale Hurston. She was an African American writer, anthropologist, and filmmaker who documented Black life in the early 20th century. "Magnolia Flower" tells the story of an Afro-Cherokee girl whose parents fled slavery and the Trail of Tears.

## 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

- The story of *Magnolia Flower* is one of hope and love in the midst of oppression. Where do you think children that have enslavement and genocide in their ancestry learn to hope and love? How does *Magnolia Flower* learn to hope and love?
- If you were reading this book to your child or children in your care, how would you explain slavery and the Trail of Tears?
- Dr. Kendi is a skilled author who began writing children's books only a few years ago. What language could you borrow from "*Magnolia Flower*" to talk to your own children about race and the history of oppression in America?
- During the interview with Dianne, Dr. Kendi says this about his book: "I think it's helpful for people to realize that even during painful, violent moments like forced removal of Native peoples, like slavery, even in those moments people still found love." Do you agree or disagree? How would you communicate this idea to a child?
- Name three children's books written by racially diverse authors that you have in your children's book library. Who are some of your favorite BIPOC children's book authors?
- Both Dianne and Dr. Kendi talked about the importance of children of color being able to "see" themselves in literature. Why do you think this is important? Do you ever think about how few opportunities BIPOC children have to see themselves?
- How do you think it affects white children if all they see are white people and animals in children's books?
- Do you think there are differences between a white author including BIPOC people in a book they have written and BIPOC authors writing about their own communities? Do you think both are important? Why or why not?
- Toward the close of the interview, Dianne asks Dr. Kendi about the mention of his book, "*Anti Racist Baby*," during the confirmation hearings of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. His response was that he was not completely surprised because he had been facing opposition of the book for a couple of years. Why do you think there is so much opposition against this particular book? Do you agree with the opposition or not?

## Closing the Discussion

As you are closing your discussion encourage people to continue learning about the importance of having children's books from diverse authors. Challenge each other to add books by authors of color to your children's book libraries and the books you have for your own children. Acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Finally, share additional resources participants can use to continue learning.

## Additional Resources

- Dr. Ibram X. Kendi has published several books for young children including "[Antiracist Baby](#)," "[Goodnight Racism](#)," and most recently "[Magnolia Flower](#)."
- "[My Family's Doll Test](#)": Dr. Kendi's 2022 essay in The Atlantic about the Clark doll test experiments from the 1940s and the importance of being intentional about representation in children's toys and books.
- "[Dr. Ibram X. Kendi Recommends 6 Books to Help Your Kids Understand Race](#)": Dr. Kendi's 2021 interview with NPR.
- [Think Small | Debra S. Fish Early Childhood Resource Library](#)

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