



# early risers

Waking up to racial equity  
in early childhood.

## Discussion Guide

Season 2, Episode 5: *Making immigrant and refugee stories visible: a conversation with children's book author Bao Phi*, released December 15, 2021

**Learning Goal:** Discuss how racism and xenophobia, along with historical trauma, have affected Asian American communities across the United States and what we can do to improve the future experiences of all immigrant and refugee communities in our country.

**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

According to the American Immigration Council, nearly 10 percent of Minnesota's residents were born outside the United States in places like East Africa and Southeast Asia. Some came as refugees—meaning they were forced to flee their homeland because of violence or persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political beliefs or other identities. Many recent immigrants are also people of color, and that means these families, which include very young children, often face racism and xenophobia when they come to the United States.

## Guest Bio

Bao Phi an award-winning, Minneapolis-based writer and spoken-word artist. Phi the author of several children's books, including "A Different Pond" and "My Footprints."

His first children's book, "A Different Pond," earned six starred reviews, the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, Booklist Editor's Choice, a Caldecott Honor, a Hornbook Fanfare book, the Ezra Jack Keats New Writer and New Illustrator Honors. It was named among the best books of the year by The Boston Globe, Huffington Post, Kirkus Reviews, Publishers Weekly, School Library Journal, Washington Post and many others. "A Different Pond" also received the Charlotte Zolotow Award for Excellence in picture book writing.

Currently, Phi continues to perform across the country, remains active as an Asian American community organizer and is the program director of events and awards at [the Loft](#).

## 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

- What are your hopes and fears about participating in this conversation?
- What are your hopes and fears for your young children or the children in your care? What do you hope they will learn?
- The United States has a long history of racism, xenophobia and discrimination against Asian immigrants, refugees and Asian Americans, dating back to the 19th century. Yet Phi mentions that “American culture has a lot of amnesia towards instances of race and racism” against Asian Americans. Looking back at your educational journey, how much did you learn about the history of Asian communities (immigrants, refugees and Asian Americans) in the United States? Why do you think you learned as much or as little as you did? Was it sufficient or accurate? Do you think this experience is different for children of today?
- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it a visible resurgence of attacks against Asian American communities. How do you think these attacks—and the messaging around them—have impacted Asian American children in school and childcare settings? How do you think this has impacted Asian American educators? What are some ways in which caregivers and educators (both Asian and non-Asian) can help mitigate the negative impacts of these racist and xenophobic acts?
- Phi shared his family’s experience as Vietnamese refugees of war. He mentioned his father fought as an ally with the United States, yet he and his family were looked at as “enemies.” He also shared that people often don’t realize refugees leave their home countries behind, not because they want to, but because they have to. Additionally, these children and families are arriving having experienced extensive traumatic events to a country that often sends them the message they are not wanted. Is enough being done to help educators meet the needs of these children and families? If not, where are we failing? What tools, policies and systems can school districts and states create that can better support refugee families hoping to integrate (not assimilate) into their new communities?
- Haulcy asked Phi: “As a child, what would you have wished for?” Phi’s response was that he wished someone had told him that Asian Americans had a history of struggle and life and achievement in the U.S. He mentioned that growing up he harvested a lot of confusion, resentment and self-hatred and wanted to be anything but Asian American. His story is not unique and one that affects our Asian American, immigrant and refugee children even today. Discuss the importance of developing a healthy identity. How much impact do you think this has on a child’s ability to succeed in school and in their communities—perhaps even in life? Looking back at your own experience, was this a problem for you growing up? Is this something that affects you today? Why or why not?
- “A Different Pond” was written to help support children and families going through similar experiences. In it he shares some painful and some positive memorable experiences of his childhood. In his book “My Footprints,” he talks about a young girl’s experience with bullying due to a variety of factors and how her ability to take solace in love, family and community allow her to heal. How do these types of books help cultivate understanding and belonging in young Asian American, immigrant and refugee children? Why is it important for non-children of color to be exposed to these books and stories as well? Do you think there is enough access to these types of books today? Why or why not?
- Phi expressed that even he, as an adult, does not always know how to talk about racism, sexism, xenophobia, etc. and that it is a continuous learning process. He also talked about the importance of parents creating safe spaces for children to talk about these topics, and that it is important for us all

to take time to inform ourselves and learn about cultures and struggles other than our own in part to limit the amount of misinformation that is spread. This includes, among others, African American struggles, Arab struggles, Latinx struggles and women’s struggles. Ultimately, these are American Struggles. What are some steps you can take to better inform yourself about other cultures? What are some ways in which learning about other cultures and their unique experiences can help change the way to think, act toward and talk about BIPOC communities?

### Closing the Discussion

As you are closing your discussion, encourage people to continue learning about the importance of learning about the history and experiences of other cultural communities. Acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Finally, share additional resources participants can use to continue learning.

### Additional Resources

- [Asian Americans, Then and Now](#), Asia Society – Center for Global Education
- [Immigrants from Asia in the United States](#), Migration Policy Institute
- [The Five Biggest Refugee Myths](#), World Economic Forum
- [Immigrant and Refugee Children: A Guide for Educators and Staff](#), Learning for Justice
- [10 Ways Countries Can Help Refugees Integrate](#), World Economic Forum

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