



outside | in
paint for peace

Creating Conversations About Difference, Race, and What's Possible

@ *Outside In: Paint for Peace Exhibit at COCA*

We Stories uses the power of children's literature to create conversation, change and hope in St. Louis as well as a stronger, more equitable and inclusive future for all. We began working with hundreds of families in 2016 and continue to grow in size, strength, and scope.

We know that conversations about difference and race are an integral part of raising 21st century kids who have heart, courage, and compassion and who value the humanity of themselves and others. And we believe the same can be said about our community.

We ask you to imagine with us: What might be possible if more families from across St. Louis decided to start talking to our young children about race and racism? Would it change how we see ourselves? Would it change how we see our city and its people? Would it unlock our ability to contribute to a more hopeful future? We think so. And hundreds of other St. Louis families agree.

It is our honor to support this important exhibit in partnership with COCA, a leading St. Louis institution, which not only embraces the power of story but which places inclusion and equity at the center of their work. We hope the included resources help you and your family enjoy a more full and transformative experience of this important exhibit, *Outside In: Paint for Peace*.

RESOURCES FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

1. [Importance of Diverse Books/Stories](#)
2. [Talking to Kids about Race and Difference](#)
3. [Talking to Kids about Protesting](#)
4. [Talking to Kids about the Power of Community](#)
5. **Join Us & Other We Stories Families!**
Opening Day - August 27th @ COCA during Taste of COCA; 10 - 2

Family Outing Day - Sept 17th from 10-12 and 2-4
10 - 12 @ Gallery 210 UMSL; Ferguson Youth Initiative
2 - 4 @ Vaugh Cultural Center; Missouri History Museum

ABOUT WE STORIES' FAMILY LEARNING PROGRAM

Our family learning program pairs beautiful, compelling picture books that feature diverse characters with monthly, thematic resources that help parents bring the books to life and advance their own learning. And, we foster a supportive community among the participating families through a closed Facebook group and regular in-person events. For more information about our programs and to join the We Stories community, please visit www.westories.org. To stay up to date on the conversation across our We Stories community, please follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/westoriesstl/>.





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Seeing All Possibilities: The Importance of Diverse Books

As many scholars, teachers, authors and illustrators have aptly said great books serve as both mirrors and windows:

*A book serves as a mirror when it reflects back to readers' portions of their identities, cultures, or experiences.**

*A book serves as a window when it allows for a vicarious experience, superseding the limits of the readers' own lives and identities and provides the opportunity to spend time observing those of others.**

This is especially true for children who are always eagerly making sense of their world and their place in it. In what medium could this be any truer than in picture books, where characters are so visibly and beautifully captured? As community members and citizens it's an important practice to regularly ask "who is present?" and "who is missing?" For a very long time adults and children of color have been missing from many of the bookshelves in our country, denying some of us important mirrors and others of us important windows.

We Stories wholeheartedly supports the efforts of [#WeNeedDiverseBooks](#), a large-scale, exciting initiative "to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people." We believe diverse books are for everyone. We want all children to see their place in an increasingly multicultural world, to see all people as potential role models, friends, and loved ones, and we want their bookshelves to reflect this world and these possibilities.

There are many books that can help you and your family more fully enjoy and experience the Outside In exhibit at COCA and around St. Louis. We have prepared several discussion topics with recommended reading lists to accompany them.

RESOURCES!

Recommended Parent Resources:

[We Need Diverse Books](#)

[Grace Lin speaks](#) on the power of "Windows and Mirrors"

[We Stories Blog](#)

[Lee and Low](#) - largest multi-cultural book publisher

[Groundwood Books](#) - committed to publishing books for and about children whose experiences of the world are under-represented elsewhere.

[Eye See Me](#) - local St. Louis bookstore selling books and educational products that promote positive African American images

** Definitions are paraphrased from a 2014 article, "Building on Windows and Mirrors" by Tschida, Ryan, and Ticknor in the Journal of Children's Literature. The Windows and Mirrors analogy was developed originally by Emily Styles, now the co-director of The National Seed Project.*





TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT RACE AND DIFFERENCE

Some people are raised not to talk about skin color, but like all phenotypic characteristics, skin color is something to be celebrated!

In fact, research consistently shows that:

- children clearly notice skin color and phenotypic differences, whether or not they say so
- the less we know and talk about racial and phenotypic difference the more likely we are to have negative perceptions of other groups.
- the best way to decrease bias in children (and adults) is with regular and explicit conversation about differences.

By talking about these visible and meaningful differences, you are giving your children the language they need to be competent and fluid in the world in which they live.

The good news is that your children are, like all people, hard wired for categorization, matching and sorting. Furthermore, they often have natural curiosity about what is alike and what is different. Use this curiosity to talk about the phenotypic characteristics that make each person different and beautiful. These small conversations will help you build your confidence and comfort too. Compare your family member's skin tones to each other and, using books and media, explore shades that don't exist within your family. It's ok to use words like "brown-ish", "tan-ish", and "peachy." It's ok to point out that lots of people get grouped into racial categories with names that don't actually reflect their skin tone. "People often call this kind of peachy skin white, even though it's not white." "People often call this kind of caramel skin black, even though it's not black." Also consider discussing the different hair types, eye color and shape, nose shapes or other individual differences that might exist within your family and our larger community.

The beauty of the human form abounds, help your children see, appreciate and celebrate it!

RESOURCES!

These books and resources can help you open up a dialog with your little ones about all the beautiful and varied shades that people come in as well as explore the physiological purpose of skin and scientific reasons that our hues differ from one another.

Recommended Reading:

[Shades of People](#) [The Skin You Live In](#) [All the Colors We Are](#) [Let's Talk About Race](#)

Other Great Resources:

[Humanae](#) - an amazing art project and Tumblr blog that truly celebrates the beauty of hue!

[My Family Builders](#) - a fantastic toy set that celebrates the range of diversity that exists within families

[Sorting People](#) - a PBS online game that shows just how phenotypically variable any racial group truly is

["Celebrating the Skin You're In"](#) - a We Stories book and discussion kit at the St. Louis County Library

[Getting Started: 12 Small Steps for White Families Who Want to Be a Positive Force for Change on Racism](#) - more ways for any family to engage



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TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT PROTESTING

The Bill of Rights, written in 1789, grants Americans many important rights which have come to define our nation and anchor some of our shared national values. Protesting is a reflection of two of those important rights: the right to “peaceably assemble” and the right to “petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

Protesting is an American tradition that can be traced back to the beginning of our country’s history and is responsible for our very formation. A notable early protest example is The Boston Tea Party in 1773. Protesting has been a primary and critical way that Americans have stood up against injustice and unfair treatment since our country’s inception. Depending on where you live your children may have the opportunity to witness protests with great frequency and on behalf of a wide variety of issues. Can you imagine how many protests kids living in Washington D.C. observe?! In other locations protestors might be more easily coupled with a particular incident or issue. In the latter case, children’s books and media provide a great opportunity to expand the narrative on protests and the gains that have been achieved as a result of this important tradition.

RESOURCES!

Recommended Reading:

[We March](#) [A Sweet Smell of Roses](#) [Sit-In](#) [Freedom Summer](#) [Ron’s Big Mission](#)
[Seeds of Freedom](#) [Rosa](#) [Separate is Never Equal](#) [Lillian’s Right to Vote](#)
[The Youngest Marcher \(coming soon\)](#)

[Brave Girl](#) [Elizabeth Leads the Way](#) [Click Clack Moo](#) [Harvesting Hope](#)

Other Great Resources:

[The Children’s March Video](#) - an important opportunity to see the integral role that children played in the Civil Rights Movement

[Activities for Older Kids](#) - from Chicago History Museum History Lab





TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

“Being human is about being in the right kind of relationships. I think being human is a process. It's not something that we just are born with. We actually learn to celebrate our connection, learn to celebrate our love. If you suffer, it does not imply love. But if you love, it does imply suffering. To suffer with, though, compassion, not to suffer against. And if we can hold that space big enough, we also have joy and fun even as we suffer. And suffering will no longer divide us. And to me, that's sort of the human journey.”

- john a powell

Connection in the face of fear. Love in the face of pain. Celebration in the face of mourning. This is humanity at it's richest. Sharing in that humanity together is the essence of community. Human history is saturated with trauma and tragedy, and so too is filled with love, compassion, and unity. As you engage in difficult conversations with your children, introduce too, the stories of joy and healing and restoration. As Fred Rodgers famously said, “Look for the helpers.”

The panels in this exhibit are terrific examples of community, connection, love and truth. Discuss with your children the meaning of the paintings and how their existence and celebration impact the overall story of our region.

What do the paintings mean to you?

Why are the panels important?

How do they help us better understand our city?

What is the value of working together?

What can be achieved by a community versus by an individual alone?

RESOURCES!

Recommended Reading:

[Painting for Peace in Ferguson](#) [Counting on Community](#) [Maybe Something Beautiful](#)
[Farmer Will Allen and the Growing Table](#) [Marvelous Cornelius](#) [The Seeds of Friendship](#)
[Harlem's Little Blackbird](#)

Other Great Resources:

[Meet the real life girl who inspired the book: Maybe Something Beautiful](#)

