



# Reading for Social Justice

A Guide for Families and Educators



**ABOUT TEACHING TOLERANCE**

A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center founded in 1991, Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to helping teachers and schools prepare children and youth to be active participants in a diverse democracy.

The program publishes *Teaching Tolerance* magazine three times a year and provides free educational materials, lessons and tools for educators committed to implementing anti-bias practices in their classrooms and schools. To see all of the resources available from Teaching Tolerance, visit [tolerance.org](http://tolerance.org).

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School of Education  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **BOULDER**

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## INTRODUCTION

Late on a November afternoon in 2017, I got an email from a professional acquaintance telling me about an informal project in Boulder, Colorado. A group of parents, some of whom happened to also be professors and staff at the School of Education at the University of Colorado, had created a Family Social Justice Learning Space about a year ago; one of them thought Teaching Tolerance might be interested in their experience. Would I like an introduction?

I certainly did, and about a week later my team and I were on the phone with Michelle Renée Valladares, associate director of the National Education Policy Center. Michelle told us she and her colleagues had long thought about doing something with their own young children, many of whom attend the same local school that also welcomes children of immigrants. The heated anti-immigrant rhetoric of the 2016 election gave them the impetus to take action, she explained.

What they did was create an intergenerational reading group where parents and kids used books to springboard into conversations about topics like immigration, racism, protest and segregation. They pulled resources from Teaching Tolerance, curated a selection of children's books, and had each family plan the activities for one of the bi-monthly meetings. "Not surprisingly," Michelle said, "several of our colleagues have been asking us for the book list and some guidance about how to recreate this group." Was Teaching Tolerance interested in helping develop such a guide?

The idea was brilliant, we thought, and aligned with our vision. We believe in helping young people learn how to navigate the world. We want them to know how to recognize and think critically about injustice. We understand that many parents and guardians share this vision and have life experiences and wisdom to spare. And we know that rich experiences with adults can have immense impact on young people.

Many of us enjoy book clubs with our friends or participate in book studies within professional learning communities. And many of us read aloud with our children. This project takes the idea of a book club, adds structure that advances teaching and learning goals, and brings kids and their families together.

We're hoping you'll try this in your school community and that this guide puts you on the right track.



Maureen B. Costello

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to support a group of educators and families as they plan and lead an intergenerational social justice reading group. Along with models and resources, you'll find practical recommendations for establishing a framework, inviting student input and organizing a series of meetings where children and adults in your community can read, talk, teach and learn together.

Families and educators share the important task of helping children develop the skills they need to thrive in a diverse democracy. These include understanding how to speak and listen to one another, to share and to hear stories and ideas and to recognize the value in our differing experiences. The true spirit of this work also requires the flip side of this: for educators and families to hear students' stories and to learn about the world as children observe it.

One way to do this effectively is to meet and explore the ways we differ and what we have in common. These interactions reinforce—for all involved—how to honor and share our identities, understand and celebrate our diversity, recognize injustice and act together to address it.

### WHY READING GROUPS?

Reading groups that bring students, educators and families together benefit everyone involved. The advantages described here are well documented and supported by research that shows improvements in school climate, family and community engagement, and reading and language skills. Here are a few points to emphasize as you talk to your school community about the value of a social justice reading group:

➤ **Reading groups support children in processing current events and hard truths about the world around them.** When planned carefully and conscientiously, these groups afford children opportunities to talk about social justice issues that affect their lives and learn to act in ways that advance social justice in their own communities. They also give children safe, supported spaces in which to practice discussing critical topics with people whose perspectives might differ from their own.

➤ **Reading groups help children situate present events within a larger historical context of social injustice.** The inquiry built into the group format helps young people reflect on the ideologies that perpetuate social injustice and recognize how much there is to learn about the ongoing struggle for equity and equal rights. It also allows them to see themselves in the actions of young people who participated in social movements of the past.

➤ **Reading groups facilitate social emotional learning.**<sup>1</sup> They do this in several ways. They allow children to learn from each other and from their families, reinforcing positive identity formation. The groups supply models for how adults express concern and empathy and think about difficult subject matter. Research shows that, after participating in book clubs, students connect more strongly with their teacher and classmates and also become more engaged.<sup>2</sup> As one researcher explains, when students come together to read,

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they are “building a foundation for an encouraging and involved classroom community. A community can consist of self-motivated students who are involved in each other’s learning; it can also safely demand a deeper level of investment and thinking.”<sup>3</sup>

► **Reading groups develop critical thinking and literacy skills.** Reading groups help students build the foundational skills they need for reading literary and informational texts *and* help students build speaking and listening skills. Depending in part on the structure of the reading group, the genres of texts that are selected and the number of texts that are discussed, the process of reading, interpreting, analyzing and discussing texts moves students toward meeting all of the CCSS ELA anchor standards for reading, a majority of the anchor standards for speaking and listening, and several of the anchor standards for language.

► **Reading groups build family and community engagement.** Reading groups that include families align educators’ and families’ expectations of what it means to be involved in a child’s education.<sup>4</sup> Through this authentic form of participation, parents become empowered participants in their children’s schooling. The funds of knowledge that families bring with them are resources that position them as equal partners with educators; participation also centers family and community values as important in the children’s learning.<sup>5</sup>

► **Family engagement bolsters students’ academic performance.** Including families in reading groups has significant, measurable effects on students’ reading acquisition, increasing vocabulary and literacy skills, and on their academic performance more generally. Surveying a number of studies, one researcher found that “the combined effect” of family involvement was equivalent to a 10-point gain on a standardized test.<sup>6</sup>

1. POLLECK, 2010

2. DRESSER, 2013

3. PETRICH, 2015

4. BAIRD, 2015

5. MOLL ET AL. 1992; BARAJAS-LOPEZ AND ISHIMARU, 2016

6. SÉNÉCHAL 2008

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS GUIDE

This guide introduces the process and resources you'll need to build your social justice reading group. Part I will help you gather community members to create the framework for your reading group. The guide provides step-by-step guidance for selecting a structure, establishing goals, and choosing topics, texts and activities for your reading group. Because each community is different, you'll be prompted to "pause and plan" throughout, ensuring that your framework reflects your school, your needs as families and educators and the interests of the children involved.

In part II, you'll find "spotlights," brief profiles of reading groups where conversations about social justice are happening around the United States. The spotlights illustrate the wide range of possibilities for structuring and leading your reading group.

In part III, you'll find recommended book lists.

The appendices include guidance for educators who want to lay the groundwork for these groups as well as a planning workbook with activities and graphic organizers your group can complete together as you build the framework for your reading group.

The first step toward social justice is for communities to come together. Thank you for committing to share stories and discussion with the children in your life.

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### A Note to Educators

Before you begin this collaborative project, there are a few steps you'll need to take on your own. Please see "Laying the Groundwork for Reading Groups," located in appendix I, before you move on.

# Before You Begin

## GETTING THE RIGHT FOLKS AND THE RIGHT DATA TO THE TABLE

Once you've decided to start a social justice reading group, your impulse may be to jump right into conversations with young people about the fights for social justice that are happening around them every day. But you're reading this guide because you want to establish a group that will be sustainable for *your* school, something that will bring families, educators and students together to think critically about these topics for years to come. Building such a space takes time and attention.

Before you begin planning your reading group, make sure you have the right people at the table. Form a planning committee to ensure that you'll include as many families as possible at the community meeting. As you form your planning committee, ask yourself: Will families *and* school staff be represented in early conversations? Does the planning committee reflect the demographics of our school? If not, take a pause and find a way to include all necessary voices.

**Make sure everyone involved has access to this guide—either electronically or in print—in advance of the first meeting.**

## GROUP STANDARDS

Organizers of effective, sustainable groups hold themselves and their members to some common standards. In these groups:

- **Ideas are generated by children and adults together.**
- **Participation is accessible.**
- **The work is equitable.**
- **The work is challenging.**

Approaching this work carefully and thoughtfully and working together to set goals, plan meetings and select texts will help you build a group that lives up to these standards.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## *Review Best Practices*

The planning committee can begin their work by taking turns reading the standards aloud.

See “Standards and Agreements” in the community meeting section of this guide for more details on these best practices. Discuss the standards as a group, and brainstorm additional standards you think belong on this list.

## PLANNING THE COMMUNITY MEETING

As you plan your community meeting, you'll want to ensure that as many families can participate as possible. Consider barriers to accessibility and how your group might address them.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

### *Plan the Community Meeting*

The following questions can help you anticipate and avoid problems of access. The planning committee should discuss them together before scheduling the community meeting.

- 🕒 **Time of day** When are families available to participate? Will the group meeting bump up against a mealtime? Is serving food a possibility, to make up for lost time?
- 🚗 **Transportation** Will meetings be held in a location along a public transportation route? If not, can other transport be made available?
- 🛡️ **Safety** Does the space feel safe for all families? Is it a safe place for them to get to? Be sure to anticipate and address these concerns, particularly for undocumented families, LGBTQ families, families of color or families who have a member with a disability.
- 👶 **Childcare** Is there space for younger siblings to play during group meetings? Can the planning committee arrange for a caregiver to watch younger children while families participate?
- 🗣️ **Language** Does the school district have live translation available? If you are a monolingual group, consider creating additional spaces for families who have a different home language.
- 🗣️ **Ability** Do any participants require accommodations such as an ASL interpreter or materials printed in Braille?

After you've considered how you can make your community meeting as accessible as possible, choose a time and place and record your meeting and accessibility plans in the planning workbook in appendix II.

## PUBLICITY AND OUTREACH

Key to a successful reading group is shared decision making and planning. Think about how you will recruit participants and ensure you're including as much feedback as possible in your community meeting.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

### *Create a Publicity and Outreach Plan*

Before your community meeting, you'll need to spread the word about your reading group, encourage educators and family to attend and get feedback from future group members (including children) who won't be at the meeting. Think critically about outreach and publicity; make sure you are making the appropriate effort to invite participation from across the **entire** school community.

You'll find questions to help develop and space to record your publicity and outreach plan in the planning workbook in appendix II.

# The Community Meeting

## BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK FOR YOUR READING GROUP

As you begin your community meeting, consider how you'll manage your time today. Agree upon the length of the meeting and how much of the guide you intend to cover. If necessary, plan for follow-up meetings or alternative means of completing the planning process. Don't pressure yourself to hurry; it's more important to follow the process with everyone's voice heard than to finish in one sitting.

## STANDARDS AND AGREEMENTS

You can begin by reviewing some standards shared by most successful community reading groups. Organizers of effective, sustainable groups hold themselves and their members to some common standards. In these groups:

➤ **Ideas are generated by children and adults together.** Educators and family members may help structure meetings or conversations, but children are full participants. Everyone involved has the opportunity to select topics, plan agendas and lead the group.

➤ **Participation is accessible.** The most successful groups make it as easy as possible for members of the school community to participate. Consider questions like: How often will our group meet? Will we hold meetings at a time and place that work with family schedules?

➤ **The work is equitable.** Labor—the planning and leading of sessions but also the intellectual labor of participating and sharing during meetings—should not fall disproportionately on any person or group. For example, the group should not rely on people of color to lead conversations about race and racism. Equitable division of labor also means the success of the group isn't dependent on any one member.

➤ **The work is challenging.** While the mere act of bringing communities together has great value, a social justice reading group exists to expand the knowledge and understanding of all participants. The most successful reading groups challenge all of their members—families, educators and students—to learn and grow together.

### ➤ PAUSE AND PLAN ◀

## *Establish Standards and Agreements*

Review the best practices as a group and discuss the standards. Are there any you would add? Working together, list a few community agreements you'll use to align expectations about process, communication and calling in group members when necessary.

The questions in the planning workbook in appendix II can help guide you through this discussion.

Learn more about “calling in” via the feature story “Speaking Up Without Tearing Down.” Read it at [tolerance.org/calling-out](https://tolerance.org/calling-out).

## GROUP ROLES

When school staff and families work together to manage the group, work is more evenly shared and children observe the value of relying on diverse decision-makers from across the school community. How can you build investment among members of the group and the support staff in your school and district? How can you ensure that the work—and the ownership—is equitably distributed?

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

### *Establish Group Roles*

While each group will be different, here are some roles you may want to assign in your initial meeting:

➤ **Communications Manager(s)** This person (or people) can ensure that everyone gets the information they need to participate and prepare for discussions. Part of this responsibility is asking the group members for their preferred modes of communication: phone calls, email, a website, text messaging, notes home with students, etc. Some families at school may already be using apps that allow groups to coordinate easily.

➤ **Text Manager** The person in this role facilitates text selection. This person also collaborates with families and school staff to ensure that any school-owned texts are maintained, distributed and collected, and to provide any text translation needs.

➤ **Plan Manager** This person collects notes and graphic organizers created during the community meeting and works with the communications manager and text manager to produce and distribute a complete plan once responses to the communications and text surveys are in.

➤ **Scheduler** The person in this role establishes times for group meetings and makes sure the agreed-upon space is secured. This person also collaborates with the communications manager to make sure families know when and where the meetings will be. The scheduler might also volunteer to keep time at the group meetings.

➤ **School Partner Manager** This person collaborates with school staff to ensure that the group has the support it needs. In particular, the person in this role should focus on coordinating with the school or district librarian (a valuable resource for books, meeting places and activities), school or district translators, community or family liaisons, and, if available, a grant coordinator who could potentially help you find and secure funding for books or other needs.

Document your group roles and responsibilities in the planning workbook in appendix II.

## GROUP STRUCTURE

There are any number of ways you can organize your social justice reading group. The three structures described here are popular starting points. Choose or develop a structure that works for your school community.

### **Collective Reading Groups**

Collective social justice groups have one type of meeting: whole-group meetings where families, children and educators gather to discuss a text or topic.

### **Parallel Reading Groups**

Parallel reading groups typically consist of three types of meetings—class, home and whole-group—with the majority of the meetings taking place in class and at home. During class meetings, children read and talk with one another and with their teachers. During home meetings, children read and talk with their families. These meetings often happen in the same week, or even on the same day.

Although families work independently for most of the parallel reading group, you can get creative about how participants connect and share their learning with one another after and between meetings.

At the conclusion of a parallel reading group, there is a whole-group meeting during which all members—children, families and educators—meet together to share their learning.

### **Home Reading Groups**

In home reading groups, there are three types of meetings—class, home and whole-group—with the majority of the meetings taking place at home. During class meetings, children and their teachers discuss a topic related to their reading. During home meetings, children and their families meet and read together about the topic being discussed in class.

Families and children may work together on reading activities, but their work isn't connected with the work of others in the community until the whole-group meeting. At the final, whole-group meeting, all members—children, families and educators—meet together to share their learning.

### **Class Reading Groups**

In class reading groups, there are two types of meetings—class and whole-group—with the majority of the meetings taking place in class. During class meetings, children meet with one another to discuss a topic related to their reading. During the whole-group meeting, families join children in class to share an activity or two and share a discussion about their topic.

*If you're planning a parallel, home or class reading group, consider tying your whole-group meetings to a culturally relevant event or observation. For example, in Latin America, Mother's Day is a huge event where parents traditionally come to school. If your community includes a large Latinx population, consider meeting as part of a Mother's Day celebration. Alternately, try building on Native-American and African-American traditions of storytelling. Or consider family and educator collaborations so those with experience on your group's topic can visit children in class and share an oral history.*

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## **Choose a Group Structure**

Discuss the merits of each structure and how each might (or might not) align with the needs of your school community. In particular, consider how many group meetings are reasonable to build into your plan. (During this discussion, be sure to include any feedback the planning committee has collected from families unable to attend this meeting.)

When choosing a structure, you'll need to balance between the value of shared discussion

time and the need for accessibility. Collective reading groups offer the most opportunities for shared discussion, but they also require significant time commitments from families and may not be accessible to everyone. Class reading groups offer the few opportunities for shared discussion but may be easier for families to commit to. Parallel and home groups fall somewhere in the middle.

Whatever structure you choose, you'll want to consider how you can **ensure that no children are excluded, regardless of family involvement**. Be sure to discuss whole-group meeting accessibility variables like:

- **Time of day** When are families available to participate? Will the group meeting bump up against a mealtime? Is serving food a possibility, to make up for lost mealtime?
- **Transportation** Will meetings be held in a location along a public transportation route? If not, can other transport be made available?
- **Safety** Does the space feel safe for all families? Is it a safe place for them to get to? Be sure to anticipate and address these concerns, particularly for undocumented families, LGBTQ families, families of color or families who have a member with a disability.
- **Childcare** Is there space for younger siblings to play during group meetings? Can you arrange for a caregiver to watch younger children?
- **Language** Does the school district have live translation available? If you are having a monolingual group, consider creating additional spaces for families who have a different home language.
- **Ability** Do any participants require accommodations such as an ASL interpreter or materials printed in Braille?

Use the graphic organizer in the planning workbook (in appendix II) to select the best group structure for your community.

## CONTENT GOALS

You wouldn't draw blueprints for a building without knowing whether you were building a school, a home or a store. Likewise, you don't want to start planning the content of your meetings before you've agreed on the purpose of your social justice reading group.

The goals you establish for the meetings should be specific. Goals like "We will learn about resistance" or "We will talk about diversity" may indicate the general direction you want the meetings to go, but they're also difficult to plan around—they don't provide much guidance to facilitators who may be new to leading discussions. Try to craft goals that address what you hope group members will gain by reading and learning together. By the end, what do you want participants to know and be able to do?

This section will walk you through how to begin with a broad goal such as "We will learn about resistance," and end with a specific goal like "We will learn about how people have historically resisted racial injustice and oppression in the United States."

A good place to start when setting content goals for a social justice reading group is the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards, 20 specific goals for social justice learning grouped under four domains: Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action. Each anchor standard is also broken out by grade band, allowing users to engage a wide range of topics at

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any level, whether they're working with kindergartners or seniors. You can find in-depth information about the Social Justice Standards at [tolerance.org/social-justice-standards](http://tolerance.org/social-justice-standards).

➤ PAUSE AND PLAN ◀

## Develop Content Goals

Discuss the broad goals you have for your reading group. You'll narrow these down soon, but for now you can just brainstorm together.

Record a few goals in the planning workbook in appendix II.

Next, think about selecting one or more topics. You may already have an idea of the topics you'd like to explore in your group. At Teaching Tolerance, we use some of the following topics to classify our resources:

- Race & Ethnicity
- Religion
- Ability
- Class
- Immigration
- Gender & Sexual Identity
- Bullying & Bias
- Rights & Activism

➤ PAUSE AND PLAN ◀

## Develop Content Goals

Discuss the topics your reading group will focus on. Review the list provided, but don't limit yourself. There may be topics not listed in this guide that are relevant to your community.

You can record possible topics in the planning workbook in appendix II.

Now you'll narrow your goal. Let's look at an example to illustrate how the different domains of the Social Justice Standards offer various ways to understand a familiar story: that of Rosa Parks. At its most basic, Parks' story is this:

*In Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, black people were required to give up their seats on a bus and either move to the back or stand if white people requested to sit down. When a white bus driver told civil rights activist Rosa Parks to vacate her seat, she refused. She was arrested. In protest, black people in Montgomery boycotted the public buses for more than a year. Some people filed lawsuits against the racist laws that led to Parks' arrest. Ultimately, the laws segregating public buses were overturned. The boycott and the lawsuits worked.*

Focusing our discussion through the **Identity domain**, we might think about race, about how Parks' race was one of the identities (along with the identities of woman, South-

erner, activist, and so on) that shaped her experiences. We might also ask how her own identity fit with the identity of others at the same time.

Focusing our discussion through the **Diversity domain**, we might ask how the experiences of white people and black people might have been different in Montgomery in the 1950s and how they're different today.

Focusing our discussion through the **Justice domain**, we might ask why transportation segregation existed in the first place, why Parks chose to sit in the front of the bus that day, why she was asked to move, why she was arrested and whether the law that saw her arrested was a just one. We might ask about which laws we see today that are unjust.

Focusing our discussion through the **Action domain**, we might ask how Parks worked as a civil rights leader in a larger movement, how her action connected to that larger movement, how people supported the demand for desegregation, what finally led to change and what action we can take when we see injustice.

### ► PAUSE AND PLAN ◀

## Develop Content Goals

Read through the Social Justice Standards together. In the planning workbook, jot down a few standards you'd be interested in exploring.

Now it's time to make your broad goals more specific. As a group, choose one of the broad goals from your brainstorming. Identify a social justice domain and one to three standards that align with this goal. Choose a topic you might like to explore. Then, use the standards to rewrite your goal with more specificity.

Here are a few models:

**Broad Goal:** *We will learn about resistance.*

**Domain:** *Justice*

**Standard:** *Students will identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world. (J15)*

**Topics:** *Race & Ethnicity, Rights & Activism*

**Specific Goal:** *Our reading group will learn about how people have historically resisted racial injustice and oppression in the United States.*

**Broad Goal:** *We will talk about diversity.*

**Domain:** *Diversity*

**Standards:** *Students will respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and will exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way. (D 8)*

*Students will examine diversity in social, cultural, political and historical contexts rather than in ways that are superficial or oversimplified. (D10)*

**Topics:** *Immigration, Religion, Race & Ethnicity*

**Goal:** *Our reading group will learn about how immigration influences the cultural identities of communities, including our own.*

The activities in the planning workbook in appendix II can guide you through this process.

Read about and watch a social justice reading group in action! See "Reading Together" in the Spring 2019 issue of *Teaching Tolerance*. [tolerance.org/mag-reading-groups](http://tolerance.org/mag-reading-groups).

## LITERACY GOALS

While learning about social justice is the primary goal for your reading group, you will still want to think carefully about the types of texts you want to read and how you'll read them.

- What voices do you want to include?
- What genres?
- Will you be reading in a group or individually? Aloud or silently?
- What scaffolding will you use? How will you support student readers?

As with your content goals, you may want to use literacy standards to help guide your group planning. Ideally, these choices support what's happening in the classroom and can build on standards that students are already working on in class. (This is a great way to bring more teachers into the collaboration and get their buy-in!)

Think about what speaking, listening, reading and writing skills you want students to practice and why. The texts and activities you select should support these goals.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## *Develop Literacy Goals*

Decide on a few key literacy goals that you want to keep in mind as you choose texts and activities for your reading group.

Find questions to guide your discussion and a space to record your goals in the planning workbook in appendix II.

## TEXT SELECTION

Selecting texts is one of the most fun parts of planning a reading group, but it can also be one of the most challenging. This process requires intentional outreach and collaboration as well as consideration of the group's needs and of the established content and literacy goals.

The four questions in this section can help you decide which texts will work best for your group.

### **Will everyone in the group be reading the same text or different texts?**

If your group includes children of different ages, different reading levels, or with different home languages, you might decide to have readers choose from a selection of texts about the same topic before the meeting. (If you do have children reading different texts, you'll want to keep that in mind as you plan your whole-group discussion activities. "Community Inquiry" strategies will work best if you don't have a shared, common text. "Exploring Texts Through Read Aloud" strategies are also good options for groups with mixed reading levels.)

### **How will you address language differences?**

It is critical that everyone in the group has access to the texts. If your community speaks several different home languages, provide a translator in your whole-group meetings and make sure every household has access to a text that they can read. Bilingual or multilingual books are excellent options because they allow everyone in the group to read in both

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A note about "text." Because each reading group will be a little different, some will discuss books while others discuss articles, stories, chapters, essays, poems, videos, audio clips, cartoons or even songs. The term "text" is used throughout this guide as a catch-all term to describe the reading, listening or viewing experiences that participants plan to discuss.

primary and secondary languages.

If your school has a family or community liaison, they may be able to help with translation services; they can also help audit for equity and ensure all families are included every step of the way. If you are selecting books in multiple languages or in Braille, be sure to include families who speak or read those languages in the text-selection process.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## *Practice Text Selection*

Discuss how you will plan for logistics, address language differences and assign responsibility for any next steps.

Record your decisions in the planning workbook in appendix II.

### **How will you select texts that support your goals?**

To match texts to your literacy goals, consider the format of your meetings, the number of students participating, and the languages and literacy levels represented in the group. The easiest way to match texts for your content goals is to look for texts that address the topics and standards your group has already selected. Of course, topics and social justice domains overlap; a single book might address the topics of race, gender and ethnicity through the lenses of diversity and justice.

Generally, children's books are written with some kind of "moral" in mind: to look on the bright side, for example, or be kind to others. Social justice children's books are similar in that they typically fall into two categories: They work toward reducing prejudice (reflected in the Identity and Diversity domains) or toward encouraging collective action (reflected in the Justice and Action domains).

### **Identity and Diversity**

In general, these types of texts work well with identity and diversity lenses:

- Fictional stories, poems or songs that focus on characters, friendship, tradition or family
- Informational texts describing contemporary cultural and religious practices or experience
- Traditional texts like folktales or songs

### **Justice and Action**

If you're reading through a justice or action lens, you might consider:

- Fictional stories, poems or songs that focus on living with or pushing back against injustice
- Informational texts that offer a history of an identity group or a description of what life was like for people in a different time

### **How will you balance windows and mirrors?**

Educators often discuss texts using the metaphors of "mirrors" and "windows" (a term coined by educator and scholar Emily Style). Texts that are "mirrors" reflect our own iden-

tities and experiences back to us. Those that are “windows” offer a view of identities and experiences different from our own.

As you plan your reading group, you’ll also want to keep “mirrors” and “windows” in mind. Look at the text’s setting, its characters, its plot, language and illustrations. How and where will the children in your group find themselves in the texts you select for your reading? How and where will they learn about cultures, experiences and identities different from their own?

Many texts are both “mirrors” and “windows.” Because identity is intersectional, readers can sometimes find their identities reflected in a text, even if their experiences aren’t. Keep in mind the range of identities in your group—identities like age, gender, ability, race, ethnicity, religion and more—as you select your texts.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## *Practice Text Selection*

Consider these reader considerations as you discuss specific texts in your planning group:

- For whom in your group could this text be a mirror, a reflection of identity and experience? For whom could this text be a window into the identities and experiences of others?
- How could this text motivate and connect with the interests and concerns of readers in the group?
- To what extent does this text access and build upon the knowledge readers in the group will bring with them?
- Does the text contain topics that may be more sensitive for some readers than others (e.g., those who have lost parents or those who have come out)?

These considerations were adapted from the TT resource *Reading Diversity: A Tool for Selecting Diverse Texts*, found at [tolerance.org/magazine/publications/reading-diversity](https://tolerance.org/magazine/publications/reading-diversity). If you have time, you can assess each text using the entire resource.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## *Plan a Text List*

Brainstorm text suggestions that align with the previously chosen topics or content goals. Then search the TT Student Text Library, filtering by grade level, topic and social justice domain. You’ll also find a collection of book lists arranged by topic in part III. This will provide you with a robust list of text options as you move into the final phase of text selection.

You’ll find more recommendations for planning a text list (including suggestions for addressing time limitations) in the planning workbook in appendix II.

### **The Teaching Tolerance Student Text Library**

Free to access through [tolerance.org](https://tolerance.org) (log in by creating a free account), the Student Text Library includes student-friendly short texts, images, videos and audio files, all leveled and accompanied by text-dependent questions. Users can search by grade level, topic and social justice domain. Tier I and Tier II vocabulary words are also clearly identified within each text.

## MEETING AGENDAS

Now that you've developed a clear framework for your group, you're ready to start planning meetings. Every group's whole-group meeting will look different depending on its content and literacy goals and its group structure.

While neither definitive nor exhaustive, this table gives you an at-a-glance guide you can use as a basis for crafting meeting agendas. (Keep in mind, these recommendations are not set in stone; adjust as needed based on *your* school community.)

	COLLECTIVE	PARALLEL	HOME	CLASS
<b>Will there be reading time at your whole-group meeting?</b>	Most likely no. Although this model is flexible, ideally reading will happen prior to the meeting.	Maybe. While ideally reading will be done in class or at home prior, realistically it may be necessary to devote some whole-group time to reading.	Maybe. While ideally reading will be done in class or at home prior, realistically it may be necessary to devote some whole-group time to reading.	Most likely yes. This model does not assume that families will read at home prior to the final meeting.
<b>How will you collect and share readers' responses?</b>	In person during the whole-group meeting	Electronically or via shared journal and in person during the whole-group meeting	In person during the whole-group meeting	In person during the whole-group meeting
<b>Who will lead each group meeting?</b>	Students, families	Students, families	Students, families, educators	Students, educators
<b>Who chooses the activities for the whole-group meeting(s)?</b>	Group leaders	Planning committee, with input from students and families	Planning committee, with input from students and families	Planning committee, with input from students

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The following questions will help you plan the agendas for your social justice reading group meetings.

### **Will there be reading time at your whole-group meeting?**

Reading before the meeting allows more time for discussion, and reading one-on-one with family can also benefit children building their literacy skills. However, if children and families don't have time to read before the meeting, the discussion may not be as rich. For parents with busy schedules, it may be preferable to meet a little longer and read together rather than to require reading before the meeting. Keep in mind that reading during the meeting (whole-group reading, reading aloud, reading in pairs, etc.) may also support your literacy goals.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## ***Organize Group Meetings***

Discuss the pros and cons of reading before the group meeting and decide when your group will read. Record your decision in the planning workbook in appendix II.

### **How will you collect and share readers' responses? (Parallel groups only)**

Parallel readings depend on an extended community of readers (families, students and educators) all learning over the same period of time, although not in the same place. If you're planning a parallel reading group, you'll want to plan an activity for each meeting for readers to record their response to share with other families.

Here are a few possibilities:

- **Shared Journals**, which go home with different children each night so families can write down their responses to the text and their responses to one another.
- **A Shared Google Doc or Other Web Application** where families can comment in response to one or more questions posed by the whole-group leader (and to each other's responses). Be sure to select an application with robust privacy settings.
- **Individual Response Sheets** that families can fill out together to connect home reading with in-class reading, and that children can share in class.

### **Who will lead each meeting?**

A key benefit of reading groups is that they offer the opportunity for students and family members to take the lead in discussions and share their knowledge with educators. They also offer the chance for children to practice leadership skills.

### ***For Collective Reading Groups***

Consider rotating leaders for each meeting and having children and their family members plan and lead the meetings together.

***For Parallel, Home and Class Reading Groups:***

Since teachers will lead the in-class meetings and children or their family members will lead any at-home meetings, this question only applies to your final, whole-group meeting. Whoever leads the last meeting needs to be sure the tone, activities and facilitation value and honor the experience and knowledge that families bring to the reading group.

► **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## ***Organize Group Meetings***

Discuss how you will decide on the leader for your group meeting(s). For collective reading groups, how will you offer the opportunity to lead to families who aren't participating in the planning process? For parallel, home or class reading groups, how will you include the voices, perspectives and experiences of everyone who attends the whole-group meeting? (You'll record your answer later, in the meeting agenda in the planning workbook.)

### **What activities will you do at each meeting?**

Each meeting should include a discussion activity, but make sure to plan interactive activities as well: videos, letter writing, charades or art projects are just a few options.

TT's archive of teaching strategies (available online in the Classroom Resources section of [tolerance.org](http://tolerance.org)) provides dozens of clear, step-by-step instructions for leading activities for K–12 students. Here are a few types of activities you'll find there:

- **Exploring Texts Through Read Alouds (K–2).** Strategies that help young readers define text types, examine how text structure affects meaning, and identify audience and purpose.
- **Responding to the Read-Aloud Text (K–2).** Strategies to help young readers analyze, interpret, critique and make connections to texts.
- **Word Work (3–12).** Build comprehension and language skills by asking readers to use key words from texts in their own reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- **Close and Critical Reading (3–12).** Ask readers to analyze, interpret, critique and make connections to texts, and discover the relevance of their reading within a larger context.
- **Community Inquiry (3–12).** Ask readers to draw upon texts—and their own lived experiences—during meaningful and respectful discussions.

For home meetings, “Exploring Texts Through Read Alouds” and “Close and Critical Reading” both offer an excellent selection of activities to use with children as they read to help build their literacy skills and to direct their attention to questions of social justice.

For whole-group meetings, “Responding to the Read-Aloud Text,” “Word Work” and “Community Inquiry” strategies can start whole-group discussions or small-group work as children and families share and discuss their responses to the text.

See appendix III for a sample Community Inquiry strategy called “Value Lines” that teaches students to question texts and deepens comprehension through observing and listening to others.

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➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## ***Organize Group Meetings***

Review the spotlights to see if any of the groups described there align with your group's planned structure. If so, discuss what ideas, texts, activities or strategies you might adapt from these groups. You can record your ideas in the planning workbook in appendix II.

The planning workbook in appendix II includes several agenda templates. Working together, complete the agenda template best suited to your group's structure.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

## ***Schedule Group Meetings***

All that's left is to schedule your meetings! If you're ready to do that now, you can complete the graphic organizer in the planning workbook. If not, make a plan to schedule times, place(s) and facilitator(s) for your group's meeting(s).

This section of the guide describes three different social justice reading groups. These groups will give you a sense of the different structures and approaches families and communities are using to read and talk about social justice.

Each spotlight includes a short narrative describing the group, followed by a sample agenda for each group. Please note that these documents were created retroactively; this guide was designed in part based on how these communities structured and organized their groups.

**Read on for more information about:**

- **Boulder, Colorado**, where a family-led collective reading group helped a group of young people learn about, and identify with, a history of action for social justice.
- **Austin, Texas**, where a parallel reading group brought a multilingual school community together in the classroom of an early-education teacher.
- **Columbia, South Carolina**, where a combination of class and home reading groups had children talking with their families, classmates and teachers as they tried to figure out the “construction of normal.”

## SPOTLIGHT

# Boulder, Colorado

### About the Group

The *Social Justice Learning Space*, a diverse community of parents and children, meets monthly in Boulder, Colorado. The group formed in 2016 when a group of adults—professors and staff in the School of Education at the University of Colorado, Boulder—came together to create a space where they could talk with their children about social justice. One parent explains that the group was formed in part as a response to an uptick in hate and bias speech following the 2016 election.

“Our 9-year-old daughter came home asking what a swastika was and what it meant to Jewish families like ours after a friend drew one at school and told her it was no big deal. I might do equity work for a living, but I was at a loss when it came to handling this in such an ongoing, emotional way,” she said. Including both single- and multi-generational households, the group brings together readers of different races, religions, immigration status and sexual orientation.

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### **The Group's Framework**

The group began with 14 members from 6 families. There are now two groups: an elementary school group with four families and four kids and a middle and high school group with four families and six kids. The group decided on a collective reading structure.

Together they settled on a few key goals, both for their social justice growth and for their social emotional learning. They would create a space for reflection and community learning, and they'd be honest about the fact that a commitment to being critical, questioning and vulnerable—all necessary in pursuit of social justice—was a commitment to lifelong learning.

They decided their group would explore social justice issues and, importantly, that the kids were responsible for selecting all of the topics. Their parents or guardians would then work with them to decide on texts and activities. Each session had three parts: a text discussion, an engaging activity and a way to take action. They learned about a range of topics such as refugee experiences, immigration, the role of art in activism, Japanese internment, school segregation, the women's rights movement and the American civil rights movement.

### **Meeting Outcomes and Activities**

Although they didn't always use the language of the Social Justice Standards, the group's meeting outcomes regularly aligned with one or more of the 20 anchor standards, and meetings tended to focus on one or more goals tied to identity, diversity, justice and action.

For their activities, adults and kids worked together to plan and lead the meetings, often drawing from TT's strategies or looking online for activities to adapt for the group. Meeting leaders emailed the group members before each meeting to let families know the plan and how they should prepare.

### **Texts**

Because the children in the group varied in age and reading level, participants chose their reading from a list of texts developed for each meeting. The reading took place outside of group time (although all group members brought their books to the discussion, and occasionally shared a passage or section of the book, reading aloud to the group during discussion).

When constructing the list of possible texts for each meeting, families made sure to include a wide range of "mirrors" and "windows," often including texts about young people. These texts represented many genres, including films, stories, biographies, autobiographies and more.

## SAMPLE AGENDA: A CLOSER LOOK AT ONE MEETING

<b>Where &amp; when will the group meet?</b>	The group meets monthly in a space provided at the University of Colorado, Boulder.
<b>Who will attend?</b>	Everyone—a group of children at different grade levels and their families, composed in this case of parents and grandparents.
<b>What are the social justice goals you hope for this meeting?</b> (What will group members take away beyond the information in the text?)	“I know and like who I am and can talk about my family and myself and describe our various group identities.” “I know that all my group identities are part of who I am, but none of them fully describes me and this is true for other people too.”
<b>What social justice domain will the meeting engage?</b>	Identity
<b>What is the meeting’s topic?</b>	Ability Race & Ethnicity
<b>Will there be reading time?</b>	No
<b>How will everyone connect &amp; share responses?</b>	After the group activity, everyone will discuss their reading together for 45 minutes, comparing what they’ve learned from their different texts.
<b>What type of texts will be read or discussed?</b>	Fictional stories, biographies, graphic novels, informational texts, traditional texts and autobiographies.
<b>What are the meeting’s texts?</b>	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> <i>El Deafo</i> <i>Through My Eyes</i> <i>Who is Malala Yousafzai?</i> <i>The Different Dragon</i> <i>Out of My Mind</i> <i>My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer</i> <i>A New Look at Thanksgiving</i> <i>The Ledgerbook of Thomas Blue Eagle</i> <i>I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark</i> <i>Becoming Naomi León</i> <i>Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family’s Fight for Desegregation</i> <i>Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America</i> <i>American Born Chinese</i> <i>I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World</i>

<b>Who will lead?</b>	A brother (12) and sister (10) and their mothers.
<b>What are the meeting's activities?</b>	<p><b>Activity 1: “Two Sides of the Same Hand.”</b>  The activity will involve drawing and thinking about how we see our identity and how our parent or child sees our identity. By the end of the activity, we hope that we all have a shared understanding of what we mean by “identity.”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Trace your hand on paper and cut it out.</li> <li>2. On the inside of the hand, write words or draw pictures that identify who you are.</li> <li>3. Exchange your hand with your parent/child. On the outside of the hand write words or draw pictures that you think identify the other person. Do not look at what the person wrote about themselves on the inside of their hands.</li> <li>4. Open Discussion—What is the same or different between what you wrote about yourself and what the other person wrote about you?</li> </ol> <p><b>Activity 2: Book Discussion</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As a group, let's discuss these questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ In the book you read, who is the main character and why is that character's identity important to the story?</li> <li>➤ How would the story change if the main character had a different identity—a different race, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or economic status?</li> </ul> <p><i>One of the children leading the group will begin this discussion by offering an answer and textual evidence from the story they read.</i></p> </li> <li>2. Please split into groups of four to five:  Talk to your group members about a character in a book who is similar to or different from you. What makes that character similar or different?</li> </ol>

## SPOTLIGHT

# Austin, Texas

### About the Group

Manuel Martinez knew there was more to family involvement than school visits and PTA meetings. So when he developed a reading group for his second- and third-graders, he kept their families in mind. Over the course of six weeks, Martinez and his students dedicated some of their class time to reading aloud together. Then, the kids went home to read and discuss the same texts with their families. Their project had no name, but it did have a single topic, one Martinez had chosen specifically for their community: migration.

After their shared reading, children asked family members about their own migration experiences, how and when and why they moved into and within the United States. They asked for stories from parents and grandparents, friends and neighbors, recording family and community histories in their own words. Even before all the families came together for a potluck in his classroom, Martinez began to notice a shift in his students. “They wanted to participate, they wanted to raise their hand, they wanted to make their voices heard,” he said. “It really changed the dynamic of the classroom.”

### The Group’s Framework

The group included Martinez, his 20 students and each of their families. It relied on a parallel reading structure.

The goals for the group were multiple: Martinez wanted to find ways to involve families more closely in the work of his classroom, and he wanted to help students build literacy and writing skills, specifically paraphrasing. The social justice goal was clear: Members of the group would expand their knowledge of migration by considering how recent or long-past histories of migration or immigration had shaped their own (and family) identities, and by learning more about the diversity of experience contained in the term “migration.”

### Meeting Outcomes and Activities

Although they didn’t use the language of the Social Justice Standards, the reading group focused on several learning outcomes in the “Identity” and “Diversity” domains.

In class, Martinez relied on read-aloud activities, followed by discussion. Together, the children and their teacher decided on the questions children would ask their families.

At home, meetings included read-aloud activities followed by one-on-one discussions. Children asked the questions they developed in class, then wrote down their families’ answers in their own words.

In the whole-group meeting, families and children came together with Martinez in his classroom. Families shared their stories with one another, reflected on the experience of reading together with their children and shared a pot-luck meal together.

### Texts

Martinez chose texts in both English and Spanish. Because nearly all of his students came from families with histories of migration into or within the United States, Martinez selected texts that mirrored those experiences.

## SAMPLE AGENDA: A CLOSER LOOK AT TWO MEETINGS

	CLASS MEETING	HOME MEETING
<b>Where &amp; when will the group meet?</b>	In class—every day	At home—once a week
<b>Who will attend?</b>	Children & teacher	Children & families
<b>What are the social justice goals you hope for this meeting?</b> (What will group members take away beyond the information in the text?)	“I want to know more about other people’s lives and experiences, and I know how to ask questions respectfully and listen carefully and non-judgmentally.”	“I know about my family history and culture and about current and past contributions of people in my main identity group.”
<b>What social justice domain will the meeting engage?</b>	Diversity	Identity
<b>What is the meeting’s topic?</b>	Migration	Migration
<b>Will there be reading time?</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>How will everyone connect &amp; share responses?</b>	In-class discussion, everyone will share at final, whole-group meeting.	Discussion, students paraphrase their families’ stories to share at the whole-group meeting and to discuss in class.
<b>What type of texts will be read or discussed?</b>	Fictional stories	Fictional stories
<b>What are the meeting’s texts?</b>	My Diary From Here to There Xochitl and the Flowers Friends from the Other Side From North to South My Shoes and I Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote Waiting for Papá	My Diary From Here to There Xochitl and the Flowers Friends from the Other Side From North to South My Shoes and I Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote Waiting for Papá
<b>Who will lead?</b>	The teacher	The child
<b>What are the meeting’s activities?</b>	Read Aloud Group Discussion: What questions will we ask our families about their experiences with migration?	Read Aloud Group Discussion: Children & families discuss the questions from class.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Columbia, South Carolina

### About the Group

When Chris Hass explained to his second-grade students they'd be talking about reading with their families, the kids were ready to go. They'd been reading together in class for a while, and they had plenty of practice discussing texts with social justice in mind. Now, it was time for Mr. Hass to step back and let the children lead their families through discussions of the text.

### The Group's Framework

Hass designed and facilitated the group, but the main participants were his students and their families; he wanted the children to lead. Because the children recounted the conversations they had with their families in small groups in class, this group is a mix of class and home reading group structures.

The goals for the group were relatively straightforward: children and families extended their understanding of justice and action by reading to see how characters in their texts recognized injustice—even when it was framed as “normal”—and how they took action to disrupt it. While everyone shared the same lens, the topics varied. Some children and families read about injustice related to gender, others about race or ability.

### Meeting Outcomes and Activities

The meeting outcomes revolved around justice and action, particularly the 12th Social Justice Standard: “I know when people are treated unfairly, and I can give examples of prejudice words, pictures and rules.” In their readings and discussions, students not only learned how to recognize injustice—they also learned that, because injustice sometimes becomes the “norm,” we need to follow the lead of those who take action against it.

### Texts

Hass selected several texts for the reading group, a mix of informational texts and fictional stories. Between three and five children read and discussed each text with their families. The texts he chose included a wide range of “mirrors” and “windows,” often including texts about young people. These texts represented many genres, including films, stories, biographies, autobiographies and more.

## SAMPLE AGENDA: A CLOSER LOOK AT ONE MEETING

<b>Where &amp; when will the group meet?</b>	At home, at the convenience of families
<b>Who will attend?</b>	Families and children
<b>What are the social justice goals you hope for this meeting?</b> (What will group members take away beyond the information in the text?)	<p>“I know when people are treated unfairly, and I can give examples of prejudice words, pictures and rules.”</p> <p>“I know that words, behaviors, rules and laws that treat people unfairly based on their group identities cause real harm.”</p> <p>“I know that life is easier for some people and harder for others based on who they are and where they were born.”</p> <p>“I pay attention to how people (including myself) are treated, and I try to treat others how I like to be treated.”</p> <p>“I will speak up or do something when I see unfairness, and I will not let others convince me to go along with injustice.”</p>
<b>What social justice domains will the meeting engage?</b>	Justice & Action
<b>What is the meeting's topic?</b>	Ability, Race & Ethnicity, Gender
<b>Will there be reading time?</b>	Yes
<b>How will everyone connect &amp; share responses?</b>	Children meet in class in small groups (everyone who read the same text meets together) and discuss how their families responded to the questions and what they learned.
<b>What type of texts will be read or discussed?</b>	Fictional stories, biographies, informational texts
<b>What are the meeting's texts?</b>	<p>Granddaddy's Turn</p> <p>The Case for Loving</p> <p>Brave Girl</p> <p>Elizabeth Leads the Way</p> <p>Emmanuel's Dream</p> <p>Ruby's Wish</p>
<b>Who will lead?</b>	Children
<b>What are the meeting's activities?</b>	<p>After reading with families, children lead families through a discussion of six key questions about the text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is being positioned as normal?</li> <li>➤ Who has the power to do this?</li> <li>➤ What is the conflict this causes?</li> <li>➤ Who disrupts this?</li> <li>➤ How?</li> <li>➤ What is the result?</li> </ul>

# Recommended Book Lists

These organizations maintain extensive book lists that you may find useful as you look for texts to share with the children in your group.

### **Colorín Colorado ([www.colorincolorado.org](http://www.colorincolorado.org))**

Remarkable for its wide range of book lists, this site is primarily designed as a resource for teachers and families of ELL students. While Colorín Colorado can direct readers to bilingual texts, they also include lists on topics as diverse as growing up adopted, celebrating Diwali and entering the United States through Ellis Island. From the site's main page, simply select "Books and Authors" from the menu then select books for kids, young adults or professionals.

### **We Need Diverse Books ([diversebooks.org](http://diversebooks.org))**

We Need Diverse Books is a nonprofit whose mission is encouraging change in the publishing industry to help shape "a world where all children can see themselves in the pages of a book."

Among the resources available at [diversebooks.org](http://diversebooks.org) is their guide, "Where to Find Diverse Books." Categorized by topic (e.g., African and African-American, Latinx, LGBTQIA), the guide directs readers to online book lists recommending texts for readers of all ages.

### **School Library Journal ([slj.com](http://slj.com))**

Written for librarians and information specialists, the website of the *School Library Journal* hosts a wealth of book lists organized by topic and separated by grade level. Search "booklists" (one word) or visit their "Reviews+" page to browse lists of books on topics like "The Refugee Experience," "Girl-Powered...Thrilling YA" or "Honoring Activism."

### **Latinxs in Kid Lit ([latinosinkidlit.com](http://latinosinkidlit.com))**

Latinxs in Kid Lit, a valuable resource for groups exploring Latinx identity and experience, is an example of the type of site you'll find included in the lists above. It offers a wealth of book reviews that can help groups select children's, middle grades or young adult literature by Latinx authors or featuring Latinx characters. The site's blog also offers interviews with authors and illustrators that can introduce young readers to the minds behind their favorite stories.

# Appendix I

## FOR EDUCATORS: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR READING GROUPS

This section offers guidelines for educators and suggests key questions to consider before bringing families together for the first planning meeting.

### 1. Why do I want to start a social justice reading group?

Consider your definition of social justice.

Research shows the clear benefits of engaging families and communities in these kinds of conversations with their children. In the introduction to this guide, you'll find a summary of this research ready to share with families, students and administrators. But beyond the predictable benefits, it's important that you consider your own investment in this project.

Educators who have been most effective in this work have some things in common:

They have a clear, personal definition of social justice.

They recognize that others can have different visions for social justice.

They have done deep, internal identity work.

They have considered the role of education—and particularly of schools—in social justice work.

### 2. Do I have the relationships I'll need to make this group a success?

Consider the work you've already done to engage with your students around critical topics and to connect with the families and communities that surround your classroom.

Creating a reading group is not a first step toward introducing social justice in your classroom or engaging families and communities. Before you begin, assess the ways you've been working. Ask yourself:

Have I introduced the concepts of identity, diversity, justice and action to my students?

Do my curriculum and my classroom environment offer windows and mirrors for all my students?

How have I reached out to the families of

my students? How have I solicited their input or asked them to share their experiences or expertise?

How have I provided families with information about the work we've been doing in class, and about their child's successes as well as challenges?

Are members of my students' communities present in my classroom? Do I create space for local leaders, change-makers or influencers to speak to my students?

If you haven't yet built strong, equitable relationships with your students and their families, it's unlikely that your reading group will succeed. Instead of starting a new project, consider how you can commit to including your students' families and communities in the work you're already doing.

### 3. How will my identity shape this collaboration?

Consider how you'll ensure that the reading group is based on equitable partnerships with families.

As an educator, you enter any collaboration with significant institutional power behind you: your school system, your own education, your expertise. Many families may see you as a person with more power over their child's education than they have. Furthermore, other aspects of your identity (your race, your gender, class or language, among others) shape both the way that you see the world and the ways that others perceive you.

Before engaging with families, reflect on your identity and your intentions in starting this reading group:

What expertise do you expect families to

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#### Resource Recommendation:

For examples of ways to make sure your students are ready to tackle social justice topics and to include families in your classroom, see TT's *Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education*.

bring to the group? What is valuable about this expertise?

How have you signaled this to families in your previous interactions with them?

How will you continue to signal this when you first invite families to collaborate on this project?

Once you've thought through these questions, you should be ready to begin assembling your planning committee. Here are a few additional questions to keep in mind as you plan your community meeting.

#### **4. How will I build support at my school?**

Inviting colleagues and administrators into your work from the beginning can be invaluable. They, too, know your students and their families, and their suggestions can help you determine the best way to maximize family involvement. Well before the community meeting, take some time to share your plans with them, solicit their input and feedback, explain "Why Reading Groups?" (see pg. 6), and let them know your hopes for the group.

#### **5. How will I encourage families to join?**

These methods might help:

##### **Explain how the group will help students.**

Framing the group in terms of how this work will support your students' academic growth—improving literacy and critical reading skills as well as social emotional learning—provides a bridge between traditional schoolwork and the community-building work that reading groups undertake.

##### **Diversify your outreach methods.**

Fliers work well, but they don't reach every family. Contacting families directly, through an email, phone call or home visit can be more efficient. Personalized invitations are particularly effective at increasing turnout. Remember that this is a project that can only succeed if families are invested. If you take the time to explain why you think this group will benefit their child, most families will attend if they can.

##### **Connect through nets, not lines.**

Take advantage of social networks that students and families already have. Ask families who seem enthusiastic about the project to encourage others to attend the community meeting.

##### **Make it easy to attend.**

Be thoughtful with logistics. Schedule planning work and community meetings at a time when most parents are able to come. If you plan around mealtime and provide a light meal or refreshments, that may make it easier for parents to attend. Provide childcare services for families with younger siblings if you can or welcome them to bring their younger children. Consider meeting in the morning before school and providing breakfast. Facilitate transportation when possible.

##### **Reach out to all families.**

When preparing for the community meeting, specifically invite caretakers who haven't engaged in school events or activities in the past. This outreach is particularly important; some families may not have found a way to participate in your school community. Your reading group may be a different type of space, one where they feel welcome and valued.

##### **Ensure your outreach is inclusive.**

Check your language to make sure you're including all family structures in your outreach. Remember that parents aren't the only caretakers, and encourage students to invite the caretakers with whom they spend the most time to join your group. Make use of your school's translation services to ensure that invitations and meetings are available in all home languages.

#### **6. How will I share the spotlight?**

The community meeting will set the tone for your group. Consider how you'll show families that this will be a space where everyone is both a teacher and a learner, where everyone has the authority to create and share knowledge.

Sometimes we may not realize the actions that confirm our authority as educators and

place others as learners. For example, it's common for educators to rephrase a student comment for the class, particularly if the original statement is unclear or resists summarization. Doing so at a community meeting, however, only serves to reassert your authority in the space. It positions educators as gatekeepers to the conversation and suggests that they alone have access to the "correct language" for these discussions.

While you may need to encourage this first conversation, educators who are most successful in this work tend to maintain an awareness of their own power, stepping back as much as possible during the planning process. Here are a few ways to do that:

#### **Choose the space carefully.**

While you may be most comfortable meeting in your classroom, it's also a space where you're usually in control. Meeting outside of school (in a community center or public library) might not be possible, but if you do meet at school, consider whether you want your community meeting to be held in your classroom or in a more neutral space, such as the gym, cafeteria or library.

#### **Contribute as an equal.**

Introduce yourself by sharing some of your own identities, along with an experience or two that has shaped your idea of justice. Recognizing and sharing your own identities—particularly the dominant ones (say, for example, American citizen or straight man)—shows that you don't see your experience as the "default." Encourage others to also share about themselves in this way.

#### **Step back when you can.**

Defer when possible. If families look to you for answers, gently toss their questions to other participants. Quote other participants when you can. When questioned, assume that others already have knowledge before you present your own.

#### **7. How have I prepared for challenging conversations?**

As political discourse in our country has become more polarized, many classrooms have as well. The families you bring together for this group may have radically different beliefs, identities and experiences. Designed for facilitating classroom conversations, the TT guide *Let's Talk!* offers recommendations for steps educators can take before, during and after critical conversations to ensure that these discussions are as productive as possible.

#### **8. How will I ensure all families can participate equally?**

When working with a group of families who are culturally and linguistically diverse, do a bit of research to support your work. Resources like TT's *Best Practices for Serving English Language Learners* and *Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education* are good places to start. But don't neglect the many resources in your community! Talk with other parents and community members to get a sense of how best to create a group that encourages equal participation.

Your school may have a family liaison or family engagement coordinator who knows the resources available to you and linguistically diverse families. Invite them to become an ally. They could even be a part of the reading group!

Your school or district may provide translation resources. These can be invaluable to parents who may not be comfortable communicating solely in English. Always ask parents to determine which language they are most comfortable communicating in.

Look for resources outside the school district that can help. Community organizations are often available to help and have strong networks of references to resources or others who would like to be involved in the reading group. Developing relationships with members of these community organizations can build both a stronger reading group and a stronger community.

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#### **Resource Recommendation:**

Looking for ways to reflect on your identity? See TT's *Let's Talk!*

# Appendix II

## PAUSE AND PLAN WORKBOOK

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

#### Review Best Practices

Referencing the guide, take turns reading aloud the four Getting Started standards. Discuss each standard and address any questions or concerns group members may have—about the standard or about how your particular group might ensure that you meet it.

#### Plan the Community Meeting

Think about what you'll need to know to ensure accessibility to all families at your school. Consider transportation, availability, translation needs, etc.

##### *1. Review the accessibility variables listed in the guide.*

Brainstorm how you'll address the questions listed there and take notes (as necessary) below.

Time of day \_\_\_\_\_  
Transportation \_\_\_\_\_ Safety \_\_\_\_\_  
Childcare \_\_\_\_\_  
Language \_\_\_\_\_  
Ability \_\_\_\_\_

##### *2. Schedule your community meeting.*

Time and date \_\_\_\_\_  
Location \_\_\_\_\_  
Staff/Resources (translators, interpreters, texts in translation, etc.):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Additional Services (transportation, childcare, food, etc.):  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Create a Publicity and Outreach Plan

How will you get as many families as possible to attend your community meeting?

##### *1. Brainstorm publicity options based on the channels available in your school community.*

Possibilities might include:

Personal Outreach to Families (Identify at least three families who might reach out to their networks and act as liaisons with the planning group.)  
Posters  
School Newsletter  
School Website

Flyer Sent Home with Students  
 Announcements at PTA Meetings  
 Conversations During Family-Teacher Conferences  
 Invitations Extended from the School Counseling Office  
 Other Ideas \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Brainstorm ways to solicit feedback from the children who will join your group.**

These might include:

Attendance at part or all of the community meeting (for older children)  
 Parent surveys for pre-discussion among families  
 In-class writing or discussion  
 Other Ideas \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Consider how you'll collect feedback from families who can't attend the community meeting.**

Brainstorm questions you can include on a family survey. (You can also use this as an opportunity to survey families about availability and other logistics.)

Several questions you'll discuss at your meeting can also be sent to families ahead of time. Some possibilities include \_\_\_\_\_

What topics or experiences would you like to read about or discuss with your child?  
 Are there any specific books you'd be interested in reading with a group like this one?  
 What goals would you have for a group like this one?  
 Other questions \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Decide who will be responsible for which outreach activity.**

Record agreed-upon activities, people responsible, due dates and dates completed here:

OUTREACH	PERSON OR PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE	DUE DATE	DATE COMPLETED

## THE COMMUNITY MEETING

### Establish Standards and Agreements

#### 1. Review best practices as a group.

Referencing the guide, take turns reading aloud the four Getting Started standards. Discuss each standard and address any questions or concerns group members may have—about the standard or about how your particular group might ensure that you meet it.

#### 2. Working together, generate community agreements to align expectations about process, communication and calling in members when necessary.

Be sure to address these questions:

How will our group structure communication during each meeting?

What expectations will we hold for one another if we disagree with a group member?

How will we remind ourselves of the “Getting Started” standards?

How will we ensure that our work is distributed across the group?

Agreement 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Agreement 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Agreement 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Agreement 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Agreement 5 \_\_\_\_\_

### Decide on Group Roles

#### 1. Referencing the guide, take turns reading aloud the full descriptions of each of the group roles.

#### 2. Decide which roles will best serve your group and who will take responsibility for each set of tasks.

Leave time to brainstorm additional roles that may be unique to your school community.

Communications Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Texts Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Plan Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Scheduler \_\_\_\_\_

School Partner Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Other Role/Person Responsible \_\_\_\_\_

Other Role/Person Responsible \_\_\_\_\_

Other Role/Person Responsible \_\_\_\_\_

### Choose a Group Structure

Reference the guide to review each of the four structures: Collective, Parallel, Home and Class.

Review the chart below. Based on your discussion and feedback the planning committee has collected about family availability, select the structure that will work best for your school community.

	COLLECTIVE	PARALLEL	HOME	CLASS
<b>Will families have time to read with students at home?</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Will families have time to communicate with other group members between meetings?</b>	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>Will families have time to attend multiple meetings?</b>	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Does the planning committee have the means to provide transportation, childcare, food, translation services and ability accommodations if needed for multiple meetings?</b>	Yes	No	No	No

### Develop Content Goals

#### **1. Work together to discuss and record the goals for your group.**

Don't forget to include the feedback the planning committee collected from children and families who couldn't attend the meeting as you decide on goals and topics.

What are a few broad, overarching goals you have for your group?

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#### **2. Discuss the topics you'd like to explore in your group. Choose a few topics you'd be interested in reading about with your children and record them below.**

The topic list in the guide may be a helpful reference, but keep in mind that there may be topics that are relevant to your community that aren't listed there.

What topics would you like your group to explore?

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**3. Read through the social justice standards as a group and identify a few you'd like to work toward.**

You might read the anchor standard list or the list of standards specific to the grade band for the children in your group.

What are two or three social justice standards you'd like to work toward?

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**4. Combine your social justice standard(s) and your topic(s) to decide on the specific content goals that you'll use to plan meetings.**

If you're having trouble narrowing your broad goal into a specific one, review the examples in the guide.

What are the content goals for your group?

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**Develop Literacy Goals**

**1. Working together, brainstorm a few answers to the questions below.**

Remember to include the feedback that the planning committee has collected from families who can't attend the community meeting.

What speaking skills do you want children to build through this group?

What listening skills do you want them to build?

What reading skills do you want them to build?

What writing skills do you want them to build?

These literacy goals will help shape some of the practical logistics of your group.

**2. As a group, talk through the following questions:**

What voices do you want children to hear from in your group?

What genres do you want them to read?

Will group members be reading in a group or individually? Aloud or silently?

How do you want children to respond to the text? Writing? Discussion? Presentations? Other?

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**3. Agree on at least three literacy goals that you'll keep in mind as you choose texts and activities for your reading group.**

List them here:

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**Practice Text Selection**

**1. Begin with logistics. Using the guide as a reference, answer the following questions:**

Will everyone in the group be reading the same text, or will we read different texts on the same topic? \_\_\_\_\_

How will the group address language differences? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is responsible for taking these steps? \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Consider genre as a way to help narrow your search.**

After reviewing the guide, decide which genres best align with the group's content and literacy goals. List your genre selections here:

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**3. As a group, practice text assessment.**

Pick a story everyone has read or revisit the simplified story of Rosa Parks included in the guide. In a discussion, assess the text using the questions below as a guide:

For whom in your group could this text be a mirror, a reflection of identity and experience? For whom could this text be a window into the identities and experiences of others?

How could this text motivate and connect with the interests and concerns of the children in the group?

To what extent does this text access and build upon the knowledge the children bring with them?

Does the text contain topics that may be more sensitive for some readers than others (e.g., the death of a parent, coming out, being adopted, etc.)?

These considerations were adapted from the TT's resource *Reading Diversity: A Tool for Selecting Diverse Texts*, found at [tolerance.org/magazine/publications/reading-diversity](http://tolerance.org/magazine/publications/reading-diversity). If you have time, you can assess each text using the entire resource.

**Plan a Text List**

**1. Begin by brainstorming texts that group members recommend.** Remember to include the feedback that the planning committee has collected from families who can't attend the community meeting.

**2. Add them to the graphic organizer below, along with a few volunteers who will assess these texts.**

If you don't have time to plan the text list as a whole group, identify volunteers to survey the text lists included in Part III of the guide, the family-suggested texts and the TT Student Texts Library to recommend other possible readings for your group. Decide who will be responsible for which text planning activity. Record agreed-upon activities, people responsible, due dates and dates completed here:

TEXT OR RESOURCE TO REVIEW	PERSON/PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE	DUE DATE	DATE COMPLETED

**3. Consider these final, logistical questions, and record the answers below.**

Who will draft and send a final book list for group approval? \_\_\_\_\_

When will the final book list be distributed to all families in the group? \_\_\_\_\_

**Organize Group Meetings**

**1. Decide when you'll read.**

Discuss the pros and cons of reading before the group meeting versus during the meeting. Will you read together as a group or individually as families? \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Brainstorm activities other than reading that you can do in your group meetings.**

The list of teaching strategies on tolerance.org is a good resource to draw from. Try to choose a variety of activities to keep the meeting energetic (including discussion, writing, art or physical activities). Be sure to keep your literacy goals in mind as you select strategies and other activities.

**3. List some possible activities here:**

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**4. Working together, complete the meeting agenda(s) most suited to your group structure.**

**For collective reading groups:** Complete the short agenda template (below) together. Facilitators can draw from the recommended activities you listed above (or select their own activities) to complete the full agenda templates as independently plan their meetings.

**For parallel groups:** As a group, complete the home agenda template (below) and the full agenda template (below). Draw from the recommended activities you listed above to plan your whole-group meeting.

**For home and class reading groups:** Complete the full agenda template (below) together. Draw from the recommended activities you listed above to plan your whole-group meeting.

**Short Agenda Template (for collective reading groups to complete together)**

<b>Specific Meeting Goal</b>	
<b>Text(s) to Discuss</b>	
<b>Activities (Include reading time if you'll be reading with your group)</b>	

**Home Agenda Template (for parallel reading groups to complete together)**

As families read independently, how you will collect and share readers' responses? The following questions (adapted from the Teaching Tolerance Strategy "Challenge the Text") may help you develop questions that families can answer to share their responses to the reading (See Spotlight: Texas and Spotlight: South Carolina for models of parallel family communication).

- Whose voice(s) is/are featured in this text?
- Whose voice(s) is/are omitted?
- Who is the audience for this text?
- Why did the author write this?
- How is the information used?
- Who decided the "truth" as it appears in this text?
- What assumption(s) is/are being made?

What did I learn from this text?  
 What was I left wanting to know?  
 Other thoughts/observations about the text:

<b>Specific Meeting Goal</b>	
<b>Text (s) to Discuss</b>	
<b>Activities/Questions for families</b>	
<b>Communication Plan (How will families share their answers to these questions?)</b>	

**Full Agenda Template (for parallel, home and class reading groups to complete together; for collective reading group facilitators to complete independently)**

<b>Date, Time &amp; Location</b>	
<b>Social Justice Goals</b>	
<b>Social Justice Domain</b>	
<b>Topic(s)</b>	
<b>Methods for Sharing Responses</b>	
<b>Text Genres &amp; Titles</b>	
<b>Facilitator</b>	
<b>Activities (Include reading time if you'll be reading with your group)</b>	

**Plan Your Schedule**

**1. Discuss meeting facilitation.**

As you plan your schedule, consider the following questions:

Who will be responsible for reaching out to families who aren't at this meeting to ensure they have the opportunity to facilitate a meeting if they want to?  
How will you ensure that as many families as possible can participate in your community meeting?

**2. Plan for inclusion.**

Consider your community meeting—what changes (if any) will need to be made to ensure that all families in your group will be able to attend your regular, whole-group meeting(s)? Refer to the “before you begin” section of the guide for more on accessibility considerations, including:

- Time of day
- Transportation
- Safety
- Childcare
- Safety
- Language
- Ability

Decide who will be responsible for scheduling group meetings. Set a deadline for soliciting volunteers to facilitate, and a date by which your scheduler will have completed and shared the Reading Group Schedule below.

**Reading Group Schedule**

MEETING DATE	FACILITATOR	TEXTS

# Appendix III

## SAMPLE TEACHING STRATEGY: VALUE LINES

### What?

Students take a stance on a topic related to the central text and listen while classmates explain their stances.

### When?

After reading.

### Why?

Value Line teaches students to question the text and deepens comprehension through observing and listening to others. The strategy incorporates movement, which can enhance student understanding and participation. By building in the opportunity to change one's stance, students see that personal positions and questions related to the text evolve as comprehension increases.

### How?

Choose a text.

After students read the text, in small groups or independently, provide students with a value judgment connected to the text.

### Sample Value Line judgments:

Text: Crocodile and the Ghost Bat Have a Hullabaloo (available on tolerance.org)

*The crocodile is too sensitive.*

*The ghost bat is mean.*

Text: Old Joe and the Carpenter (available on tolerance.org)

*Joe is right to want to build a fence.*

*The bridge was a perfect solution to the fight between Old Joe and the carpenter.*

Designate a "value line" in the classroom. Assign one side for those who agree strongly, the other for those who disagree strongly, and a space in the middle for those whose opinions lie in between.

Ask students to take a stand relative to the value line at the count of three.

Invite students to partner with someone who disagrees with their stance and discuss their positions with these questions:

- Why do you think that?
- How would you explain that?
- What's the evidence to support that?
- How can you persuade me to think that too?
- What would you have done in that situation?

---

After individual student discussions, debrief the value judgment as a whole class.

Revisit the central text.

Ask students to take a stand again, using the same statement. Some students may return to the same location on the value line. Some may change position.

Invite students to select a different partner and talk about why they chose the stance they did. Debrief the process again with the whole group, focusing on reasons for keeping or changing position.

Have students quick write or draw about the process.

### **English language learners**

Verbal interaction is central to developing language proficiency. Value Line provides students with an authentic opportunity for meaningful conversation and verbal interaction in English. Reading and rereading the same text increases reading comprehension for all students.

### **Connection to anti-bias education**

In an anti-bias classroom, each student must feel valued, accepted and validated. Value Line supports rich discussions about divergent opinion and experiences. It enhances understanding and allows students to adjust their thinking in response to additional information. This strategy illustrates how diversity enriches a team.

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# Reading for Social Justice

## PRE-USE EVALUATION

### Which grade levels do you work with?

K-2  
3-5  
6-8  
9-12

### How would you rate the quality of this guide overall?

Excellent  
Good  
Average  
Poor  
Very poor

### How would you rate this guide as a resource for reaching family engagement goals?

Excellent  
Good  
Average  
Poor  
Very poor

### How would you rate this guide as a resource for reaching student literacy goals?

Excellent  
Good  
Average  
Poor  
Very poor

### How likely are you to use this guide?

Very likely  
Somewhat likely  
Unsure  
Somewhat unlikely  
Very unlikely

### How likely are you to recommend this guide to a friend or colleague?

Very likely  
Somewhat likely  
Unsure  
Somewhat unlikely  
Very unlikely

### What content recommendations do you have? What information would be helpful to include or cut?

### What organizational recommendations do you have? What information could we clarify or present differently?

Thank you for your time! If you are planning on starting a social justice reading group at your school, please keep us posted on how it goes via [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org).

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