



# Reading Together

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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The mission of the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education is grounded in a lived commitment to democracy, diversity, equity and justice. The School of Education teaches and conducts research to make a positive difference with and in schools and communities. The work of its faculty, researchers, staff and students leads to evidence-based policy and practice. The School of Education aims for its graduates to be engaged and informed educators, researchers, policymakers and community leaders.

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TOLERANCE  
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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 prior; 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 in which 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

## 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 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 both talk about the issues that affect their lives and learn to act in ways that advance 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 lets them 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. They supply models of 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 educator and researcher Nathaniel Petrich explains, when students come together to read, 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, and they help students build speaking and listening skills. Depending on the structure of the reading group and the genres and number of texts discussed, participation in a reading group can move 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 actively engage 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>

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

► **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, developmental psychologist Monique Sénéchal found that “the combined effect” of family involvement was equivalent to a 10-point gain on a standardized test.<sup>6</sup>

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to support a group of caretakers: parents, guardians, teachers, librarians and others 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 during which children and adults in your community can read, talk, teach and learn together.

We all share the important task of helping children develop the skills they need to thrive in a diverse democracy. These skills include understanding how to speak and listen to one another, to share and hear stories and ideas, and to recognize the value in our differing experiences. The true spirit of this work also requires that we learn as well, listening to children’s stories and learning about the world as they observe and live 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.

## 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. “Before You Begin” walks you through forming a planning committee and outlines the work this committee will need to do to prepare for your first community meetings. “Getting Started” provides the information and activities you’ll use during your first community meetings. It offers 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 community, 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 in which 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 a planning workbook with resources, activities and graphic organizers to complete together as you build the framework for your reading group.

The appendices include guidance for educators who want to lay the groundwork for these groups as well as a bibliography and an evaluation we’ll use to improve the next edition of this guide.

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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 the appendix, before you move on.



# Before You Begin

## The Planning Committee

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

Once you've decided to start a social justice reading group, it's tempting 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 in *your* community, 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.

When you bring everyone together for your first community meeting, it's crucial to have the right people at the table. A planning committee of interested parents, guardians and educators can ensure your group includes as many families as possible. As you form your planning committee, ask yourself: *Whose voice might be missing from this conversation? Does the planning committee reflect the demographics of our community?*

If not, pause and find a way to include all necessary voices.

Once you've assembled your planning committee, meet together to prepare for the first community meeting. The recommendations in this section—and the workbook activities that accompany them—provide a roadmap for planning a reading group that prioritizes inclusion and access.

#### **In your planning committee meeting, you will:**

- Discuss group standards and best practices of successful reading groups.
- Plan and schedule the community meeting.
- Create a publicity and outreach plan.

### 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** ◀

Activity A: Read more about and discuss best practices.

## **PLANNING THE COMMUNITY MEETING**

For your group to succeed, you'll need as many families to participate as possible. Think about what you'll need to know to ensure accessibility to all families at your school. Consider transportation, availability, translation needs and so on. Planning ahead can help you anticipate and avoid problems with access.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

Activity B: Evaluate your needs and schedule your first community meeting.

## **PUBLICITY AND OUTREACH**

Key to a successful reading group is shared decision-making and planning. Before your community meeting, you'll need to spread the word about your reading group, encourage educators and families 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.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

Activity C: Create your publicity and outreach plan.

# Getting Started

## 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 on the length of today's meeting and how much of the guide you intend to cover. You will probably need to 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.

#### **In your community meeting(s), you will:**

- Establish group standards and agreements for conversations in your reading group.
- Select and assign group roles and responsibilities.
- Decide on a structure for your reading group.
- Set content goals for your reading group.
- Set literacy goals for your reading group.
- Begin the text selection process.
- Discuss organization for your reading group and review possible agendas.

### 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. In the most successful reading groups, members call one another in and challenge everyone—families, educators and students—to learn and grow together.

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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).

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

Activity 1: Establish your group standards and agreements.

## GROUP ROLES

When school or library staff and families work together to manage the group, work is shared, and children observe the value of relying on diverse decision-makers from across the 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—of your group is equitably distributed? One way to divide labor is to identify group roles. These might include:

- Communications Manager(s)
- Text Manager
- Plan Manager
- Scheduler
- School or Library Partner Manager

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

Activity 2: Establish your group roles.

## GROUP STRUCTURE

There are any number of ways you can organize your social justice reading group, and you'll want to develop a structure that works for your community. You might begin by thinking of who will be participating in your meetings:

- **Whole-group meetings** include children, parents, guardians or caretakers, and educators.
- **Class meetings** include children and educators.
- **Home meetings** include children and their parents, guardians or caretakers.

Your group needn't limit itself to just one type of meeting—in fact, talking through texts and ideas with different people in different settings can be an excellent way for children to build their understanding and their communication skills. When structuring your group, you can build on the meeting types that work for your community. These four structures are popular starting points:

- **Collective Reading Groups.** Collective social justice reading groups have one type of meeting: whole-group meetings during which families, children and educators gather to discuss a text or topic.
- **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. After children have had several meetings with one another and their educators, a whole-group meeting brings children, families and educators together to share an activity or two and a discussion about the topic.

► **Home Reading Groups.** In home reading groups, there are two types of meetings—home and whole-group—with the majority of the meetings taking place at home. 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 meet together to share their learning.

► **Parallel Reading Groups.** Parallel reading groups typically consist of all 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 educators, sharing elements from their home discussions, if relevant. During home meetings, children read and talk with their families, sharing elements from their school discussion, if relevant. 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 meet together to share their learning.

When choosing a structure, you'll need to balance between the value of shared discussion time and the need for accessibility. In particular, consider how many group meetings are reasonable to build into your plan. Be sure to include any feedback the planning committee has collected from families unable to attend this meeting.

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 few opportunities for shared discussion but may be easier for families to commit to. Parallel and home groups fall somewhere in the middle.

Keep in mind that these recommendations aren't set in stone—you'll want to adjust them as needed for your community. **But whatever structure you choose, you'll want to consider how you can ensure that no children are excluded, regardless of family involvement.**

► **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

**Activity 3: Establish your group structure.**

## SOCIAL JUSTICE LEARNING 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 best goals answer one simple question: *By the end of your reading group, what do you want participants to know and be able to do?*

You might think of goal-setting as a three-step process: selecting a topic, connecting it to social justice and establishing a clear, narrow learning goal.

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

### 1. Select one or more topics.

You've probably come into this group with ideas of what you'd like to discuss. Selecting a topic is a great starting point.

► **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

Activity 4: Select a few topics.

### 2. Connect to social justice learning.

A good place to begin when setting specific 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.

► **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

Activity 5: Read and discuss the Social Justice Standards.

### 3. Establish your social justice learning goals.

The last step is to develop clear goals that bring your topic into conversation with the Social Justice Standards. To illustrate how the different standards can shape our approach to a topic, we can look at the familiar story 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, Southerner, activist and so on) that shaped her experiences. We might also ask how her 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 was asked to move, why she was arrested and whether the law that led to 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 protest connected to that larger movement, how people supported the demand for desegregation, what finally led to change and what actions we can take when we see injustice.

For more information, including breakdowns of how the standards look for students in different grade levels, visit [tolerance.org/social-justice-standards](https://tolerance.org/social-justice-standards).

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

Activity 6: Establish your social justice learning goals.

## LITERACY LEARNING 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 young 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 the 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** ◀

Activity 7: Establish your literacy goals.

## TEXT SELECTION

Choosing texts is one of the most fun parts of planning a reading group, but it can also be one of the most challenging. When selecting texts, you'll need to consider the relationship between your texts, your learning goals and your group members. You might think of text selection as a three-step process: determining your needs, gathering prospective texts and checking the texts.

### 1. Decide on your group's needs.

Before you begin selecting texts, it's worth taking a moment to discuss a few very general questions about the kinds of texts you're looking for. Your reading group members may have different reading levels, different home languages or different accessibility needs. Remember that there are many ways to organize a social justice reading group, and the key is finding a structure—and finding texts—that work for your members.

➤ **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

Activity 8: Decide on your group's needs.

### 2. Pull together a list of books based on topic and reading level.

There are several ways to go about setting a reading list. You might consult with staff members in your school or district library. You might make use of online text libraries. Or you might review online book lists.

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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.

► PAUSE AND PLAN ◀

Activity 9: Develop a text list.

**3. Narrow your list based on your learning goals and your group members.**

After you've established a list of suitable books, it's time to narrow. 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).

While much children's literature honors identity, values diversity, prioritizes justice and encourages action, there are also plenty of children's books that reinforce stereotypes. You might divide the responsibility, asking group members to evaluate possible texts for alignment with the Social Justice Standards and with the identities, experiences and knowledge of group members.

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 identities and experiences back to us. Those that are "windows" offer a view of identities and experiences different from our 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 such as age, gender, ability, race, ethnicity, religion and more—as you select your texts.

► PAUSE AND PLAN ◀

Activity 10: Narrow your list.

**PLANNING YOUR MEETINGS**

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, literacy goals and group structure. To wrap up your community meeting, plan your logistics and then work together as a group to complete a sample meeting agenda.

**1. Plan your logistics.**

There are a few logistical questions that every group can answer before setting the agendas for their meetings:

► **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. Most groups find it efficient to have the group leader for each meeting also plan the activities for that meeting.

**The Teaching Tolerance Student Text Library**

Free to access through [tolerance.org](https://www.tolerance.org) (log in after 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, text type and social justice domain. Tier I and Tier II vocabulary words are also clearly identified within each text.

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► **When and where will your group meet?** It may be helpful to consider your community meeting—what changes (if any) could be made to ensure that all families in your group will be able to attend your regular, whole-group meeting(s)?

► **Will there be reading time at your 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. On the other hand, for parents and guardians with busy schedules, it may be preferable to meet a little longer and read together rather than to require reading before the meeting.

► **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

**Activity 11: Set logistics for group meetings.**

## **2. Plan a meeting.**

Many groups leave it to the meeting leader or facilitator to set the agenda for each meeting. However, you may want to plan one or more whole-group meetings together to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute. In the workbook, you'll find recommendations for activities you can try during your meetings and templates you can use to plan meetings for each of the four group structures. You'll also find recommendations for which template(s) you can complete together for practice.

► **PAUSE AND PLAN** ◀

**Activity 12: Plan activities and a sample group meeting.**

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 families 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 six families. They 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.

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.

## **Meeting Activities**

Although they didn't always use the language of the Social Justice Standards, the group's goals 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 Teaching Tolerance'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 WHOLE-GROUP MEETING

<b>Date/time/location</b>	The group meets monthly in a space provided at the University of Colorado, Boulder.
<b>Topic(s)</b>	Ability Race & Ethnicity
<b>Social Justice Learning Goal(s)</b>	I know and like who I am, and I 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>Literacy Learning Goal(s)</b>	Not specified. Common Core State Standards met by this meeting include: Analyze in detail how a key individual, event or idea is introduced, illustrated and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).
<b>Facilitator(s)</b>	Children—a brother (12) and sister (10) and their mothers
<b>Text(s)</b>	The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian El Deafo Through My Eyes Who Is Malala Yousafzai? The Different Dragon Out of My Mind My Mixed-Up Berry Blue Summer 1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving The Ledgerbook of Thomas Blue Eagle I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark Becoming Naomi León Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America American Born Chinese I Am Malala: How One Girl Stood Up for Education and Changed the World

<p><b>Activities</b></p>	<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/guardian 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/guardian or 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 hand.</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 chose to 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>One of the children leading the group will begin this discussion by offering an answer and textual evidence from the story they read.</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>
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## SPOTLIGHT

# Austin, Texas

### About the Group

Elementary school teacher 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 hands, 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 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 potluck meal together.

### Texts

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. To ensure that all families had access to the texts, he chose books in English and Spanish.

## SAMPLE AGENDA 1: A CLOSER LOOK AT ONE WHOLE-GROUP MEETING

<b>Date/time/location</b>	In class—every day
<b>Topic(s)</b>	Migration
<b>Social Justice Learning Goal(s)</b>	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.
<b>Literacy Learning Goal(s)</b>	Not specified. Common Core State Standards met by this meeting include: Analyze how and why individuals, events or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
<b>Facilitator</b>	Teacher
<b>Text(s)</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
<b>Activities</b>	Activity 1: Read-aloud Activity 2: Group Discussion: What questions will we ask our families about their experiences with migration?

## SAMPLE AGENDA 2: A CLOSER LOOK AT ONE HOME MEETING (PARALLEL)

<b>Date/time/location</b>	At home—once a week
<b>Specific Meeting Goal</b>	I know about my family history and culture and about current and past contributions of people in my main identity group.
<b>Texts to Discuss</b>	Families will pick one: 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>Questions for families to discuss</b>	Questions determined by the class
<b>Additional Activities</b>	Read-aloud and paraphrase for communication
<b>Communication Plan</b>	At the parallel (home) meetings, children paraphrase their families’ answers to class questions to discuss in class and to share at the whole-group meeting.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Columbia, South Carolina

### About the Group

When Chris Hass explained to his second-grade students that 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 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 students recounted in class small groups the conversations they'd had with their families, this arrangement is a mix of class and home reading group structures.

The goals for the group were relatively straightforward: Children and families extended their understandings of justice and action by reading to see how characters in their texts recognized injustice—even when it was framed as “normal”—and how those characters 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 Social Justice Standard 12: “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 work with 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 HOME MEETING

<b>Date/time/location</b>	At home, at the convenience of families
<b>Specific Meeting Goal</b>	<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>Texts to Discuss</b>	<p>Families will read one:</p> <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>Questions for families to discuss</b>	<p>What is being positioned as normal?</p> <p>Who has the power to do this?</p> <p>What is the conflict it causes?</p> <p>Who disrupts this?</p> <p>How?</p> <p>What is the result?</p>
<b>Additional Activities</b>	Read-aloud
<b>Communication Plan</b>	Children meet in class in small groups (based on the texts they read) to discuss how their families responded to the questions and what they learned.

# Before You Begin

## The Planning Committee

### Activity A: Review Best Practices

1. Take turns reading the standards aloud. As you read, 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.

➤ **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. In the most successful reading groups, members call one another in and challenge everyone—families, educators and students—to learn and grow together.

2. Brainstorm additional standards you think would benefit your group and list them here:

➤

➤

➤

➤

## Activity B: Plan the Community Meeting

1. Evaluate accessibility to ensure how you'll include all families. Read through the questions below, discussing possible answers and taking notes as you go.

➤ **Accessibility** Will your meeting place be accessible to students or family members with disabilities? Will any participants require accommodations such as an American Sign Language interpreter or materials printed in Braille?

➤ **Childcare** Will there be a 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.

➤ **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.

➤ **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?

2. Brainstorm additional standards you think would benefit your group and list them here:

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- 

3. Schedule your community meeting. 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 below.

➤ Time and date:

➤ Location:

➤ Staff/resources (translators, interpreters, etc.):

➤ Additional services (transportation, childcare, food, etc.):

### **Activity C: Create a Publicity and Outreach Plan**

*1. Brainstorm publicity options based on the channels available in your school community. Possibilities include:*

- 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
- Personal outreach to families—identify at least three families who might reach out to their networks and act as liaisons with the planning group.

*Other Ideas:*

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*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/guardian surveys for pre-discussion among families
- In-class writing or discussion

*Other Ideas:*

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*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 and due dates here:

Outreach	Person/people responsible	Due date
➔		
➔		
➔		
➔		
➔		
➔		

5. Assign one member of the planning committee to ensure everyone at the community meeting will have access to this guide during the meeting.

## THE COMMUNITY MEETING

### Activity 1: Establish Standards and Agreements

1. After reviewing best practices as a group, discuss the following questions:

- ➔ What expectations will we hold for one another if we disagree with group members?
- ➔ How will we remind ourselves of the “Getting Started” standards?
- ➔ How will we ensure that our work is distributed across the group?

2. Use your answers to develop community agreements. List them below.

- ➔
- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

### Activity 2: Decide on Group Roles

1. Take turns reading aloud the full descriptions of each of the group roles. As you read, decide which roles will best serve your group and who will take responsibility for each set of roles.

➤ **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 and so on. 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 address 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 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.

➤ **Partnerships Manager** This person collaborates with school or library 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 the group find and secure funding for books or other needs.

2. Add additional roles, along with descriptions and the names of those who will take them on, below.

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### Activity 3: Choose a Group Structure

1. Consider which structure best aligns with your community’s needs. Review the chart below, and then have the scheduler lead a discussion of how each structure might align (or not) with the needs of your community.

	Collective	Class	Home	Parallel
Will families need time to read with students at home?	maybe	no	yes	yes
Will families need to communicate with other group members between meetings?	maybe	no	no	yes
Will families need to attend multiple meetings?	yes	no	yes (in home)	no

2. Based on your discussion and feedback the planning committee has collected about family

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*availability, select the structure that will work best for your school community.*

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As you plan, consider tying a whole-group meeting to a culturally significant event or observation. For example, in Latin America, Mother's Day is a huge event, and parents traditionally come to school around this time. 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.

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#### **Activity 4: Select a Few topics**

*1. The communications manager should lead a brainstorm of some topics your group might want to explore. Below is a list of topics we use to classify resources for Teaching Tolerance, but you may find it useful to review the Book List Chart on p. 38-39 for a few more ideas.*

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

*2. As a group, decide on two or three topics to explore together. List them below. (Be sure to consider any feedback the planning committee has collected from families unable to attend this meeting.)*

- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

#### **Activity 5: Read and Discuss the Social Justice Standards**

*1. Read through the Social Justice Standards as a group.*

##### **Identity Anchor Standards**

1. Students will develop positive social identities based on their membership in multiple groups in society.
2. Students will develop language and historical and cultural knowledge that affirm and accurately describe their membership in multiple identity groups.
3. Students will recognize that people's multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals.
4. Students will express pride, confidence and healthy self-esteem without denying the

value and dignity of other people.

5. Students will recognize traits of the dominant culture, their home culture and other cultures and understand how they negotiate their own identity in multiple spaces.

### **Diversity Anchor Standards**

6. Students will express comfort with people who are both similar to and different from them and engage respectfully with all people.
7. Students will develop language and knowledge to accurately and respectfully describe how people (including themselves) are both similar to and different from each other and others in their identity groups.
8. Students will respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and will exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.
9. Students will respond to diversity by building empathy, respect, understanding and connection.
10. Students will examine diversity in social, cultural, political and historical contexts rather than in ways that are superficial or oversimplified.

### **Justice Anchor Standards**

11. Students will recognize stereotypes and relate to people as individuals rather than representatives of groups.
12. Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).
13. Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today.
14. Students will recognize that power and privilege influence relationships on interpersonal, intergroup and institutional levels and consider how they have been affected by those dynamics.
15. Students will identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world.

### **Action Anchor Standards**

16. Students will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.
17. Students will recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.
18. Students will speak up with courage and respect when they or someone else has been hurt or wronged by bias.
19. Students will make principled decisions about when and how to take a stand against bias and injustice in their everyday lives and will do so despite negative peer or group pressure.
20. Students will plan and carry out collective action against bias and injustice in the world and will evaluate what strategies are most effective.

You can find the standards in Spanish, as well as a list of standards specific to the grade band for the children in your group, at [tolerance.org/social-justice-standards](https://tolerance.org/social-justice-standards).

2. As a group, identify one or two domains and three or four standards that you'd be interested in learning more about. The plan manager can lead this conversation; you can record your group's answers below.

- ➔
- ➔
- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

### Activity 6: Establish Your Social Justice Learning Goals

1. Review the models below for examples of how to bring your topic and the Social Justice Standards together to form a social justice learning goal.

➤ **Topic:** Immigration

➤ **Social Justice Domain:** Diversity

➤ **Social Justice Standard:** Students will respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and will exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way. (D8)

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

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

➤ **Topic:** Black History

➤ **Social Justice Domain:** Justice

➤ **Social 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)

➤ **Social Justice Learning Goal:** Our reading group will learn about how black people have historically resisted racial injustice and oppression in the United States.

2. Working together, develop one or two social justice learning goals for your group. (Note: group leaders may develop additional learning goals for each meeting.) Record them below.

- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

### Activity 7: Develop Literacy Goals

1. 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?

2. *Talk through the following questions:*

- What perspectives do you want children to engage with 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?

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

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### **Activity 8: Decide on Your Group's Needs**

1. *Consider how you'll include members at all reading levels.*

- 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.)
- Will everyone in the group be reading the same text, or will you read different texts on the same topic?

2. *Consider how you'll include members of all home languages in your community.*

- 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 they can read. Bilingual or multilingual books are excellent options because they allow everyone in the group to read in both primary and secondary languages. If you are selecting books in multiple languages or in Braille, be sure to include families who speak or read those languages or who use Braille in the text-selection process.
- Will you be selecting books that are bi- or multilingual? When will the partnerships manager reach out to the district to learn more about translation services?

3. *Consider how you'll guarantee everyone has access to a text.*

- You'll also want to consider how you'll ensure everyone has physical copies of the texts for your reading group. There are many ways to handle this—the text manager might work with the partnerships manager to secure library or class sets of texts. Home reading groups might stagger their meeting dates so texts can circulate among group members. You might even choose online texts, like those available through Teaching Tolerance's Student Text Library, that can be accessed by (or printed for) all group members.

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4. Record your answers here. How will you ensure that everyone has physical access to texts? What next steps will the text manager and partnerships manager need to take to make sure texts are available to all?



### Activity 9: Develop a Text List

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

2. Supplement your list (if necessary) with student texts from *Teaching Tolerance* or from other sources. These organizations maintain extensive book lists that you may find useful:

➤ **Colorín Colorado ([colorincolorado.org](http://colorincolorado.org))** Remarkable for its wide range of book lists, this site is primarily designed as a resource for teachers and families of ELLs. 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 and 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 booklists organized by topic and separated by grade level. Visit their "Reviews+" page to browse their lists—you may discover topics you hadn't considered.

➤ **Social Justice Books ([socialjusticebooks.org](http://socialjusticebooks.org))** A project of Teaching for Change, Social Justice Books offers curated booklists, reviews of children's literature and articles with recommendations for talking with children about social justice. Their "Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books" is particularly helpful.

This chart shows where you might begin looking for lists of texts on the topics below. Please note that the sites featured update their content frequently, and not all topics are reflected here:

		COLORÍN COLORADO	WE NEED DIVERSE BOOKS	SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL	SOCIAL JUSTICE BOOKS
<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity</b>	African American				
	Afro-Latinx				
	American Indian/ Native American				
	Arab American				
	Asian American Asian/Pacific American				
	Caribbean American				
	Chinese American				
	Japanese American				
	Latinx/ Latino/a/ Hispanic				
	White Identity				
<b>Black History &amp; Civil Rights</b>	Black History				
	#BlackLivesMatter				
	Civil Rights				
	Slavery, Resistance and Reparations				
	Reconstruction				
	Voting Rights				
<b>Religion</b>	Judaism/ Jewish Identity & History				
	Islam/ Muslim Identity & History				
<b>Gender &amp; Sexual Identity</b>	Gender Identity				
	LGBTQ/ LGBTQIA				
	Women				
<b>Family Structure</b>	Families/Grandparents/Siblings				
	Adoption				
<b>Ability</b>					
<b>Economic Class</b>					
<b>Environment</b>					
<b>Immigration</b>					

		COLORÍN COLORADO	WE NEED DIVERSE BOOKS	SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL	SOCIAL JUSTICE BOOKS
<b>Incarceration</b>					
<b>Labor</b>					
<b>Organizing/Activism</b>					
<b>Location</b>					
	Africa				
	Asia/South Asia				
	Central America				
	Cuba				
	Dominican Republic				
	El Salvador				
	Europe				
	Haiti				
	Iraq				
	Palestine				
	Puerto Rico				
	Syria				
<b>Other Topics</b>					
	Arts				
	Food				
	Holidays				
	Music				
	Sports				
	Shootings				
	War				
<b>Genre</b>					
	Changemakers				
	Early Elementary Chapter Books				
	Fantasy				
	Folktales				
	Graphic Novels				
	Poetry				
	Read Alouds				
	Science Fiction				
	YA Fiction				
<b>Bilingual</b>					

## Activity 10: Narrow Your List Based on Your Learning Goals and Your Group Members

1. Look for texts that align with your learning goals—not just your topic.

Review the booklist to look for titles that you think might best align with your social justice learning goals. The genre breakdown below can help.

### Identity and Diversity:

- 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. *Please note that folktales alone cannot fairly represent a culture or heritage.* As Louise Derman-Sparks writes, “They are about animals and occasionally people from a mythical past and are designed to teach core values and beliefs in their culture of origin. They are not about how people actually live in contemporary society—and that is what young children need to understand.”

### Justice and Action:

- 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

2. Look for texts that align with your group. Look at the text’s setting, characters, plot, language and illustrations. These questions can help as you discuss specific texts:

- How and where will children in your group find themselves in the texts you select?
- How and where will they learn about different cultures, experiences and identities?
- 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 group members?
- How does this text access and build on the knowledge that group members will bring with them?
- What knowledge or information will children need to fully understand this text?
- 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)?

3. Use “*Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children’s Books*,” available through [socialjusticebooks.org](http://socialjusticebooks.org), as a final check. Here are a few questions inspired by the guide that you can ask yourself, along with recommendations from anti-bias education expert Louise Derman-Sparks:

➤ **Are there stereotypes in the language or images?** See the list “Common Harmful/Undermining Stereotypes.”

➤ **How are different identities represented in the texts?** Sparks asks, “Are people of color, women, low-income families or people with disabilities depicted as needing help or in passive roles, while whites, men and ‘able-bodied’ people are in leadership and action roles?”

➤ **What message(s) does the text send about lived experiences?** Sparks asks, “Do the lives of people of color or people living in poverty in the story contrast unfavorably with the norm of white, middle-class suburban life?”

These considerations were adapted from Teaching Tolerance’s Reading Diversity: A Tool for Selecting Diverse Texts, available at [tolerance.org/magazine/publications/reading-diversity](http://tolerance.org/magazine/publications/reading-diversity).

► **How does change come about in the text?** “The story line should be about children and adults working together,” Sparks says, “rather than perpetuating the myth that change happens because of special, individual people who do it by themselves.”

► **How do the identities of the author and illustrator affect the text?** Sparks asks, “What qualifies the author or illustrator to deal with the subject? If the book is not about people or events similar to the author or illustrator’s background, what specifically recommends them as creators of the book?”

► **When was the text published?** Sparks recommends, “When considering new books for your collection, begin with the most recently published ones and then continue with descending copyright dates.”

► **What about the text will children enjoy?** “Check for active, interesting story lines,” Sparks says, “where different kinds of people are integral to the people in the story, not the main topic.”

4. *Assign tasks. You can select texts as a group or identify volunteers to assess the readings for your group. The text manager should set a date by which reviews will be due to them and by which they will share a final book list with the group—record that information here:*

Text/Resource for Review	Person/People Responsible	Due date
➔		
➔		
➔		
➔		
➔		
➔		
➔		

### Activity 11: Set Logistics for Group Meetings

1. *Discuss who will lead each meeting. Your group structure might help you decide.*

► **Collective Reading Groups** Consider rotating leaders for each meeting and having children and their family members plan and lead the meetings together.

► **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.

2. *Consider when and where your group will meet. As you plan a time and location for your whole-group meetings, think through the following:*

► **Accessibility** Will your meeting place be accessible to students or family members with disabilities?

► **Childcare** Will there be a space for younger siblings to play during group meetings?

You can find and read the free “Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children’s Books” at [socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books](https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books).

Can the planning committee arrange for a caregiver to watch younger children while families participate?

➤ **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.

➤ **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?

*Other considerations:*

- 
- 
- 

3. *Set a time, date and place for your meeting.*

➤ Time and date:

➤ Location:

➤ Staff/resources (translators, interpreters, etc.):

➤ Additional services (transportation, childcare, food, etc.):

4. *Begin planning your calendar. Decide who will be responsible for working with the scheduler and partnerships manager to schedule group meetings. Decide who will reach out to families who aren't at this meeting to ensure they have the opportunity to facilitate if they want to. Set a deadline for soliciting volunteers and a date by which your scheduler will have completed and shared the final schedule. Record planning responsibilities and due dates below.*

<b>Text/Resource for Review</b>	<b>Person/People Responsible</b>	<b>Due date</b>
➤		
➤		
➤		
➤		
➤		
➤		
➤		

When complete, you can record your meeting schedule in the chart at the end of this workbook.

5. *Decide when you'll read. Keep in mind that reading during the meeting (whole-group reading, reading aloud, reading in pairs, and so on) may also support your literacy goals. Discuss the pros and cons of reading before the group meeting versus during the meeting and decide on an answer.*

## Activity 12: Plan Activities and a Sample Group Meeting

1. Consider activities other than reading that you can do in your group meetings. 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 exercises. Read through the activities listed below to get an idea of what you might do.

### Exploring Texts Through Read Alouds (K–2)

These activities help young readers define text types, examine how text structure affects meaning and identify audience and purpose.

► **Developing Language to Talk About Texts** Most children need explicit language instruction to discuss difficult or sensitive issues. This activity gives them tools to use when exploring, thinking about and discussing read-aloud texts.

► **Using Realia** Realia are real-life objects that enable children to make connections to their own lives as they try to make sense of new concepts and ideas. They create physical responses that help readers recall ideas and themes from the text in later discussions.

► **Who’s Telling It?** This strategy helps children explore varying points of view in familiar, comfortable situations, then apply their learning to unfamiliar texts and topics. Readers explore the same text from various viewpoints and identify the author, speaker point-of-view, publication date, intended audience and characters.

### Responding to the Read-Aloud Text (K–2)

These strategies help young readers analyze, interpret, critique and make connections to texts.

► **Author’s Chair** This activity allows children to show their understanding of the reading. They take on the role of “author,” reading the text aloud and facilitating a group discussion.

► **Making Connections During Read Aloud** Making connections allows readers to monitor their understanding and relate learning to their own lived experiences. They make connections to read-aloud texts by relating the text to themselves (lived experiences), to other texts and to the world (current and historical events).

► **Readers’ Theater** Readers’ theater helps children gain reading fluency and engage fully with the text. The strategy requires attention to pronunciation, unfamiliar vocabulary and interpretation. During a readers’ theater, two or more children dramatize a text by reading expressively.

### Word Work (3–12)

These strategies help build comprehension and language skills by asking readers to use key words from texts in their own reading, writing, speaking and listening.

► **Illustrated Vocabulary** In this visual strategy, readers divide key words into parts and draw illustrations to represent the separate meaning of each part.

► **Vocabulary Tableaux** In a vocabulary tableau, a group of readers use their bodies to create a frozen picture of a key word.

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An expanded explanation—including steps to follow—for each of these activities is available at [tolerance.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies](https://tolerance.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies).

➤ **Four-Fold Vocabulary** Interactive “foldables” help readers learn new vocabulary through defining, illustrating and using words in sentences.

### **Close and Critical Reading (3–12)**

These strategies help readers to analyze, interpret, critique and make connections to texts and discover the relevance of their reading within a larger context.

➤ **Challenge the Text** This activity helps readers ask and answer text-dependent questions by taking multiple perspectives and uncovering assumptions and biases in the text.

➤ **Text Graffiti** This strategy exposes readers to multiple short pieces of a text before they read it. They read selected quotes out of context and comment on both the selection and the comments of other students. The activity ends with participants reflecting on their reactions to and predictions about the text.

➤ **Window or Mirror?** This task helps readers determine if a text is a window or a mirror. They decide if the author, speaker, characters or content in a text mirrors their lived experiences or provides a window into the lived experiences of people whose identities differ from theirs.

### **Community Inquiry (3–12)**

These activities ask readers to draw upon texts—and their own lived experiences—during meaningful and respectful discussions.

➤ **Brain Share** In this activity, all members of the group contribute to collective understanding. Small groups of readers rotate through stations, discussing and recording concepts from central texts.

➤ **Text Treasure Hunt** Teams of readers look for clues and respond to questions that help them identify details, organization, inferences and comparisons in the central text. The strategy is a fun way for readers to solve problems and give each other directions as they search for text clues.

➤ **What Would They Say?** Analyzing how two or more texts address a similar theme or topic helps readers build knowledge and compare ideas. This discussion strategy asks participants to infer how a particular author or character from a text would respond to questions and scenarios, defending their conclusions using evidence from the text.

*2. Complete a sample agenda together. Use the following chart to answer any last questions and determine the template that best aligns with your group structure. Working together, plan out a sample meeting.*

	FOR GROUP TO COMPLETE AT A COMMUNITY MEETING	FOR MEETING LEADERS TO COMPLETE INDIVIDUALLY
COLLECTIVE	Whole Group Meeting Template	Whole Group Meeting Template
CLASS	Whole Group Meeting Template	N/A
HOME	Whole Group Meeting Template Home Meeting Template	Home Meeting Template
PARALLEL	Whole Group Meeting Template Parallel Meeting Template	Home Meeting Template

### Whole Group Meeting Template

- Date/time/location
- Topic(s)
- Social justice learning goals
- Literacy learning goals
- Facilitator
- Texts
- Activities (Include reading time if you'll be reading with your group.)

### Home Meeting Template

- Date
- Specific meeting goal
- Text(s) to discuss
- Questions for families to discuss

*You might draw from the following questions, adapted from the Teaching Tolerance strategy "Challenge the Text":*

- 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:
- Additional Activities

### Parallel Meeting Template

- Date
- Specific meeting goal
- Text(s) to discuss
- Questions for families to discuss

*You might draw from the following questions, adapted from the Teaching Tolerance strategy “Challenge the Text”:*

- 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:
- Additional Activities
- Communication Plan

*Consider the following possibilities for communicating with other families before your whole-group meeting, or create your own communication plan in the space below:*

- **Shared journals** can go home with different children each night so families can write down their responses to the text and to one another.
- **A shared Google Doc or other web application** can allow families to comment and respond to questions posed by the whole-group leader (and to one another). If you decide to hold conversations online, be sure to select an application with robust privacy settings, and remember that not all participants may feel comfortable sharing personal information in such a forum.
- **Individual response sheets** can be filled out by each family together. Children can connect home reading with in-class reading by sharing their family response sheet in class.

### Meeting Schedule:

Meeting Date	Facilitator	Texts
➤		
➤		
➤		
➤		
➤		
➤		



# 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.*

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

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 children's successes as well as challenges?
- Are members of my students' communities present in my classroom? Do I create space for local leaders, changemakers or influencers to speak to my students?

If you haven't yet built strong, equitable relationships with your students and their families,

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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, 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 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?" 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.** Flyers 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 families are able to come. If you plan around mealtime and provide a light meal or refreshments, that may make it easier for parents and guardians 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.

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## 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 Teaching Tolerance guide *Let's Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations With Students* 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 such as Teaching Tolerance'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 families 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 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 and guardians who may not be comfortable communicating solely in English. Always ask parents and guardians 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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Looking for ways to reflect on your identity? See Teaching Tolerance's *Let's Talk!*

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# Reading for Social Justice

## EVALUATION

**Which grade levels do you work with?**

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

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

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

Excellent  
Good  
Average  
Poor  
Very poor

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

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

Excellent  
Good  
Average  
Poor  
Very poor

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).

**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 recommend this guide to a friend or colleague?**

Very likely  
Somewhat likely  
Unsure  
Somewhat unlikely  
Very unlikely

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