

Thinking about Social Justice through Crafts and Conversation



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Since families are spending more time at home and together, we expect that many will be looking for hands-on activities to do with children during the summer months and throughout the year. The projects below provide fun activities and opportunities to talk with children (ages 3–12) about respect, inclusion, diversity, bias and social justice. Each activity is followed by discussion prompts for talking with children about what they learned, their feelings and any questions they might have.

1. Mask Making

Masks have become an essential part of our attire and everyday lives. Making and wearing masks can open a conversation with children about identity, showing respect for others, and the impact of stereotypes and bias on interpersonal communication when someone is wearing a mask. While you make masks together using [this sewing tutorial](#) or this [no-sew face mask](#), you could talk about how a mask can [reflect something important about your identity](#), either through the fabric design, or drawings, images and words you add to the mask. For younger children, you can use this [Wearing a Mask](#) coloring book to have fun talking about why and when we need to wear masks.

With older children, you can talk about how masks have been used to [convey bias and hate](#) and how certain kinds of [masks and costumes](#) can spread stereotypes and bias. It's also important to consider why some identity groups (e.g., African American and Latinx men) may [have concerns about wearing a mask](#) because of stereotypes others have about them.

Discussion Prompts:

- How can you use your mask to express an aspect of your identity?
- How can we make connections with people as we go out into the world wearing masks that hide parts of our faces?
- How do stereotypes about Black and Latinx people contribute to the fear they may have about wearing masks in public?

2. Symbols of Respect and Inclusion

We see symbols every day—they are all around on buildings, in the street, on schoolyards, on our phones and in digital spaces. Symbols convey ideas, qualities, feelings, objects, opinions and beliefs. Unfortunately, symbols are also used to [spread bias and hate](#). Explore the idea that symbols can be positive (blow kiss emoji), neutral (Instagram logo) or negative (Swastika). Brainstorm symbols that express positive values and concepts such as respect, diversity, inclusion, love, acceptance and friendship. Then use art materials or go online to create

symbols that represent these qualities. Finish your project by identifying ways to share the symbols you created with your community and the world in digital and physical spaces.

Discussion Prompts:

- Why are symbols important?
- What symbols have you noticed and are they positive, negative or neutral?
- How can symbols of respect and inclusion make a difference in your community and the larger society?

3. Create an Anti-bias “Heads Up” Game

Board games and apps are another way to reflect on identity, bias and language. Using the [Heads Up!](#) game app produced by the Ellen DeGeneres Show, create your own categories and words with a focus on anti-bias themes such as Identity, Culture, Diversity, Bias, Discrimination, Social Justice. Refer to ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#) and build a bank of words for the game. Make the cards and start playing. If you are unfamiliar with some of the words, go over them first in order to clarify definitions. You can also use other board games and game apps to put an anti-bias spin on a favorite game.

Discussion Prompts:

- Did you learn new words by creating this game and if so, what are they?
- Why is expanding your vocabulary important?
- Why do words matter?

4. Self-Portraits

Creating self-portraits is an opportunity to reflect on the physical aspects of our identity. Use paint, markers, colored pencils or crayons, to create individual or family portraits. Make sure your art supplies reflect the variety of colors, shades

and complexions that represent a diversity of people. Before creating your self-portraits, start a conversation about different aspects of our physical identity. You might concentrate on your faces or look at your faces and bodies together. Encourage children to look in the mirror and describe the shape of their face; skin color and complexion; eye shape and color; hair color, texture, length and style; nose shape; and other characteristics like birthmarks, freckles, glasses, braces, etc. Then make your self-portraits using all the information you just gathered. Another option is for each family member to draw themselves on one large paper to create a family portrait. An outdoor variation is having children trace themselves with sidewalk chalk and then color in the details.

Discussion Prompts:

- What do you notice about your self-portrait?
- How does your self-portrait reflect aspects of your identity in terms of race, ethnicity and other identity characteristics?
- How do you look similar to and different from people in your family, friends and classmates?

5. Visit Virtual Art Galleries

You can take children on a virtual field trip to an art gallery and use artwork to explore important social justice themes. Together, identify specific pieces of art that express some aspect of identity, culture, human rights or social justice. You can use some of the social justice art in [this lesson plan](#) to begin the process. Then venture out to virtual art galleries like one of [10 of the world's best virtual museum and art gallery tours](#) or [12 World-Class Museums You Can Visit Online](#). These virtual tours can inspire and encourage children to create a piece of art of their own that says something about social justice. They can use any variety of media: painting, sculpture, drawing, collage, photography, digital art, and more.

Discussion Prompts:

- What thoughts and feelings come up as you look at a particular work of art?
- How can art have an impact on our community and world?
- How did you decide to come up your own idea for a piece of social justice art?

6. Write Identity Poems (or Songs)

Explore identity through poems and songs. Start by talking to children about many different aspects of their identity including their name(s); physical characteristics; race and ethnicity; gender and gender identity; sexual orientation; age; socioeconomic status, languages; likes and dislikes; family and family structure; neighborhood and community, languages spoken and more.

Then write those words and characteristics into an identity poem. The poem could have a specific structure like a haiku or limerick, or it can be a free-verse poem. You could also start off with an [acrostic poem](#), which is a poem that uses the first letters of your name for each line of the poem. Children can apply these same ideas to composing a song. For more information, see our lesson on [Who Am I? Identity Poems](#).

Discussion Prompts:

- What did you learn about yourself by writing your poem?
- Did you learn anything new about yourself or others?
- How do you think your poem reflects your identity?

7. An Emoji a Day

Emojis have become a meaningful way we communicate with one another—communicating our moods, feelings, thoughts, interests, and identity. Talk with your child about how they use emojis to express different things, including aspects of their identity. You can share that a 22--year-old digital artist from the Ivory Coast, was recently in the news because he [created his own emojis](#), to

reflect life in contemporary West Africa and share important aspects of his identity. With your child, brainstorm important aspects of their identity and if they are currently reflected in the emojis that are available. Then create a list of new emojis you can make. Use markers, colored pencils or make them digitally. Set a goal to create one emoji per day (or week). They can even submit their emojis to the Unicode Consortium using this [Emoji Proposal form](#).

Discussion Prompts:

- What do emojis convey about our identity?
- Why is it important to see ourselves reflected in and represented by emojis?
- How did you come up with the emojis you created and why are they meaningful to you?

8. Write a Children’s Book: Windows and Mirrors

Expand a child’s [summer reading](#) experience through mirror and window books and then have them write one of their own! The book can be either a “mirror” that reflects their own identity or a “window” through which children can explore how others identify themselves. Ask children to decide on the theme and plot of the book, what words and illustrations will be included and how the book will begin and end. Then, make their book by creating pages and stapling or tying them together or you use another [bookmaking strategy](#). After creating the book, have the child read it aloud to others in the house and if possible, arrange for them to read aloud to friends, neighbors and family members using Facetime or other video conferencing platforms. This is also a good opportunity to talk with them about the [importance of diversity](#) in children’s books. Children can also write about the struggle for civil rights and social justice or create books that examine some aspect of bias and offer suggestions for what to do about it

Discussion Prompts:

- How did you decide what your book was going to be about?

- Is your book a window or a mirror book and why?
- Why is it important to have a diversity of children's books?

9. Film Festival

Many great movies explore anti-bias themes. As a family or with your neighbors, create a list of movies that explore themes of identity, culture, diversity, bias, discrimination, and social justice. Be mindful of [age recommendations](#). Narrow down the list to about 10–12 movies, select a movie night and create a calendar, scheduling one day/evening per week to watch a movie. If you want to get neighbors, friends or extended family members into it, [Netflix Party](#) lets you watch together and chat virtually throughout the film. You can find some examples of films in ADL's [Black History Month](#), [Hispanic Heritage Month](#), and [Women's History Month](#) activity guides. Also, check out [15 Fantastic Films for Teaching Social Justice](#) and [The Best Social Justice Movies and Documentaries](#).

Discussion Prompts:

- What film(s) did you enjoy most and why?
- What did you learn that was new for you?
- What themes and perspectives did you take away from the films as a whole?

10. Me Museum

Just as museums curate collections of an artist's work, your child can create a collection about themselves as a way to explore and express their identity. Brainstorm all the kinds of collections you might see at a museum (e.g., paintings, artifacts, drawings, photographs, sculpture, collage, architecture, textiles, ceramics, fashion, etc.). Then ask your child what kinds of items they want to include in a museum about themselves. Talk about how they can represent social identity characteristics like race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, etc. plus other aspects of identity like hobbies, interests and talents with their

collection. Then have them gather and organize their artifacts, photographs, drawings, webpage screenshots and the other items that represent who they are. Create short descriptions for each item, like those you see in a museum and place them with each piece. Then, help your child display their collection either in a physical space and in an online gallery with photographs of each piece. Once the exhibit “is up” you can invite others to visit virtually. You can suggest could even act as a docent/guide taking everyone on a virtual tour of their Me Museum. A variation could be a mini-museum using a shoe box. Place items outside the box for how others see you and items inside the box for how you see yourself.

Discussion Prompts:

- What aspects of my identity are most important to me right now?
- What aspects of your identity are clear to everyone and what are less known?
- Are there any differences between how I see myself and how others see me? How so?

11. Classic Summer Craft with an Anti-Bias Spin

You can take a classic summer craft like one of [these](#) or one of [these](#) and put an identity, diversity or anti-bias spin on it. For example, use sidewalk chalk to share messages with friends and neighbors about challenging bias and supporting social justice or create words and images about a [bullying](#) or bias situation and the roles your child might have played to talk through what happened. Use photo-journaling to explore a person’s life and different aspects of their identity and experiences with bias. Create an outside obstacle course that is inclusive and accessible to everyone. Make your own postcards with a message about identity, hope and inclusion that you can send to friends and family near and far. Make friendship bracelets and send them to friends with a favorite story about a shared experience or what you value in your friendship.

No matter which craft or activity you choose, creating something together gives you and your child the time and space to have fun and engage in important conversations. Remember to ask open-ended questions, listen actively without judgment, allow young people to speak their minds, and encourage them to be creative!