



# JOURNEY IN... YEAR TWO ON BEING HUMAN SCIENCE

## This lesson's Big Ideas:

- Part of being human is having a racial identity. When we say 'race' we mean many things, including skin color, hair and eye color and place of origin.
- While race is biologically an illusion, it has become 'real' as a social construct, and so forms a great part of our individual and shared human identity.
- Prejudice has its base in categorical thinking. Assumptions that we make about individuals based on a category into which we think they fit are often false and sometimes hurtful.
- Racism is a result of systematic combinations of racial prejudice and power.
- Unitarian-Universalism's first principle is that *all people have inherent worth and dignity*. Therefore, we commit ourselves to the struggle against hurtful prejudices in ourselves and racism in our world.

## TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

🕒 Ahead of time

Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education; they grow there, firm as weeds among rocks.

- Charlotte Brontë

I look forward confidently to the day when all who work for a living will be one with no thought to their separateness as Negroes, Jews, Italians or any other distinctions. This will be the day when we bring into full realization the American dream ~ a dream yet unfulfilled. A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men will not take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few; a dream of a land where men will not argue that the color of a man's skin determines the content of his character; a dream of a nation where all our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone, but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity; the dream of a country where every man will respect the dignity and worth of the human personality.

- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

This is what we are about: We plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

- Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero

### Lesson Materials

- Book: *All the Colors We Are*
- 20 images or more, people of different skin colors, cut from the pages of *National Geographic*. Note country of origin for each image.
- World map
- Poster putty
- Example cards: Prejudice or Racism (ideas attached, print out on index cards)
- Two boxes labeled “Prejudice” and “Racism” for sorting

### **YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCES: FEEDBACK AND NOTES**

## **GATHERING AND FOCUSING**

🕒 2-3 minutes

A check-in poll. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being really lousy and 10 being the best every, how is everyone today?

## **PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE A PRIMER ON MELANIN**

🕒 10 minutes

- This will be one of the rare occasions on which we’ll educate our young people. Be sure to ask questions before volunteering information, as the kids might already have a basic understanding of pigmentation. You might consider offering prizes for kids who offer correct answers or at least are brave enough to give it a shot.
- Our resource book is *All the Colors We Are*. With young groups, you might feel inclined to use the photos and even some of the text, but as this isn’t the Story Workshop, we’ll avoid reading the entire book from cover to cover. Instead, we’ll try to offer facts and ask questions so that kids can recall their scientific learning and try out their own reasoning.
- Below is a list of questions with answers following:
  - All living things have color. This color comes from chemicals called pigments. Who knows what color chlorophyll is? (green) Can you guess what color the pigment carotene might be? (orange)
  - While many people talk about race in terms like ‘black’ and ‘white’, all people have skin in one of many, many shades of brown. Does anyone know what the name of this brown pigment is? (melanin)
  - Skin comes in different colors for only one reason – to protect us. Can you guess what our skin color helps to protect us from? (the sun’s harmful rays) Melanin is the brown pigment that prevents the sun from damaging our cells. Some people have lots of active melanin and other people have less active melanin.
  - Who knows which part of the earth gets the most sunshine? Where is the climate the warmest? (between the Tropic lines and the Equator).
  - If you had to predict, would you expect people near the equator to have lots of active melanin or not much at all? (lots of active melanin). Describe what skin with lots active melanin would look like. (dark brown, not prone to burning pink)
  - Of course, there are people living in far northern climates

now who have dark skin. Where does their melanin come from? (from their ancestors who pass it down to their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren through their genes).

- Those of us who have light skin without much active melanin to start out with, we like to spend time out in the sun, too, right? What happens to us? (we burn or we tan). Guess what's happening inside our bodies when we get tan? (we're making more melanin).
- **For 5th and 6th graders:** Interestingly, there are some people who have lived way up north for 1000s of years, like the Lapp and the Inuit people. They have dark skin, too. The reason is complicated. Can anyone guess? Does anyone know how people get the Vitamin D that they need? (from the sun or from food sources like fish). Guess where northern people like the Inuit often get their Vitamin D? (fish) So, do they need to let lots of sun into their skin? (nope).

## **PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO**

### **MAPPING OUR MELANIN**

🕒 10-15 minutes

- This activity has two parts, the first is a serration activity that encourages kids to sort through observation. The second is a geography activity that draws on what we've learned about melanin, but also throws in a few curve balls to segue into our talk about prejudice.
- First, offer the kids a pile of images cut out of magazines like National Geographic. These images should represent a wide array of people with different skin tones from many different places. The geographic home of each of the people in the images will be indexed by number to a "key" of answers.
- Ask the kids to take a few each and then to work together to cooperatively order the images from "Most Active Melanin" to "Least Active Melanin". Let them work through any of the tricky spots themselves; it's probably best not to challenge the group's final decision unless you feel they haven't taken the activity seriously.
- Next, encourage each child to take one person's image and place it on the map near a country that might be his or her home. You can stick them to the map using poster putty. Offer each child the option of asking for help.
- Once the group has place every image on the country they guessed as 'home', ask if they'd like to know where they're actually from. Share the answers if they request it.

#### **Wondering Together**

- Was it a challenge to guess where these people came from? Why?
- Did we miss any one of the answers? What might have led us to guess incorrectly?
- Is it fair to make assumptions about people based on their physical appearance? Why or why not?
- What are some other facts that we can't know about people based on their physical appearances?
- **For 5th and 6th Graders:** What situations might arise when someone with dark skin lives in a country where most people have light skin? What does human history have to say about this question? What about the opposite: a person with light skin lives somewhere where most people have dark skin. What explanation might we have for this reality?

## **PRIMARY ACTIVITY THREE**

### **PREJUDICE OR RACISM?**

🕒 10 minutes

- Ask for volunteer to share a definition of prejudice.
- Offer these two ideas:
  - Prejudice is an individual experience. When one person makes assumptions about another and makes decisions about his or her own approval or disapproval, fear or trust without adequate information.
  - Racism is the word we use when prejudice and power get systematically combined. That is, when the people who get to make all the rules and pick the winners and losers have lots of their own prejudices and shared prejudices, whole groups of people get treated unfairly.
- In the classroom, you'll have a stack index cards with several examples of prejudice and racism in action. The group will collectively or cooperatively sort each of these cards into one of two boxes: Personal Prejudice or Racism. You can ask each person to draw a card, share it with the group and have them decide together on the right box. Or you can invite each child to pick their own card and then take turns putting it into one of the boxes, offering their own justification.

#### **Wondering Together**

- Which of the two might be easier for us to change, prejudice or racism? How do we change prejudice in people's minds and hearts?
- Does that mean that kids can't work to change racism? Can one person make a difference? Revisit each card in the "Racism" box and talk about how ONE UU KID could make a difference in that situation.

## **CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING**

🕒 2 minutes

Gather in a circle, take each other's hands and speak these words or something similarly hopeful from your own heart. Invite the kids to echo you every phrase or so:

We promise to see the rainbow of beauty in every human face.  
 We promise to honor every person's inherent worth and dignity.  
 We promise to work to weed out the prejudice in our own hearts and minds.  
 We promise to work to make the world more safe and fair for all.  
 We promise to see the rainbow of beauty in every human face.