



In Real Life

A Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum Guide
for High School

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Session 3

Coloring Outside the Lines

SEL FOCUS: SELF-AWARENESS

Story: “Color Me Different” by Jamal Greene

Story Summary: Jamal feels he must dress and act a certain way to meet others’ expectations of his racial identity.

Learning Objectives

Youth will build their SEL by:

- Reflecting on their sense of self and identity
- Taking the perspective of others from diverse backgrounds
- Increasing empathy with other youths’ perspectives

Youth will increase their literacy by:

- Making meaning of a text through group read-aloud and discussion
- Using their background knowledge to connect to the text
- Speaking ideas clearly, and actively listening in collaborative discussions
- Responding thoughtfully to, and seeking to understand, diverse perspectives

Materials

- Chart paper, markers
- Internet-connected computer, projector (optional), and speakers
- Lyrics handout (p. 47)
- Journals or notebook paper, pencils

Preparation

- Read the story ahead of time. Reflect on your personal response and how the group may respond.
- Read the session plan and prepare the agenda.
- For the Opening Activity:
 - Make copies of the Lyrics handout (p. 47), one for each group member.
 - Prepare your computer and speakers to play the song for the Opening Activity. Go to: bit.ly/forest-whitiker
 - Write the Journal Jot and Pair Share prompt (**in bold**) on chart paper.
- For the Explore the Ideas Activity, write the Silent Conversation prompts (**in bold**) on chart paper.

GETTING STARTED (2 minutes)

Welcome everyone and have them sit in a circle. Review the agenda (posted):

Agenda: Coloring Outside the Lines

- Review Group Agreements
- Opening Activity: Journal Jot and Pair Share (Video Viewing Activity)
- Read and Discuss: “Color Me Different” by Jamal Greene
- OPTIONAL ✓ ● Explore the Ideas Activity: Silent Conversation
- Closing Circle

OPENING ACTIVITY — JOURNAL JOT AND PAIR SHARE (VIDEO VIEWING ACTIVITY) (8 minutes)

This pre-reading activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. After welcoming the group, explain that they are going to watch a video that previews themes from the story they’ll be reading.
2. Pass out journals or notebook paper and pencils.:
3. Ask group members to write the following questions on their paper, leaving space in between each for their responses. Read the questions aloud from the chart paper you prepared:
 - **What stands out to you about the lyrics and the way Brother Ali talks about himself?**
 - **What do you think the message of the song is? Can you relate? Explain.**
4. Tell the group to jot down their responses as they watch the video.
5. Play the video at bit.ly/forest-whitiker (Brother Ali- “Forest Whitiker”)
6. Once the video ends, give group members a few minutes to finish writing their responses to the questions.
7. After time is up, explain to the group that they will be doing a Pair Share. Ask them to turn to a person next to them and take turns sharing as much of their responses to the questions as they feel comfortable sharing.

8. Each member of the pair should take about a minute to share. Cue partners to switch roles after the first minute. Use a timer or wait until the hum of conversation dies down before regaining group members' attention.
9. Time permitting, lead a discussion by asking group members to describe some of the good points that were made during their conversations. They can also share times they agreed or disagreed with their partner, new ideas that their partner gave them, or questions they still have about the topic. They can also share their general reactions to the video.
10. Thank group members for sharing.

READ AND DISCUSS THE STORY (20 minutes)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, group members build comprehension and make meaning of the story.

1. **Introduce the story:** Explain to the group that they are going to read a story by a young man who feels like he doesn't quite fit the racial mold.
2. **Set expectations for reading the story:** Sitting in a circle, group members take turns reading aloud. They should be given the option of passing when it's their turn.



Tell the group to turn to p. 25 in their anthologies. (See the leader's version in this guide for stories with discussion questions included.)

3. **Read and discuss the story together:** As the group leader, pause the reading when you arrive at an open-ended question within the text (**in bold**). Ask the group this question and facilitate a brief discussion before returning to the text.
4. **After reading and discussing the story:** Continue to either the Explore the Ideas Activity or Closing Circle, based on your choice as the leader.



Color Me Different

By Jamal Greene

I am black. Yet, since I was 12, I've gone to a school almost totally devoid of black people. I don't speak in slang. I don't listen to rap or reggae and, try as I might, I have at best a 50-50 chance of converting a lay-up. Except for the fact that I'm not white, I am not all that different from a stereotypical white kid from the suburbs.

Because of this, when I'm around other black people I usually feel a certain distance between us. And so do they. For example, this past summer I took a journalism workshop at New York University. After it was over, I was on the phone with one of the girls in the workshop, a black girl, and we got to talking about first impressions. She said that for about the first week of the workshop, she was saying to herself, "What's wrong with this guy? Is he white or something?" She said that I "talked white" and she made a lot of offhand remarks about me not being a "real" black person. It irritated me that this girl thought that just because I didn't speak "black English," I was not a genuine black person.

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

["Was it fair for the girl to make assumptions about whether Jamal was a 'real' black person based on how he spoke?"]

I have often heard people criticize Paul Olden, a New York Yankees announcer, for the way he speaks. He's black, but you would never know it from the way he talks. They say he's trying to be white. I don't "sound black" either and I'm not trying to be anything but who I am. It's just the way I talk. Black people who speak standard English don't do it because they want to dissociate themselves from other black people but because they grew up hearing English spoken that way.

I don't dance like a lot of other black people either. I never learned to move my hips and legs the way most kids you see at parties are able to. I lose the beat if I have to move more than two body parts at once and so my dancing tends to get a little repetitive.

When I go to parties with black people I often find myself sitting at the table drinking a Coke while everybody else is dancing. “Why aren’t you dancing?!” people ask. And then when I do get on the dance floor, the same people sneer at me. “What’s wrong with you?” they say. “Why do you just keep doing the same thing over and over again?”

Contrary to popular belief, black people aren’t born with the ability to dance and play basketball. Even though I have speed and leaping ability, I can’t drive to the hole without losing my dribble. Those skills have to be learned and perfected with practice. It only seems like they are innate because the black community in America is culturally close-knit and people share the same interests.

[“How do you think Jamal feels when he is expected to talk or behave in a way that he does not feel comfortable with?”]

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

Another thing that constitutes “blackness” in a lot of people’s minds is an interest in or a feeling of pride and identification with things historically black. I collected baseball cards until I was 15. I had a pretty substantial collection for a kid. At least, I thought I did. One afternoon, my cousins came over to my house and were looking at my baseball cards.

“Do you have any Jackie Robinson cards?” one of them asked.

“Of course not,” I answered.

They were visibly displeased with that response. Of course in my mind I knew that the reason I didn’t have any Jackie Robinson cards was the same reason why I didn’t have any Ted Williams or Mickey Mantle or Joe DiMaggio cards. I just didn’t have the money for Jackie Robinson. Even if I were going to spend that money on baseball cards, I would buy a Mickey Mantle card before I would buy a Jackie Robinson card of the same price. Jackie may have been the first black major leaguer but Mickey hit home runs and home runs increase in value faster than historical novelty. It’s that simple. But my cousins thought that the reason I didn’t have any Jackie Robinson cards was because I didn’t like black players as much as white players.

My family has always had a problem with me liking baseball—a game that did not integrate until 1947—as much as I do. They keep getting me Negro League postcards because they are worried that I don’t know enough about the subject. And they’re right. But then again, sports enthusiasts in general don’t know enough about the Negro Leagues. My family feels strongly that as a black sports fan, I should feel an added responsibility to know about black baseball players. If I don’t learn about them, they say, then nobody will.

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

[“Why do you think this is so important to Jamal’s family?”]

Minorities are often called upon to be the spokespeople for their races. The only black kid in the class is often expected to speak up when the subjects of slavery or the civil rights movement come up. The question is, does he have a responsibility to know more about issues pertaining to blacks than his white classmates? I would like to think that he doesn’t.

If we really believe that everyone should be treated equally, then ideally my Jewish friends should be expected to know just as much about black history as I do. Of course I should know more about the Negro Leagues than I do now, but so should a white baseball fan or a Japanese baseball fan or a polka-dot baseball fan.

So I guess I don’t fit in with the black people who speak in slang, dance with a lot of hip motion, and hang out with an all-black crowd. And I don’t feel any added responsibility to learn about black history or go out and associate with more black people either. Nor do I fit in with blacks who try as hard as they can to separate themselves from blacks altogether, vote Republican, and marry white spouses. I wouldn’t do that either.

Even though I grew up playing wiffle ball with white kids in Park Slope instead of basketball with black kids in Bed Stuy, even though I go to a school with very few blacks, and even though most of my friends are white and Asian, I can’t say that I feel completely at home with white people either. Achieving racial equality is a process that still has a long way to go. Blacks were slaves for hundreds of years. And we were legally inferior to whites up until just a few

generations ago. Blacks may have achieved equality before the law, but it will take another few generations to achieve full social equality.

["What are some examples of social inequality that still exist?"]

READ-ALoud
QUESTION

There is still a stigma attached to interracial relationships, for example, both romantic and otherwise. Whenever I'm around the parents of white friends, I get the sense that they see me not as "that nice kid who is friends with my son or daughter" but rather as "that nice black kid who is friends with my son or daughter." There is still a line that certain people are unwilling to cross.

So after all this analysis, I'm still confused about what it means to be black. I would like to think that race is nothing more than the color of your skin, but clearly in most people's minds it's more than that. I feel distanced from blacks because I am black but don't act the part, and I feel distanced from whites because I act white but don't look the part. As long as other people expect me to act a certain way because of the way I look, or to look a certain way because of the way I act, I will continue to be something of an outcast because I defy their prejudices.

Society has different expectations of blacks and whites, and becomes uncomfortable if any of us strays from those expectations. Just ask anybody who's ever picked me for two-on-two just because I was black.

["Turn to a partner and share your thinking in pairs: What stood out to you about this story? What sorts of connections did you make with it?"]

READ-ALoud
QUESTION

Jamal wrote this story when he was 16. He later graduated from college. He became a sports journalist and then went to law school.

OPTIONAL

EXPLORE THE IDEAS ACTIVITY — SILENT CONVERSATION (20 minutes)

During this choice post-reading activity, group members will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors. This activity can be used during the session plan or to extend the learning afterwards.

1. Introduce this writing activity by saying to the group:
 - “Now that we’ve read the story, we’re going to do an activity where we learn more about each other and find ways that we connect.”

2. Review the directions with the group. Tell them:
 - “Everyone will sit with a partner.”
 - “You will write independently in response to a prompt and then write a question you have about the prompt or what you wrote.”
 - “Then you will exchange papers and respond to your partner’s writing by answering their question, sharing your own ideas, and then posing a new question.”
 - “You will pass notes back and forth to build a silent, written conversation with your partner.”

3. Have group members find a partner and sit beside each other in a comfortable place in the room.

4. Pass out notebook paper and pencils.

5. Tell the group:
 - “People make a lot of assumptions about Jamal because of his race: that he can dance, that he’ll be good at basketball, and that he’ll know a lot about black history. You are now going to do some writing based on a few questions around the assumptions people make about you.”

6. Read the prompt or question aloud from the chart paper you’ve prepared:
 - **What are some assumptions people make about you?**
 - **What do you think or feel about these assumptions?**
 - **Do these assumptions matter to you? Why or why not?**
 - **Why do people make assumptions about others?**

7. Remind the group that this is a silent activity because quiet can help when we want to think deeply about things.
8. Have everyone write for one or two minutes. Remind them that after they answer some part of the prompt, they should write a question for their partner. Then, ask partners to pass their notes and respond to each other's writing. Move around the room to quietly check in with group members and offer support.
9. Continue this process by directing partners to finish writing and pass their notes about every two minutes. Remind them to include questions that engage their partner and contribute to the conversation.
10. After about 10 minutes, break the silence. Have partners thank each other for sharing. As a whole group, have group members talk about what they learned about one another in their silent conversations

CLOSING CIRCLE (10 minutes)

In Closing Circle, group members make personal connections to the story and share their take-aways with one another.

Guide group members in a go-round share of responses to these prompts:

1. "What stood out for you in Jamal Greene's story, 'Color Me Different,' and our activities today?"
2. "Finish this sentence: The next time I start to prejudge someone, I will..."

(See next page for leader reflection prompts to complete after the session.)

LEADER REFLECTION

After leading this session, reflect on the prompts below through writing, discussion with a colleague, or just by sitting and thinking:

- What connections did the youth in your group make with this story? How can you help them to be more comfortable with who they are?
- What are some assumptions or expectations that people have made about you in your life? Who or what has helped you create a meaningful identity for yourself, regardless of these expectations or assumptions?



"Color Me Different" by Jamal Greene

Forest Whitiker

By Brother Ali

And yo whatever comes up comes out
 We don't put our hands over our mouth
 And whatever comes up comes out
 We don't put our hands over our mouth
 Whatever comes up comes out
 Please mister bass-man lay it on me

Ayo, Dependin on the day, and dependin on what I ate
 I'm anywhere from 20 to 35 pounds over weight
 I got red eyes and one of them's lazy
 and they both squint when the sun shines so I get crazy
 I'm albino man, I know I'm pink and pale
 And I'm hairy as hell, everywhere but fingernails
 I shave a cranium that ain't quite shaped right
 Face tight, shiny, I stay up and write late nights
 My wardrobe is jeans and faded shirts
 A mixture of what I like, and what I wear to work
 I'm not mean and got a neck full of razor bumps
 I'm not the classic profile of what the ladies want
 You might think I'm depressed as can be
 But when I look in the mirror I see sexy ass me
 And if that's somethin that you can't respect then that's peace
 My life's better without you actually
 To everyone out there, who's a little different
 I say damn a magazine, these are god's fingerprints
 You can call me ugly but can't take nothing from me
 I am what I am doctor you ain't gotta love me

[Spoken]

If you would please turn in your Bible
 To beauty tips according to Forest Whitiker
 In the third chapter of the third line
 Brother Ali would you please read to the choir for me son

[Sung x3]

I'ma be all right, you ain't gotta be my friend tonight (you ain't gotta love me)
 An I'ma be okay, you would probably bore me anyway (you ain't gotta love me)

Forest Whitiker y'all

Reprinted with permission of the songwriter, Brother Ali