N is for Natural

JOYFUL

A NMAAHCH KIDS ABCs ACTIVITY BOOK
EARLY LEARNERS EDITION - AGES 3 TO 5

Brought to you by the National Museum of African American History and Culture Early Childhood Education Initiative.
Inspired by the children's book, A is for All The Things You Are: A Joyful ABC Book written by Anna Forgerson Hindley and illustrated by Keturah A. Bobo, ©2018 Art by Keturah Ariel LLC.

Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.
A is for All the Things You Are was written to affirm our children and empower them to see themselves as many things at once – daring and loving, creative and just, amazing and zany – and everything in between. The book offers wonderful opportunities for conversations with children to build their vocabularies, strengthen their sense of self and deepen their joy in and acceptance of human diversity. The illustrations allow them to see not only themselves but others in the same positive light as well. By seeing positive images of children of different colors, genders, abilities, classes, and other social identities, we nurture the child’s comfort and joy in human diversity so deep caring connections can be made across humanity. In exploring ideas such as fairness, kindness, open-mindedness and being vocal, children begin the task of recognizing injustice and knowing how to stand up for themselves and others.

Each activity booklet offers suggestions of how to begin the lifelong work of having a positive sense of self and others with your early learner, how to support their language development and how to build the foundations of literacy.
N is for Natural:

Your skin, your hair, and your eyes are part of your natural self. Those things are uniquely your own and are part of what makes you special.

How will you show your pride in your natural, beautiful self?

Three to six year olds are excellent observers, and even though they often don’t have the words to express it, they pay close attention to the subtle ways society lets them know what is valued and what is not. These are key years for trusted adults (that’s you!) to help children to feel happy about the body they live in - exactly as it is now, without focus on what we or the world around them thinks their body will be or should be based on factors like race, gender or ability.

It is a huge support to children to be given positive, accurate words to describe characteristics like hair textures, eye and body shapes or skin color rather than to absorb society’s racial and gendered stereotypes about the “normal” way to look and be. Their personal confidence and joy in the diversity of others is strengthened by on-going conversations with loving, anti-bias adults about how everyone is alike and different and how interesting and wonderful that is!

The way we model pride in our own natural, physical selves is just as important as the words we give our children about their own. Our courage to stand up to the world’s judgements that tell us we are too fat, too short, too dark or too different can encourage our children to do the same! This week, as you delight in the body your child lives in, take time to appreciate your own as well. There’s no one just like you in the whole world. You are special.

What You’ll Need:

The following supplies are suggested for the experiences in this booklet.

- Yarn, string, ribbons or scarves
- Tape
- Paper
- Watercolor paint and brushes
- Markers and crayons
- Pencil or black marker
- Chalk (optional)

Tip:
Build an at-home creativity kit full of all the supplies and recycled materials you’ll need for future ABC art and play activities. Find the supplies list here!
EXPLORE

In early childhood, children learn best through doing! Explore this week’s theme with your child by trying this engaging experience inspired by our museum collection.

Loving Your Natural Hair

Embrace Your Hair. Watch We Love Our Hair and read a book with photos of real and diverse children, like Shades of People by Shelley Rotner. Talk about the different textures and colors hair can have and how hair helps us. The way hair naturally grows from everyone’s heads is worthy of admiration. What do you love about your hair? Look in a mirror, touch your hair and describe it. Offer words like long, short, thick, flat, curly, wavy or straight.

Learn about hair styles. Braids and twists are hairstyles in Black communities that express creativity, show pride in Black culture and African ancestry, and care for natural hair textures. Braiding and twisting hair takes a lot of practice. Braids are a style found in many other communities but they are styled in different ways. Do you or people in your family or community wear braids?

This week, practice braiding and twisting with yarn, ribbon, long scarves or fabric strips.

- Start with two pieces of ribbon or yarn held down with tape or tied to sturdy furniture.
- Invite your child to twist the two pieces together.
- Then, with patience and grace, try braiding. Model how, one strand at a time. Remember, braiding and twisting require children to use different levels of fine motor skills and are skills that take time and a lot of practice to learn. Be sure to keep this experience fun!

Caregivers: Learn more about the importance and history of braids in Black culture.

Tip: Be sure to include all genders in this experience.
Create art inspired by this week’s theme!

Your Special Eyes

Eyes are all different shapes. Some are round like circles, shaped like almonds or look like small crescent moons. For some people, eyes help them look at the world around them all on their own. Other eyes may need glasses while some eyes can’t be used to see. From light and dark shades of browns to many kinds of blues and greens, eyes come in many shades and colors. Eyes in every shape and color are special!

Paint a picture of your eyes. Start by looking closely at your eyes. What shapes are they? Do they change shape when you smile? What colors are your eyes? How are your eyes the same or different from your grown-up’s eyes?

What You’ll Need
- Pencil or black marker
- Large sheet of white paper
- Watercolor paints and brush

1. Begin to draw the shape of your eyes with a pencil or marker. Remember to add your eyelids and eyelashes. Try to fill the page!

2. On a small plate, mix water with paint from different watercolor tabs to create a shade that is most like your wonderful natural colors. Then begin to fill in the iris and pupils of your eyes with colors and details like lines or specks.

3. In the blank space on your paper, work together to write down words that you used to describe your eyes, colors or patterns that you love.

Tip: Support your child’s self-love by teaching them how their body works! While drawing and painting, talk about the different parts of an eye.
LEARN

Invite your child to take part in the following experiences to support their literacy and language skills.

Celebrating Your Body’s Shapes

What You’ll Need

- Markers or crayons
- Paper

Bodies come in many shapes and sizes. Some bodies are small or tall and others are short or big. Our bodies are always changing. Everyone’s bodies have some things that are the same and some things that are different. All bodies are loveable and wonderful just the way they are! What is something you love about your body? What does your body help you do?

Trace body parts. Tracing helps to strengthen hand-eye coordination and gives children opportunities to practice the fine motor skills required for writing. Start by asking your little one to place their non-dominant hand on a blank piece of paper. Then, model how to use a marker or crayon to trace along the sides of their hand and in between fingers. For a different challenge, encourage them to try tracing with the opposite hand, allow them to trace your hands, or trace feet. As they trace, talk about the beautiful color of their skin and the wonderful ways they can use their hands - from holding utensils or picking up things to holding a friend’s hand or giving a high-five.

Try this! Take turns lying down on the sidewalk and tracing each other’s bodies with chalk. (Make sure that the concrete isn’t too hot or too cold!) Talk about the similarities and differences of your body shapes. Fill in the shape with positive words, colors, letters or body parts drawn with chalk.
EXPLORE MORE

Children notice skin color starting in infancy and begin to form beliefs about what the colors mean about themselves and others, whether we talk about it or not. As a caregiver in the life of young children, you have the special opportunity to show them the beauty of diverse skin colors and the specialness of their own skin. Use the resources below to learn more about how children understand skin color and race, and to support your child’s positive identity development in fun and meaningful ways.

**Books**

Discover how we get our skin colors, the many shades skin can be and the awesome things that skin can do!

- **Happy In Our Skin**
  by Fran Manushkin, illustrated by Lauren Tobia

- **All the Colors We Are: The Story of How We Get Our Skin Color**
  by Katie Kissinger, photographs by Chris Bohnhoff

- **The Skin You Live In**
  by Micheal Tyler illustrated by David Lee Csicsko

- **Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children**
  by Sandra L. Pinkney, photographs by Myles C. Pinkney

- **Shades of People**
  by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly

- **Sulwe**
  by Lupita Nyong’o, illustrated by Vashti Harrison

**Online Resources**

Use the resources below to learn more about how adults can support children’s understanding of skin, race and identity. Then, share the songs below to celebrate skin with your child.

⭐ **Lupita Nyong’o Loves Her Skin** - Sesame Street
⭐ **Beautiful Skin Song** - Sesame Street
⭐ **Children Are Not Colorblind: How Young Children Learn Race** - by Erin N. Winkler, Ph.D
⭐ **Five Things to Remember to Help Keep Colorism From Infecting Your Family** - EmbraceRace

Visit NMAAHC’s [Talking About Race: Race and Racial Identity page](#). With a better understanding of our own identities and race as a construct, we can better support children in developing their own positive sense of self and others.
N is for Natural

Books and Online Resources
From our heads to our toes, we all are wonderful just the way we are. Support your child's love of their unique, natural self while also celebrating body diversity as you enjoy the books and videos below together.

Hair

Books

Happy to Be Nappy by bell hooks, illustrated by Chris Raschkat

Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Gordon C. James

Bippity Bop Barbershop by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley, illustrated by E. B. Lewis

Bedtime Bonnet by Nancy Redd, illustrated by Nneka Myers

Hairs / Pelitos by Sandra Cisneros, illustrated by Terry Ybanez

Hair, It's a Family Affair! by Mylo Freeman

When Mama Braids My Hair by Monique Duncan

Teaching for Change: Representation of Hair in Children's Books Guide

Online Resources

I Love My Hair Song (English) - Sesame Street
(Enjoy the song in Spanish here.)

Hair Love: A Short Film by Mathew A. Cherry - Sony Pictures Animation

Fixing My Hair - Sesame Street

Body Diversity & Self-Love

Books

Eyes that Kiss in the Corner by Joanna Ho, illustrated by Dung Ho

The Best Part of Me by Wendy Ewald

We’re Different, We’re the Same by Bobbi Kates, illustrated by Joe Mathieu

Her Body Can by Katie Crenshaw and Ady Meschke

I Like Myself by Karen Beaumont, illustrated by David Catrow

It’s Okay to Be Different by Todd Parr

What I Like About Me by Allia Zobel Nolan, illustrated by Miki Sakamoto

I Am Enough by Grace Byers, illustrated by Keturah A. Bobo

Embrace Your Body by Taryn Brumfitt, illustrated by Sinead Hanley

You Are Enough by Margaret O'Hair, inspired by Sofia Sanchez, illustrated by Sofia Cardoso

Online Resources

The Reflection In Me by Marc Colagiovanni - Fable Vision

Will.i.am Sings “What I Am” - Sesame Street

NeYo Sings “You've Got A Body” - Sesame Street

It’s You I Like Song - Mr. Rogers
A Guide for Families and Caregivers

Why do these experiences matter?
A child's identity is both internally constructed and externally imposed. They learn who they are and how they are valued from the words and actions of others and from the way they do or don't make sense of those messages. Their beloved adults (that's you!) are the most important people in their world. The words you give a child to describe themselves and others have lasting power in their lives. When a child has the words to think about their strengths and their worth, they can sort through negative messages and hold on to their sense of being loveable and capable. The experiences in this booklet are invitations for you to use objects, activities and words to support your child's positive identity development, their fascination with how people are both different and the same, and their ability to read emotions and build empathy. In time, experiences like these will also support your child's ability to recognize unfairness or unkindness.

What about supporting language development and getting ready to read?
Alphabets, in and of themselves, are not particularly interesting to young children. However, learning letter-filled words to describe the world around them and inside of them (their feelings, experiences and senses) are very interesting to children! Discovering new words, new ways to say things and new ways to think is exciting and essential to a child's literacy and identity development.

The developmental path to reading is a child's understanding that, “Anything I do or see, I can say! Anything I say can be written! Anything written can be read!” Many booklet experiences will encourage you to engage in conversations about objects and during story times to deepen your child's connection to spoken and written words. Other experiences will invite you to build literacy skills by writing down what your child says, feels or thinks and reading it back to them aloud. Some booklets will introduce fun ways to boost fine motor skills that contribute to a child's writing and reading abilities. The booklets will also recommend books that intrigue children by illustrating the rich diversity of people in the world and providing them with a mirror to their own lives or a window into other lives.

Every child's path to literacy is different and valid - just like their identity. The experiences in these booklets aim to support you and your child along their unique journey to literacy and a positive sense of self. Remember to have fun along the way!

Credits

Objects

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