

N is for Natural

JOY FUL

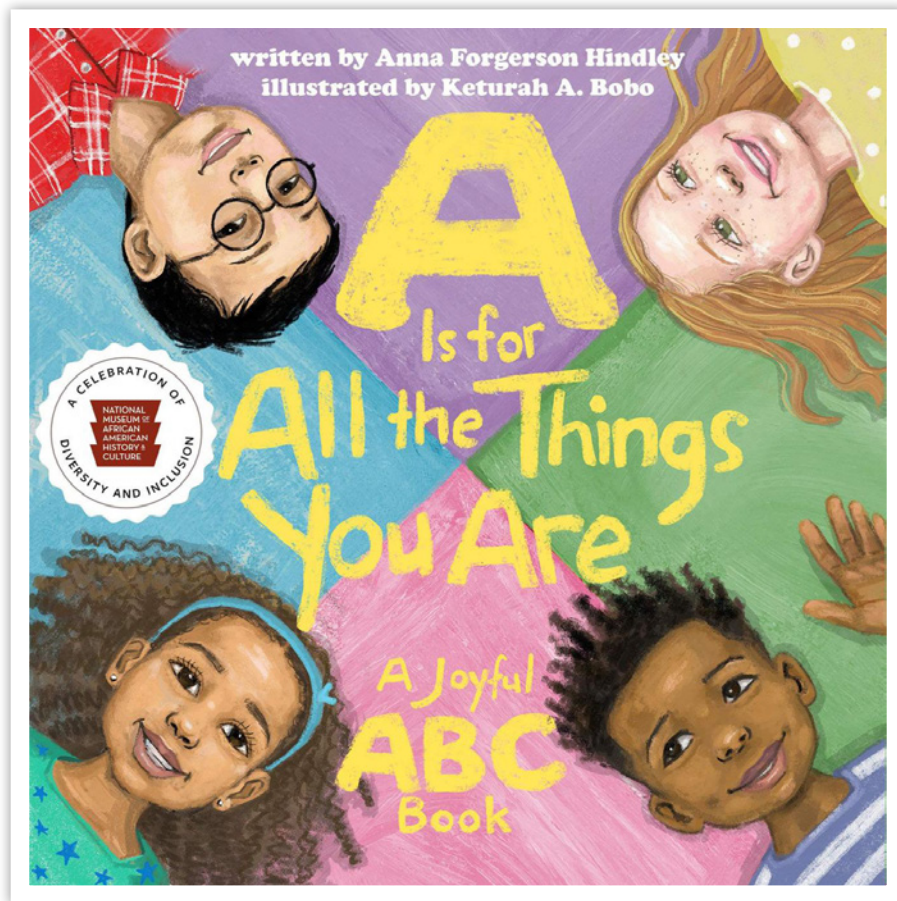


A NMAAHC KIDS ABCs ACTIVITY BOOK

INFANT AND TODDLER EDITION

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. 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.

Each activity booklet offers suggestions of how to begin the lifelong work of having a positive sense of self and others with your infant or toddler, how to support their language development and how to build the foundations of literacy.

A Is for All the Things You Are: A Joyful ABC Book
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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?

From the very beginning of a child's life, families, caregivers and educators have the opportunity to demonstrate that we cherish the original, unique and natural body in which the child lives. Every time we pick them up, feed them, diaper, dress and undress, hug and hold them we are interacting with their bodies and transmitting messages about their acceptability. Combined with our actions, our loving words and sounds while we hold them and look into their eyes further convey their first lessons in how valued they are.

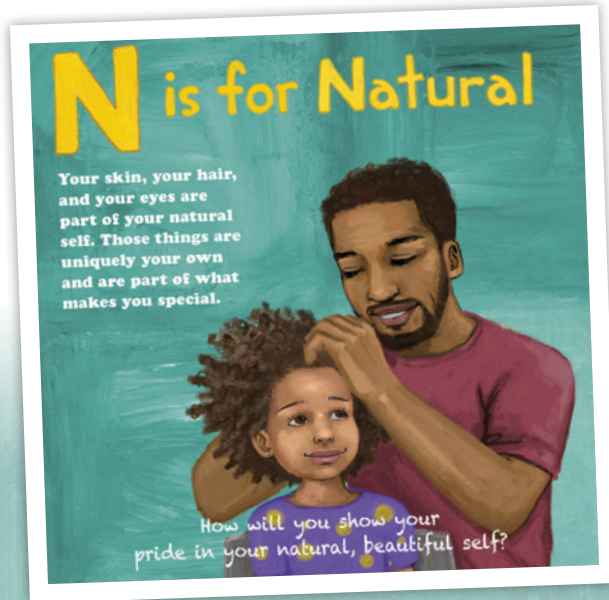
In a world that is still highly judgmental about appearances, beloved adults (that's you!) can provide an essential message that the child's own natural, physical being is strong, healthy, and beautiful – just as it is. We can be the first to provide empowering words to describe skin color, eye shape, hair texture and body size, and let the child know, from birth on, that we can talk about our outsides and admire how we are the same and different from everyone else.

Just as important as the words we give our little ones is the way we model our pride in our own physical selves and our courage to stand up to the world's judgements that tell us we are too fat, too short, too dark, too different, too... something. Instead, we can show what it looks like to treasure our health and the skin, hair, eyes and bodies we naturally have. We can let our little ones hear and see that humans come in all sizes and shades and how wonderful it is that no two of us are just alike!

What You'll Need:

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

- Mirror
- Blank paper
- Markers, crayons or paints in shades of skin colors



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EXPLORE

In early childhood, children learn best through doing! To explore this week's theme, try the activity below with your infant or toddler.

Building Self-Image with Mirrors and Words

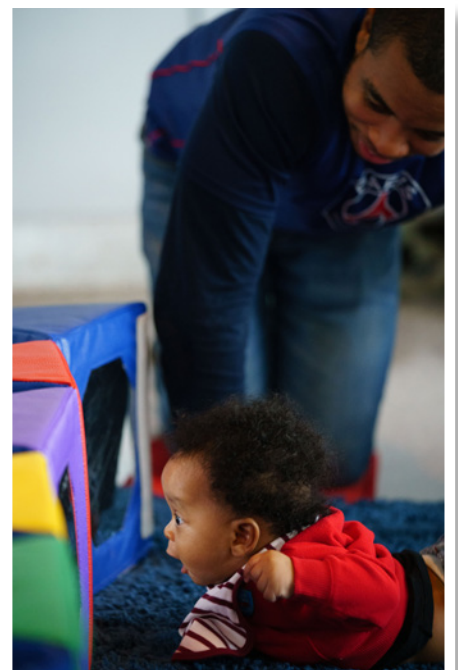
Designed for: Infants and Toddlers

One of the first things that babies spend the most time exploring and experimenting with is their own body. With each movement, our littlest ones are getting to know who they are. When we add mirrors to this process of self discovery, we support their understanding and appreciation of their physical self. Mirror time helps babies to recognize their own reflection and tell the difference between who they are and the reflection of others. This time can be a wonderful support to a child's developing self-image, particularly when it's accompanied by loving, descriptive words.

The words we use to describe our children's natural bodies directly contribute to who they believe themselves to be. Take time to look in a mirror together. Notice how they gaze at their own reflection and move their bodies. Wave and smile in the mirror! Then, describe their natural features out loud. What words can you use to describe their skin and hair colors? How would you describe their eyes or nose shapes? Do they have any birthmarks? Where does their skin crease or roll?

Begin the important conversations about similarities and differences by noticing, delighting in and naming how you both have eyes but your eyes are different colors, or how you both have skin but it is darker or lighter.

Share observations with admiration. As they grow and we continue to share these words, children will not only recognize their natural qualities in a mirror but be proud of the image they see and love themselves just as they are.



EXPLORE

In early childhood, children learn best through doing! To explore this week's theme, try the experience below with your toddler.

Celebrating Natural Colors

Designed for: Toddlers

What You'll Need: Blank paper and crayons in shades of skin colors and rainbow colors

Organically, children's eyes are often drawn to high contrast between colors. We tend to dress them, give them toys and encourage them to create with a rainbow of bright or pastel colors - and often leave out dark colors, black and shades of browns. All skin colors are shades of brown, from very light and fair to dark and deep tones. Our avoidance of dark colors communicates to children that some colors are better than others. This spoken or unspoken attitude toward dark colors then informs children's attitudes about the skin of others as well as their own.

Support your child to love their natural, beautiful skin through early exploration of art materials.

- Provide your child with paper and crayons in an array of browns to explore and experiment with. Companies like Crayola and Lakeshore offer art materials in "people colors." Sometimes, give your toddler the opportunity to just create with shades of brown, and always mix browns and blacks into their multi-colored art materials. Use brown toned papers for art projects and comment on how beautiful the paper is.
- Talk about what materials match their own natural shade of brown skin. Describe the colors to your child with admiration. Let them know how much you love that color!

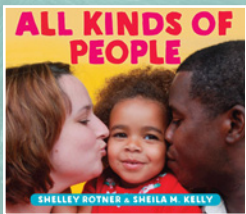


EXPLORE MORE

Continue learning with your little one using these recommended resources:

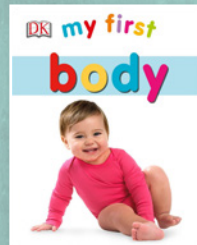
Books

Support your child's love of their natural selves with the books below!



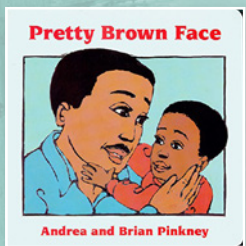
All Kinds of People

by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly



My First Body

by DK



Pretty Brown Face

by Andrea Davis Pinkney,
illustrated by Brian Pinkney



We're Different, We're the Same

by Bobbi Kates,
illustrated by Joe Mathieu

Tip:

Use your favorite search engine to find read-aloud videos online!

Online Resources

A child's sense of self is something that develops over time. Use the resources below to support them in their unique journey.



[Beautiful Skin Song](#) - **Sesame Street**



[Who Am I? Developing a Sense of Self and Belonging](#) - **Zero to Three**



[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.

CONNECT

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 and to stand up for themselves and others.

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.

In the first three years of life, early language and literacy skills are best learned through everyday moments. The experiences in these booklets invite you to boost your child's literacy through talking, playing and creating together in fun and accessible ways. Some experiences will guide you in helping your infant or toddler "name the universe" with descriptive words for the actions and emotions of themselves and others. Other experiences will encourage you to point out written words and look closely at objects to provide your little one with the beginning connections between the real world, reading and talking.

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

Program Photos:

- Doug Sanford, National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2019

Original Artwork

- Bluebird (cover, page 2) © 2018 Art by Keturah Ariel LLC