

Implementing the Serious Talks curriculum...has been life changing for my classroom community. The lessons have provided time, space, and context for my students to safely share their experiences with racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice. I've seen my students become so respectful of each other as they've learned more cultural and historical context. Students of Color have felt safe to have conversations with me about incidents of racial harm as well as how they would like it addressed within our class. This is such important work. - Fifth Grade Teacher

I am proud to teach this powerful curriculum that teaches kindness, inclusion, and how to be an ally. - First Grade Teacher

The impact on my students as a result of this work has been incredible. Students reflect on what they are doing and seeing in school and out in the real world. As a result of this work, they want to make positive changes. Students are more aware of multiple perspectives and more inclusive and understanding of others. Students frequently have "aha" moments as they make meaningful connections based on these lessons across the curriculum.

I have grown as an educator in leading these lessons because they help establish common ground, a sense of community, and a safe classroom environment where all students feel welcome and heard. Some of the first topics we cover include telling YOUR story, understanding perspectives tied to different cultures, and reflecting on what we consume as readers. Are we reading about characters who look like us? Are there books for people who don't look like us? Should we only read books one way or the other? These lessons are important and are a foundation for the whole year to learn and grow together. - Fifth Grade Teacher

In both 2nd and 4th grades I have seen students really connect to the discussions about stereotypes, bias, discrimination, and racism. The lessons and class discussions have given them the language and opportunity to identify and express their own experiences with each of these. There have been countless examples shared by students but specific voices that I can recall were a Russian student experiencing challenges and assumptions of others about her and her family given the war on Ukraine, and an Asian student being made fun of when she spoke to a family member in Korean while at a soccer game. The rich discussions gave students a much needed forum to discuss and process their experiences and to hear those of their classmates and to begin to learn ways that they can recognize biases/stereotypes/racism and empower them to respond and begin to dismantle them.

I have found that students have also connected to the lessons where we introduce the term transgender. In both classes at least one student was able to share that they have a family member or someone they know or care about who is transgender. The introduction of the term

and scaffolded conversation and lesson helps them to understand the identity rather than having to distill confusing/conflicting information for themselves. In particular, there are students in our elementary grades that use they/them pronouns, so the lesson helped students to understand the importance of using preferred pronouns.

These lessons and discussions have left an indelible mark on my work as a white woman and educator. Having grown up white in majority white suburbs, my experiences were drastically different than those of the diverse students in our classrooms. Even our young students are able to articulate and share stories where they have experienced discrimination, stereotypes, bias, or racism. Hearing their experiences (and knowing there are so many more that may not be shared) reinforces for me why this work is of the utmost importance and these discussions need to be had. It is only by validating the experiences of others and giving space to listen/share/be heard and learn from others that we will be able to recognize and dismantle unfair systems of oppression in order to create a more just school, community, and world where we actually do all belong. - Elementary Educator

Like our best curriculum in Lexington, the Serious Talks have always been about teaching critical thinking skills. The goal is not to tell students what to think, but how to think, and how to have meaningful conversations with each other, even about difficult topics. The biggest impact that I've noticed is how well students transfer these perspective taking and critical thinking skills to our literacy and social studies curriculum. - Fifth Grade Teacher

My students were so engaged during all of our Serious Talk lessons. The gender identity lesson in particular brought up SO much great conversation about expectations and stereotypes. Students shared personal stories about feeling expectations related to gender (for example, feeling like they couldn't wear a particular color or type of clothing). The conversation also delved into stereotypes about gender and how they aren't based in reality. For example, many students expressed that they had felt stereotyped by gender related to extracurricular activities or sports they play. Ultimately, my class shared many different expressions of acceptance as we came to conclusions about being ourselves, accepting others for who they are, and naming stereotypes so that they have less power.

This lesson falls among several lessons designed to introduce students to different aspects of personal identity, and culminates in a project in which students create an identity portrait. My students were so engaged in their identity portrait project. They thoughtfully considered aspects of their identity and how they wanted to communicate their identity with words, colors, and symbols. Some students included information about their gender identity in their portrait, some did not. Several students included a rainbow flag in their portrait to represent their allyship with the LGBTQ+ community, clearly demonstrating some of our [School and District] values of acceptance and respect.

The high engagement in all of our lessons about identity shows that students are eager to discuss, and capable of understanding, their own and others' identity. Research shows that children develop a sense of gender by about age three. By including gender identity in our work with identity in general, we therefore seek to include and affirm all students of all genders. Representing all students in the curriculum is an important and essential way to live out our LPS core value "We all belong." - Fourth Grade Teacher

Serious talks are something that I look forward to teaching in my classroom. This curriculum, at the elementary level, is all about teaching empathy and kindness. As an educator, the biggest thing I want is for my students to be kind and welcoming to others. That is whether they look the same or different from themselves. That is whether they like the same things or different things. This curriculum helps students dig deeper into what it means to be empathetic and kind to others. One of the early lessons in the curriculum teaches about what your visible and invisible parts of your identity are. Your visible parts of your identity are things that people can see when they look at you. They can see your skin color, your hair, your eye shape, what clothes you like to wear etc. Your invisible parts of your identity are parts of your identity that you don't know about someone unless you try to get to know them. You can't see them. Some examples are languages you speak, where you're from, what you like (for example: sports, books, music), what you don't like and many more. When teaching and learning about this with students, they start to get to know each other on a deeper level. When teaching about different types of identities, we learn that families can be made up of different races, different genders and different amounts of people. The whole point of these lessons are to show that if people are different from you, that you're not passing judgement on them. For example, when teaching about gay and lesbian identities, we are teaching to be accepting of families that may have people that identify that way. Another lesson we have is to teach students about gender stereotypes. We teach students that not only girls can like pink or not only boys can like trucks. It again teaches kindness to show that anyone can like whatever they want and to be kind regardless of what you like yourself. They start to think about their own identities and how that can connect or not connect with other people's identities and to be kind and empathetic regardless.

All of this work and learning that I've mentioned then digs even deeper into understanding when there are disparities based on identities, it starts to teach students about privilege, stereotypes and bias. It is extremely powerful to hear students putting their learning into context and real life situations that happen in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

I will leave you with this email that I received from a parent:

"I just wanted to send you a quick email and tell you just how happy we are that you're my daughter's teacher. She started telling me about 'identity' while we were brushing her teeth the other night. And it brought me to tears. To hear this kind of acceptance and compassion coming from her at just 7 years old- when there are so many adults in this world who can't seem to

grasp it- I just can't even express how it made my heart explode with happiness. You are doing an amazing job showing these kids how to be amazing and accepting little people."
-Elementary Educator