Learning From the Reflections of ABAR Practitioners

In the book (Chapter 1), you read the reflections from ABAR practitioners to the following questions:

- *When do you recall first noticing racial differences between you and other people (in your community, school, place of worship and/or in the world in general)? Did you say anything to your family about what you noticed? If so, how did your family respond to you?*
- *When was the first time you remember seeing and/or reading about people of other races in books, movies, and/or TV shows? Tell me about those books, movies, and/or TV shows.*
- *Growing up, what do you remember your K–12 teachers and/or school doing that clearly showed they didn't understand the history, culture, and oppression of People of Color?*
- *If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K–12 learning experiences related to people of other races?*
- *If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K–12 learning experiences related to being White?*

Here are some additional reflections to those questions, and at the end of each section, you'll have the opportunity to reflect on the questions as well. These reflections may spark some of your own memories and can lead to further self-reflection, discovery, and action along your antiracism journey. You also might want to use each of these questions as a starting place for professional learning community work.

Question: When do you recall first noticing racial differences between you and other people (in your community, school, place of worship, and/or in the world in general)? Did you say anything to your family about what you noticed? If so, how did your family respond to you?

Responses

"My memories of noticing racial differences come to me through family lore. My mother told me stories about our time living in Virginia when I was very young. She told me that my teacher informed me that I was smarter than my lone Black classmate and that the police came to our house to 'check in' when my father's Black coworker came over to visit. She also told me that when we decided to rent the place in Virginia, the landlady offered us a 'Black boy' or 'Black girl' to come help us around the house and property. She said no and later came to understand that the landlady had been referring to two adult Black people. When our family moved back north to New York, where I had been born, my mother told me that it was because the schools were better and it was less racist in New York.

"I don't remember any of these incidents, but I remember my mother telling me about them. As I reflect on these stories now, it strikes me that my mother wanted me to understand that our family was 'good' White people, in contrast to the racist White people in Virginia. She wanted me to see us as different from them. That became an important piece of my racial identity, inasmuch as I ever thought about race. Looking back, I can now see that my racial identity development was actually hampered by these family legends. I learned from them that racism can be understood as individual acts of ignorance or aggression by bad White people and that racism is a relic of the past still practiced in backward places. In my mind, I was able to distance myself from racism and racists, then, because, according to these stories, we had done the right thing in getting out of there."

—Sydney Chaffee, teacher of Humanities 9 and instructional coach at Codman Academy Charter Public School, Boston, Massachusetts

"My first memory of race, in general, is when my first-grade teacher was reading a book about the Civil Rights Movement. She kept talking about 'White people' and I didn't understand who these people were. I raised my hand and asked who White people were because at that point I knew I didn't have White skin, I had peach or pink colored skin. I don't remember her answer, but the realization that I was White really stuck with me. I think my first memory of seeing people who didn't look like me was when I was probably 5 or 6 and I was at Stop and Shop with my parents and I remember seeing a Black family as I walked in and I was just floored by how cool, interesting, and different their braided hair was. I'm sure I was that kid who was staring for way too long as my parents tried to keep me moving through the aisles."

—Kate LaBelle, Grades 3–6 physical education teacher at Rutland Intermediate School, Vermont

"I first noticed racial differences when my parents brought people of different racial backgrounds into my life. I recall my father was extremely proud to introduce me to his best friend from childhood, Spencer, when I was in kindergarten. I was initially surprised and startled to see Spencer, a towering Black man from my little five-year-old perspective, but my shock was quickly replaced with excitement as I saw my father embrace him and tell me, 'Claire, this is the best friend I have ever had—his family is our family.' My father went on to tell me, as I got older, that he often felt neglected by his family and found his family with Spencer's family, which included Spencer and his seven brothers.

"I noticed racial differences again when I was six or seven and my mother started working at Head Start to make ends meet. I remember being there with my mother and meeting her boss, Feeni. Feeni was a Latina woman who had impeccable fashion, and I recall my mother telling me how much she admired Feeni, appreciated her for giving my mom a chance at employment, and how she hoped to dress like Feeni one day."

—Claire Miller, educator, school leader, curriculum designer, and founder of the nonprofit Restorative Practices in Action in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"As early as kindergarten I had friends and classmates who were from different backgrounds. My family ran a church and my dad preached acceptance. I also served in soup kitchens and community events. We were very vocal as a family and spoke openly about how people in KC lived very different lives. There was a picture of a little brown boy with a distended tummy on our bulletin board near the kitchen table. My mom would point at him and let me know that he would eat what I was complaining about having in front of me. I will say that their views are those of the melting pot and that we are all the same on the inside. I have had to help my mom understand the way she is viewing this with only her own privilege to say what 'same' means or feels like."

—Chris Odam, secondary ELA coordinator for Kansas City Public Schools, Kansas City, Missouri

"I probably noticed that some students in my elementary and middle school were Asian American, but I don't recall it meaning anything to me until high school. My high school was 40% Asian, 40% Latinx, and 20% White. The most common stereotypes were that Asians were bad drivers and the Latinx guys were in gangs. I was tracked into the honors classes, and that was a very White/Asian experience. I didn't say anything to my parents at the time. My parents also said very little, except that they did indicate they had no intention of leaving our neighborhood to avoid the Asian immigrants who were moving in. I do think it became a point of pride for my dad, although he didn't really express it at the time. He occasionally talked about going over to make friends with the Vietnamese neighbors, but that transition was occurring after I'd moved to college.

"I was a sprinter in high school, so the dynamic that ended up impacting me the most were relationships with Black folks on my college team. That is when we began talking more openly about race. I was learning through my teammates and bringing ideas home with me."

—Shelly Tochluk, author of *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It* (2010) and *Living in the Tension: The Quest for a Spiritualized Racial Justice* (2016)

"When I was growing up, most of the people on TV and in the movies were White. *Star Trek* was probably one of the first shows that had People of Color. As for books, I don't remember reading about any People of Color until I was in college and took an African American literature course. After that, I sought out books written by People of Color."

—Jennifer Wolfrum, graduate instructor and IDEAS (Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students) instructor

Breathe and Reflect

When do you recall first noticing racial differences between you and other people (in your community, school, place of worship, and/or in the world in general)? Did you say anything to your family about what you noticed? If so, how did your family respond to you? ■

Question: ***When was the first time you remember seeing and/or reading about people of other races in books, movies, and/or TV shows? Tell me about those books, movies, and/or TV shows.***

Responses

"I first remember seeing a Black girl in the *American Girls* series of books. I was naturally most drawn to the character Addy, the only Black girl featured in the series. While I don't know why I was drawn to her character, I remember begging my mom to buy that doll for me. My mother told me that she would buy me the small doll version because I had to show I could take care of that doll for a year before she would buy me a large American Girl doll. One year later I fell in love with a different American Girl, Molly, but I took my mother's words seriously and took great care of that little Addy doll. It sat on my dresser all growing up and is actually one of the only childhood toys I still have saved."

—Claire Miller, educator, school leader, curriculum designer, and founder of the nonprofit Restorative Practices in Action in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"When I was little, I remember watching *Sesame Street* a lot, though I don't recall having much awareness about the diversity of race, ethnicity, and culture that I was seeing. The first memory of reading a book about other races was in third grade. We had an assignment to read a biography and then write a report about it, and my book was about Frederick Douglass. I don't recall anything specific about the narrative or even discussing race, enslavement, or abolition in that class, but I do remember writing the report because it was the first time I had done an assignment like that.

"In that same class, my (White) teacher read aloud *Indian in the Cupboard*. I DO remember having the impression that the 'Indian's' behavior had an air of mystery and exoticism to it. I also remember that the 'Indian' character was really independent and that bothered the boy who had the cupboard (he felt like the Indian was his and he wanted the Indian to 'need' him). I can recall that feeling of wanting to be needed resonating with me. I also LOVED the shows *Hangin' with Mr. Cooper* and *Family Matters* (yay, TGIF!), which were both shows about Black families. Again, though, I don't remember having much awareness about race."

—Carly Riley, director of virtual learning and a facilitator for Embracing Equity

"In the public schools I grew up in we watched the MLK Dream speech every year together in the auditorium. The old wooden chairs and the resonance in his voice moved me so much that I secretly looked forward to that assembly. From there I was super interested in the vocal ability of such a preacher, as my father simply spoke in quiet tones and philosophized deep stuff. I wanted to learn more about what I did not know then was called 'the oral tradition.' In my middle school days I grew interested in hip-hop and began experimenting with my own dress. I had some overall shorts at one point, with one clasp open, of course. Run DMC was my first real rap tape, *Raising Hell*, and it was something I wielded in my Walkman with great pride. I would secretly practice and loved every bit."

—Chris Odam, secondary ELA coordinator for Kansas City Public Schools, Kansas City, Missouri

"My early experiences were all entertainment and sports. I have no recollection of learning about, experiencing, or watching People of Color who weren't actors or sports figures. Oprah started when I was in high school, and she was a big deal mostly because she was a woman who was doing what Phil Donahue was doing. So, she was significant to me at the time from a gender perspective.

"In all honesty, all these influences made me very comfortable approaching my new teammates when I became a white sprinter on my mostly Black sprint team in college. Don't get me wrong, I had LOADS to learn, but I was naively sure we would all get along just fine at the time."

—Shelly Tochluk, author of *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It* (2010) and *Living in the Tension: The Quest for a Spiritualized Racial Justice* (2016)

Breathe and Reflect

When was the first time you remember seeing and/or reading about people of other races in books, movies, and/or TV shows? Reflect on those books, movies, and/or TV shows. ■

Question: Growing up, what do you remember your K–12 teachers and/or school doing that clearly showed they didn't understand the history, culture, and oppression of People of Color?

Responses

"Dressing up as pilgrims and Native Americans. Talking about the Civil War and Reconstruction from the perspective of states' rights. A completely whitewashed curriculum in all subject areas."

—Leigh Ann Erickson, founder of Undone Consulting and Undone Movement; author of the young adult book *What Is White Privilege?*; and educator and developer of the Connect, Absorb, Respond, and Empower (CARE) curriculum and conference

"I look back and see a complete absence of any discussion about the history, culture, or oppression of People of Color."

—Claire Miller, educator, school leader, curriculum designer, and founder of the nonprofit Restorative Practices in Action in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"We only ever learned one perspective, the White perspective on every topic. People of Color were never discussed."

—Melissa Pointer, public school educator and elementary school principal in a school leading the implementation of instruction on race and identity

"I was so unaware about race, history, culture, and systems of oppression that I did not have the consciousness to notice anything like this happening when I was in school. I believed that schools and teachers knew best and were well-prepared to teach us everything that we needed to know. In retrospect, my teachers/school showed that they didn't understand the history, culture, and the oppression of BIPOC because we had a narrow/Eurocentric history curriculum, we only learned about oppression as a thing of the past, and I was introduced to culture as something that 'other' people have (via a feasts and festivals approach)."

—Carly Riley, director of virtual learning and a facilitator for Embracing Equity

Breathe and Reflect

Growing up, what do you remember your K–12 teachers and/or school doing that clearly showed they didn't understand the history, culture, and oppression of People of Color? ■

Question: If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K–12 learning experiences related to people of other races?

Responses

"I would go back and include teachers who are People of Color and bring more students of color into the school."

—Claire Miller, educator, school leader, curriculum designer, and founder of the nonprofit Restorative Practices in Action in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"I would have attended a diverse school with staff who represented the student body and who taught an antiracist curriculum."

—Melissa Pointer, public school educator and elementary school principal in a school leading the implementation of instruction on race and identity

"I would live in an integrated community and attend an integrated school that had students and staff who represented a range of racial groups."

—Jennifer Wolfrum, graduate instructor and IDEAS (Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students) instructor

Breathe and Reflect

If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K–12 learning experiences related to people of other being White?

Question: If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K–12 learning experiences related to being White?

Responses

"I would have the teachers/staff teach about racism and teach about White people who resisted racism and were allies in the struggle for racial justice."

—Jennifer Harvey, college educator, director of the Crew Scholars program at Drake University (Iowa), and author of four books about disrupting White supremacy and social justice

"I would be engaging in discussion about my racial identity development with my peers from the first year I stepped into schooling."

—Claire Miller, educator, school leader, curriculum designer, and founder of the nonprofit Restorative Practices in Action in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"I would have been taught about my Whiteness as a very young child so as to not be blinded by White supremacy and to allow it to have such an impact on my socialization and development."

—Melissa Pointer, public school educator and elementary school principal in a school leading the implementation of instruction on race and identity

"I would have appreciated having teachers who could have told the truth about US history, while also standing solidly on a foundation of self-investigation and antiracism. Having a model to show me how to be an antiracist White person would have been really helpful."

—Shelly Tochluk, author of *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It* (2010) and *Living in the Tension: The Quest for a Spiritualized Racial Justice* (2016)

Breathe and Reflect

If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K–12 learning experiences related to being White? ■