

Parenting Together

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5 Things to Do with Children to Honor Black History Month During February and All Year Long!

February is Black History Month – a month dedicated to highlighting and celebrating the important achievements and contributions that Black people have contributed to American history.

In addition to celebrating Black culture, this month is also a great opportunity for families to explore and have conversations about the historical experiences of Black people in America, while reminding us that all Americans must shine a light on the injustices Black and African American individuals still face in this country.

Everyone can and should participate in the celebration of Black culture not just in February, but all year long! Unfortunately, the realities of prejudice and discrimination begin to affect children's development early. It is developmentally appropriate to address these issues with young children, especially in White families.

As adults, we have the power to create, teach, & maintain bias (even if we don't mean to)—but more importantly, we have the power to eliminate it. By exploring the stories and rich history of Black people in America, we can equip children with tools to resist negative messages based on racial identities.

In a time when cultural tensions are at an all time high, cultural learning is crucial for children to increase knowledge, understanding, empathy, and compassion in an effort to build bridges across differences. From a mental health perspective, those who have high levels of empathy are more likely to function well in society. Research shows that empathy is vital in building successful interpersonal relationships of all types.

Celebrating Black History Month is the perfect opportunity to expand your children's awareness of other's racial identities while encouraging them to be open and respectful of all people they may encounter.

5 Activities to Celebrate Black History

Read books about Black history with your children

Children love to be read to at any age. Celebrate Black history and stories of Black joy with books about African-American artists, authors, athletes, politicians, & others who made their mark on the world. Explore the history of slavery and Civil Rights movements through biographies of people who led the journey to freedom and liberation.

Try a new recipe

Cooking with children is always fun and making traditional dishes is a great way to celebrate. Traditionally, many cuisines from African countries used locally grown fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats. Search Google or Pinterest for recipes like Peanut Stew (popular in Ghana, Senegal, & Kenya *spicy*), Misir Wot (Ethiopian stew with chicken, beef, lamb, or lentils), or Benne Wafers (traditional African cookie from Nigeria - crispy, nutty, delicious). With any new recipe you try, learn with your child about the origins and history of the recipe.

Virtually visit a Black History museum or Black Cultural center

Learn about the Black Cultural centers in your community or state. At this time, many organizations may have virtual activities that your family can participate in to celebrate Black History month in February, but also throughout the year.

Make a Shekere (Shaker Instrument)

Children will love constructing, decorating, playing and learning about a new instrument. The Shekere is a West African percussion instrument that consists of a dried gourd with beads woven onto a net covering (Instructions here: <http://bit.ly/Make-a-Shekere>). You can also create a shaker use a plastic bottle that is filled with lentils or beans and decorated to make a simple musical shaker. Play your instruments along with music (Search for Putamayo "The Best of World Music: Africa" on YouTube).

Watch movies that highlight Black Achievement

Family movie nights are so much fun! Make a tub of popcorn and enjoy one of these suggestions or look for your own:

- March On! The Day My Brother Martin Changed the World - Scholastic Storybook DVD of 4 civil rights stories. Ages 4+
- 42 – An inspiring Biopic about the two years when Jackie Robinson broke the baseball color barrier. Ages 10+
- A Ballerina's Tale – Examines the life and career of Misty Copeland the first African American principal dancer. Ages 9+
- Remember the Titans – a true story about the struggles and victories of a newly integrated high school football team in 1971. Ages 10+

The Book Nook

Black is a Rainbow Color
by Angela Joy

Mae Among the Stars
by Roda Ahmed

¿Quién fue Louis Armstrong?
by Yona Zeldis McDonough

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References

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Things to Do with Children to Honor Black History Month
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All Families Can Celebrate Black History Month!
<https://parentingjourney.org/2020/02/01/5-ways-all-families-can-celebrate-black-history-month/>