



# RACE & INCLUSION

standing up to racism and  
building a better world

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## Dear Reader,

Good for you! You've taken the first step in a lifelong journey to learn what you can do to stand up to racism. Maybe you've seen someone treated unfairly just because of the color of her skin. Maybe you were treated unfairly because of the color of yours. Maybe you've seen protests in the news and wondered what they're about. Whatever reason you picked up this book, you're here because you want to make a difference and change things for the better, and that's awesome!

There's a lot to learn about race, racism, and anti-racism. But don't be overwhelmed—we'll take it step by step. We'll first learn the language and concepts of race and racism. Then we can start to think about changes we can make in ourselves, in our communities, and in the world to challenge racism. There are lots of ideas in this book for thinking bigger and learning new skills as we work to stand up to racism all around us.

Imagine a world where everyone is treated fairly and no one is hurt or looked down on because of the color of their skin. Think about all the good that will come when everyone is valued, respected, and cared for—no matter who they are. That's a world worth fighting for, so let's go!

**Your friends at American Girl**

# starting your journey

If you're reading this book, you're a girl who . . .



is curious.

is brave.

stands up for others.

wants to make the world a better place for everyone.

But you might also be a girl who . . .

feels uncomfortable talking about race.

isn't sure what words to use when talking about race.

wants to help fight racism but doesn't know how.

is worried she'll never be able to do enough.

Here's the good news—you can be all these things! You can be brave *and* feel uncomfortable talking about race. You can stand up for others *and* be unsure how to help fight racism. Even grown-ups have these mixed-up feelings. You don't need to be perfect or know everything to begin this work—in fact, no one who is doing this work is flawless. Standing up to racism is a lifelong journey, but it's an exciting one. If you're willing to put yourself out there and learn more about racism, that's enough to get started!

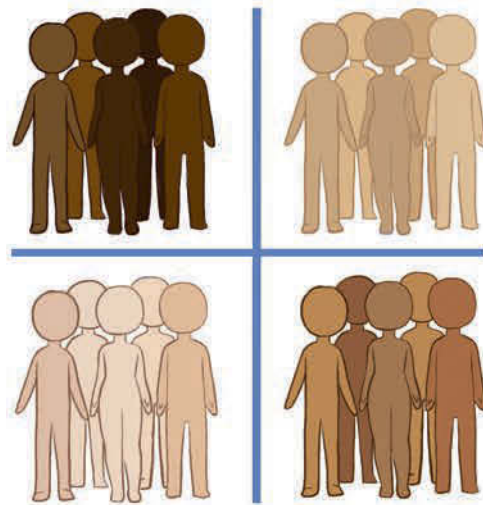
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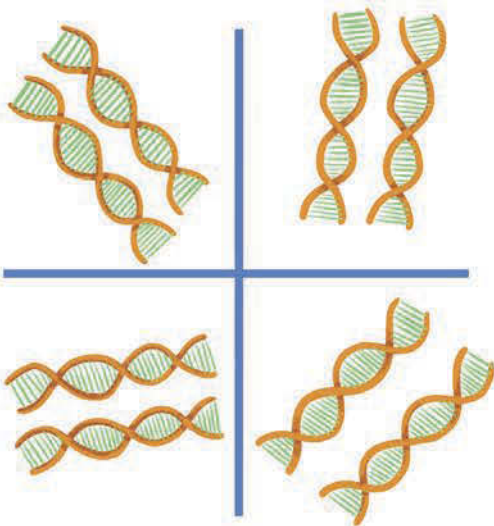
# what is race?

There are a lot of words and ideas that describe race and racism. It can be overwhelming and confusing. Let's break it down.

**Race** is a system that's used to sort people into groups based on their ancestry or physical appearance, like skin color. Black, White, Latinx, and Asian are some examples of these categories.



But this is tricky. It's impossible to identify a person's race in her DNA—you won't ever see it under a microscope. There's no gene that determines what group a person belongs to. But we do tend to divide people into groups socially. The idea of biological race isn't real, but society has everyone believing it is.



Those beliefs are so strong that they create stereotypes about whole groups of people. **Stereotypes** are beliefs or assumptions about groups of people that aren't true. Sometimes we don't even know that we believe a certain stereotype—the idea might have come from a TV show or from something someone said. Even though we aren't aware of it, these thoughts and stereotypes inform how we act. They cause us to prefer certain groups over others through what is called **implicit bias**—a set of dangerous assumptions that can make us unknowingly hurt others. Our brains automatically make these assumptions about other people. But we can learn to notice our thoughts and then act differently.



But sometimes people treat others badly on purpose. **Bigotry** is treating another person differently because of their race. Bigotry can sound like someone telling a racist "joke," or it can look like not allowing someone to play with you because of her skin color. Anyone can be bigoted because these are personal, individual behaviors.

**Racism** is how society treats racial groups differently. Racism is so much bigger than bigotry because it is about whole groups of people. In US society, White people have more power in their roles as teachers, school officials, bankers, doctors, or politicians. Because of implicit bias and sometimes on purpose, White people have made it easier for other White people to benefit from systems, such as education, that help them have more successful lives. Whether this happens on purpose or unconsciously, it's still racism.



In this book, you'll see words such as *race* and *racial groups* to describe people. But keep in mind that while these words are common and used everywhere, separating people into groups by race allows some people to feel superior to others, usually based on the color of their skin.

# same day, different experiences

Selah and Madison are sixth-graders at the same middle school. But their days look very different.

MADISON

Madison wears her hair in a ponytail, like most of her friends, and they rarely comment on it.

Most of the books in the library are about people who look like Madison.

Madison's history class focuses on White people and their experiences.

Madison is never the only White person in any of her classes.

SELAH

People often want to touch Selah's hair to see how it feels.

It's hard for Selah to find books in the library about girls who look like her.

Selah often stands out as the only Black girl in her classes.

In Selah's classes, the people and experiences she learns about almost never look like her.

The fact is, Madison's life is often easier in ways she doesn't even notice. That's because the world she lives in was built to favor White people. Selah, on the other hand, runs into obstacles every day that make her feel different, discouraged, and even invisible.



# becoming anti-racist

It's not fair that just because Madison is White, her life is easier. But Madison is not mean to Selah and never calls her inappropriate names. She's not racist! But is that enough? To make things more equal for Selah and help stop racism for everyone, Madison can learn to be anti-racist.



**Anti-racism** is when people work to make society more fair and help people of color get the same quality of education, housing, jobs, food, and safety that most White people have. Everyone can practice anti-racism.



Many people try not to be racist and think it's enough to avoid using racist terms or to not tell racist jokes. Some act like differences don't exist and strive to treat everyone the same.

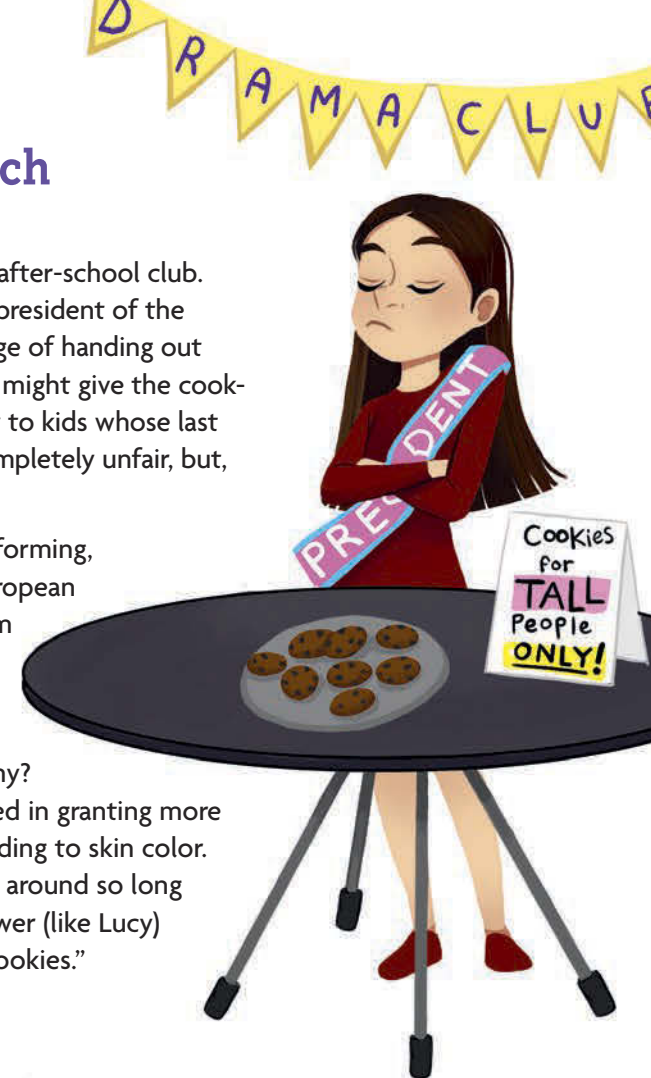
These actions help people feel that they are doing enough to combat racism, but they don't really help people of color get the same kind of education or jobs that many White people have. That's why it's important to be anti-racist—all of us have to purposely work to create real and meaningful changes for *everyone*.

## Why is race such a big deal?

Think about society as an after-school club. Lucy, who is White, is the president of the Drama Club. She is in charge of handing out cookies to other kids. She might give the cookies only to tall kids or only to kids whose last names start with D. It's completely unfair, but, hey, Lucy's in charge!

As the United States was forming, the leaders among the European newcomers took land from Native Americans, waged war against people who'd be called Mexicans, and enslaved Black people. Why?

One reason is they believed in granting more favorable treatment according to skin color. The idea of race has stuck around so long because the people in power (like Lucy) have decided who gets "cookies."

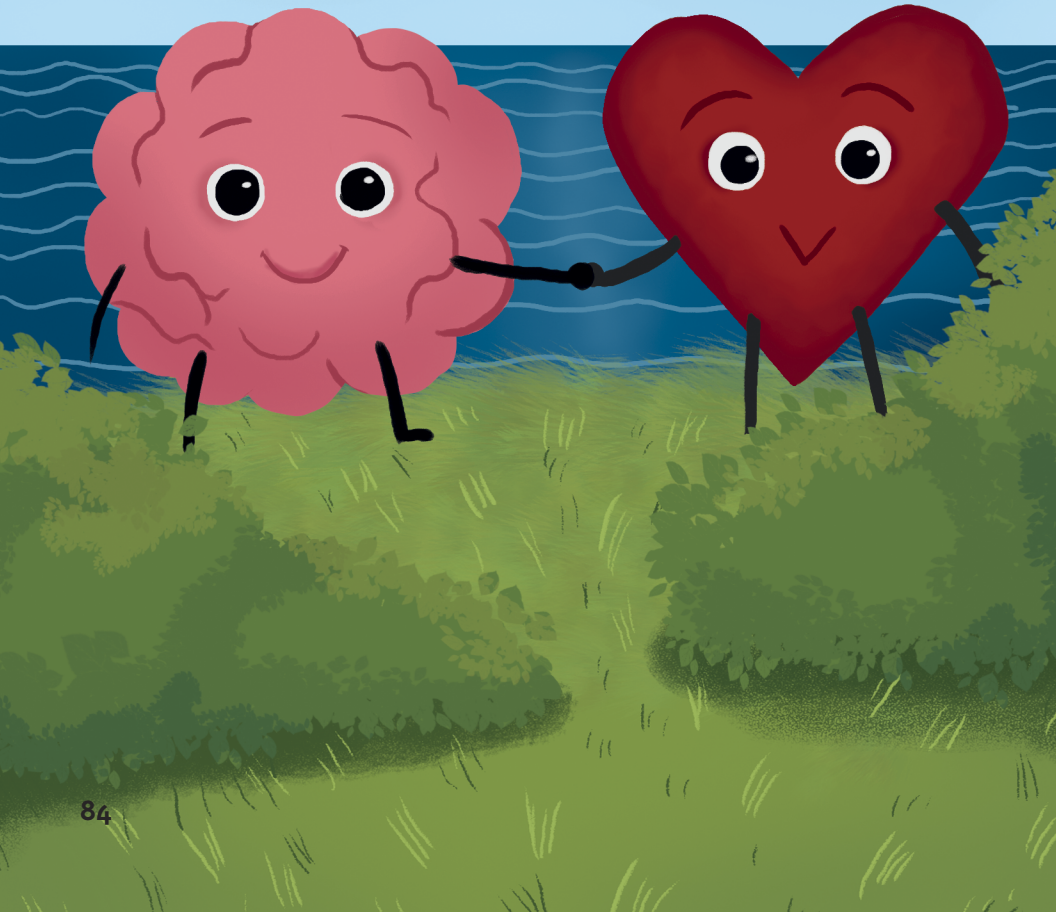


Now, imagine Lucy gives Madison a cookie but doesn't give one to Selah. To make everyone think that she is being fair, Lucy might accuse Selah of being too scatterbrained to deserve a cookie. Armed with this excuse, Lucy hands out cookies unfairly, and everyone starts thinking it's right, natural, and even a good thing that Selah doesn't get any cookies. The rest of the Drama Club accepts Lucy's excuses as the truth.



# staying dedicated

To remain dedicated and engaged as an anti-racism activist, learn to have empathy and compassion for others. Empathy is putting yourself in someone else's place and seeing the world from her eyes. Being compassionate means seeing and acting with love, not anger or judgment. Even when we disagree, it's important to treat one another with kindness and patience. If you keep your heart and mind open to diverse experiences and opinions, you're sharpening your empathy and compassion skills and becoming a stronger anti-racism activist.



If your friends or family still don't agree or identify with your need to become more inclusive, you might have to continue practicing anti-racism without their approval. You can still be friends with people who don't support you, and you can still love family members who disagree with you. That's compassion—loving without judgment.

In fact, if you continue to love and support friends and family even when they don't support you in your anti-racism work, your openness might just be what changes their mind. If they see how dedicated you are to helping others and improving the world, they could be inspired to begin doing the same thing.



In the meantime, it's important to be around people who can support you as you practice anti-racism. You need a community of allies to help you learn and take anti-racism actions.