

# 12 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN ADDRESSING RACIAL EQUITY IN CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

*To be used in conjunction with the CSS Tip Sheet*  
**Flipping the Script on Diversity: Insights for Creating On-Screen Authentically Inclusive Representations (AIR) of Race**

1. If there is a writers' room, is it set up as a safe space for all voices, viewpoints, and experiences? Has the showrunner established specific norms and guidelines to support open discussion and constructive feedback?



2. Does the story have multiple, diverse characters with rich intersectional identities who create more meaningful diversity?



3. If characters' backgrounds do not match that of the content creator, did the production consult with experts around cultural competence? To what extent was the cultural feedback incorporated?



4. How does the content deal with stereotypes about marginalized groups? Does it explicitly name and reject stereotypes? Does it implicitly debunk stereotypes by representing members of marginalized groups as complex, multi-dimensional human beings?



5. Sometimes stereotypes are used for humor to demonstrate that they are inappropriate. In such cases, consider: Do they intentionally function as a bridge from the status quo to a more evolved perspective?



6. Are background extras and minor characters representative of the culture that is being portrayed in all its complexity?



7. For children's programming, does the language help the audience understand issues around race and identity in a manner that is developmentally appropriate? For example, younger children may not pick up on subtle references, so conversations around these topics need to be straightforward.



8. Do adults and families have conversations, including ones that are very specific and direct, about race and identity?



9. Which kinds of characters speak with a dialect? Are "heroes" just as likely to speak with a dialect as "villains"?



10. Do characters who speak with a dialect use terms and cultural practices that are appropriate for their cultural identity?



11. Is casting actively working to combat colorism? Are darker-skinned characters cast as heroes or protagonists?



12. Were dailies and cuts reviewed to see whether bias may be coming across in nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions or tone of voice?



# Insights for Creating On-Screen Authentically Inclusive Representation (AIR) of Race

## AUTHENTIC



**AIM** to show positive nonverbal behavior towards characters of color.

**Research Insights:**

- Children as young as preschool ‘catch’ social bias expressed by adults through nonverbal signals and are influenced by that bias when choosing playmates.
- Subtle patterns of nonverbal behavior that appear on popular TV shows influence racial bias among viewers.



*Examples of positive nonverbal behavior you can show include smiling, leaning in, eagerness to share, and using a warm tone of voice.*

**ADD** explicit, proactive language about race, even in content targeted to preschoolers. Messages should be direct, not subtle, so children can pick up on them.

**Research Insight:**

- Toddlers use race as one of their criteria to choose playmates.

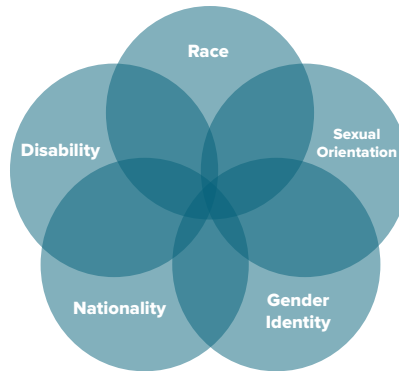


*Toddlers understand the concept of fair vs. unfair, so these are good terms to use when addressing race with young children.*

**AVOID** stereotypes by portraying characters of color with rich, intersectional identities.

**Research Insights About On-Screen Stereotypes:**

- Asian women are often portrayed as either passive love interests of White men or as partners in crime with Asian men.
- Latinx characters are most often portrayed having conversations about violence and crime.
- Black women are often portrayed as either oversexed fantasy objects, dominating matriarchs, or grandmother figures.



**Intersectionality (n)**  
*The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.*

## INCLUSIVE



**INCLUDE** counter-stereotypical, multi-dimensional characters.



**Research Insights:**

- Showing a narrative that is the opposite of what is expected (e.g., Black heroes and White villains) can decrease unconscious bias by 40%.
- For Black and Latinx youth, and White girls, more frequent exposure to TV is associated with lower self-esteem. For White boys, the opposite is true.
- Out of the over 3,000 children’s books published in 2018, Latinx characters accounted for just 5% of protagonists.

**INCORPORATE** on-screen conversations about race when possible.

**Research Insight:**

- Taking a “color-mute” approach can actually promote future bias.



*“When a child says ‘that kid is Black or Asian,’ I think a lot of White parents shush their child. You don’t want to shush your child. It creates a negative connotation in that child’s mind, and they think, ‘Wait, there’s something wrong with brown skin.’ Just say, ‘Great. Let’s meet this child. What else did you learn about them?’” -Amber Coleman-Mortley, iCivics*

**INSPIRE** activism by specifically addressing systemic and historical discrimination and racism.



**Research Insight:**

- After learning about the history of racism, White children ages 6-11 viewed other races more favorably and were more likely to want to help change the unfairness in the world.

# R EPRESENTATION



**REMEMBER** to show characters of color having conversations with each other.



**Research Insight:**

- In a survey of 62 TV shows, 65% of on-screen interactions were between only White characters. In contrast, just 2% were between only Black characters.

**RECALL** that there is diversity within diversity.



**Research Insights:**

- “Asian-American” includes more than 30 different nationalities and ethnic groups.
- The Census grouping for “White” includes Middle Easterns and North Africans.

**REPRESENT** characters of all skin tones and colors in positive roles.



**Research Insight:**

- “Colorism” is reflected all too often in media representations despite the fact that it is no less insidious than racism and also has serious, real-world implications.

**REVEAL** that both children and adults can have positive cross-race friendships.



**Research Insight:**

- White elementary school children (ages 7-9) who read storybooks featuring African and Chinese characters were more interested in interacting with non-White children afterwards.

**RECOGNIZE** and challenge your potential bias as a content creator.



**Research Insight:**

- Research finds that openly acknowledging existing biases and challenging them works to reduce them.

*“In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist. We must be anti-racist.” - ANGELA DAVIS*

**UCLA About The Center for Scholars & Storytellers:**

The Center for Scholars & Storytellers, based at UCLA, bridges the gap between researchers and content creators to support positive youth development.

**For More Information Contact:**  
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For research-based ideas to keep AIR top of mind, use our checklist free to download at <https://www.scholarsandstorytellers.com/AIR>.

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**Research Sources:**

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