

Supporting Children After the Election

The outcome of the presidential election will spark emotions, reactions, and opinions in our home and school communities. It may also spark violence and protests in and against the communities we serve.

While schools and neighborhoods may be putting safety measures in place, many children will be worried and justifiably scared. We must do what is needed to make children feel safe and understood. Organizations focused on civic engagement and equity have noted that many schools and teachers did not feel prepared after the 2016 elections to support and respond to children's needs. This time around, we intentionally recognize our responsibility to use the outcome of the election as an opportunity to:

- + **Ensure safety for our children**, paying particular care to those who are experiencing post-election trauma or are in a position to be targeted based on the results.
- + **Foster inclusion**, as we make sure all children feel that they are part of a welcoming and supportive school community.
- + **Foster voice and activism**, as we encourage children to exchange ideas and listen with empathy, empowering them to see themselves in a larger historical narrative.
- + **Uequivocally denounce racism and racist action** and support children connecting current rhetoric and events to historical movements.
- + **Amplify Black joy** in our classrooms.

This guide will look at steps we can take to implement these five ideas now and in the future. The very same mindsets and actions that will help us to support children after the election—**inclusion**, the development of civil discourse, and a sense of safety for all—will continue to help our classes to thrive and grow as a community throughout the year.

Ensure Safety for Our Children

Recognize that children may be experiencing trauma from the election, and therefore we may need to make sure our classrooms are safe for them. Below are some recommendations from the *Anti-Defamation League* and *The Center For Racial Justice In Education*:

- Do not ignore discriminatory behavior or words, as silence suggests tacit approval.
- Consider asking non-aggressive exploratory questions that help open up conversation and clarify the root of children's beliefs, so that you know what information you need to convey.
- For children in the younger grades, discuss why some words hurt, and take time to explain what bias and prejudice are and how they hurt people deeply.

- With older children, link instances of bias or discrimination to historical contexts as well as present ones, potentially connecting to work children have done in social studies.
- Practice your strategies for addressing bias, discrimination, and/or hurtful speech before using them, so that you are prepared to use them if and when they are needed.
- Be pro-active and clear about what is and is not allowed in your class and school in relation to the election.
- To prevent class discussions from igniting conflict and hurt feelings, remind children of what a safe and respectful learning environment looks and sounds like. In such environments, we make sure our words and body language reflect a respectful attitude towards others, use 'I'

statements not generalizations, ask questions, share “air time”, and honor confidentiality.

- To help restore a sense of hope and agency, remind children of times throughout history when individuals and groups have stood up to injustice and made significant and lasting change.

Foster Inclusion

The day after the election will be an opportunity for a recommitment to inclusion. This looks like:

- Reflecting on our own identity, positionality, and feelings as educators and making decisions about what belief systems are private versus what topics you cannot stay neutral on. When educators do this, they commit to not retreating into silence, and instead choose to discuss election results in ways that are inclusive and respectful.
- Intentionally welcoming children into the classroom after election day with encouraging and hopeful language, naming how grateful we can be for having a community of peers who support one another despite holding different viewpoints.
- Creating or reminding children of the collaborative norms or responsibilities their community shares, and articulating how these norms are inclusive of all of the identities, cultures, and viewpoints we have in our classrooms.
- Talking about what emotional safety means in the classroom—the ability to express emotions without fear of judgment or shame, and treating each other with respect.
- Helping children see the impact of harmful words by noticing and naming how words could make others feel.
- Articulating the importance of kindness during this time by using language and practices that foster kindness, such as this [buddy kindness practice](#) from the Greater Good in Education, in which children work in pairs to send a wish to themselves and each other.
- Intentionally connecting to and highlighting that our experiences and feelings are different and that those differences make us a stronger community. We stretch and grow when we hear other viewpoints.

- Have plans in place if things go wrong or children need support. When educators do this, they are ready to recognize and respond in non-punitive ways to signs of distress as well as hateful behavior. In their guide, [Responding to Hate and Bias in Schools](#), Teaching Tolerance provides a number of strategies for doing this kind of crisis management work actively in the moment, as well as proactively before it happens. The Virginia Center For Inclusive Communities also provides a useful tip sheet, [Considerations After Incidents of Bias](#).

Resources to check out for further suggestions:

- + Teaching Tolerance's Article "[Teaching The 2020 Election: What Will You Do On Wednesday?](#)"
- + Greater Good Science Center at University of California, Berkeley: "[How to Build an Inclusive School Community During a Divisive Election](#)"

Foster Voice and Activism

At the elementary level, we foster civil discourse and activism when we encourage children to exchange ideas and listen with respect, empathy, and compassion. Once we have developed a caring and collaborative classroom culture through co-created responsibilities and a commitment to caring for ourselves, each other, and the class, we can further foster civil discourse by providing opportunities for children to:

- Reflect on a sensitive topic before discussing it. For example, before having K-1 children discuss ideas and thoughts about the election, we may have them draw what they are thinking and feeling in their journals, while older children may process and recognize the same thoughts and feelings through writing in their journals. This simple act of journaling before discussing, fosters civil discourse by helping children to see their own thoughts and feelings reflectively, particularly if we ask children to then only share from their journals what is appropriate or generative to share.

- Co-create agreed-upon systems in which they can express their feelings and viewpoints while demonstrating care for themselves, others, and their classroom environment (e.g., children use a phrase and gesture, such as “your turn,” to pass the opportunity to speak to others when they are not ready, and/or want to leave room for others’ feelings).
- Respond to prompts for discussion if they are not sure where to start or how to express their feelings. For example, children may be asked to address one of two prompts about the election, developed by the Virginia Center For Inclusive Education:
 - “Name one emotion word that describes how you are feeling about the election and one reason why you are feeling that way.”
 - “For people who are sad or disappointed about the election, what is one thing you could do support them?”
- Understand that civil discourse involves both the articulate expression of one’s own ideas and empathy for others, even if their viewpoints differ. Intentionally connect to the power of taking care of ourselves, each other, and our communities simultaneously—to be civil, we need to do all of these things. It is important to remember, this does not mean providing legitimacy to racist ideologies.
- Introduce or revisit the concept of Activism. An activist is someone who works to bring about political or social change. One way to balance keeping kids safe with the goal of teaching them to fight for change is to teach them the importance of being civically engaged, reading widely, and serving their communities. As educators we can create spaces for children talk about the issues individuals and communities are facing and we can consider actions such as letter writing, volunteering, donating etc.

Resources to check out for further suggestions:

- + Facing History and Ourselves: “[Fostering Civil Discourse: A Guide For Classroom Conversations](#)”
- + Virginia Center For Inclusive Education: [Day After Election Guide](#)
- + Teaching Tolerance: [Art and Activism](#)
- + Teaching Tolerance: [Activism Online](#)

Unequivocally Denounce Racism and Racist Action

Because as educators we are deeply committed to the schools and neighborhood in which we are embedded, we show up. We are active members of our school communities, we model participation, and we look for opportunities to bring the vast resources of the communities into our classrooms. We actively name racist language and actions. This looks like:

- Supporting children in naming racist and biased language and actions. It is important not to be silent on issues of racism. Make it clear to students that such language is unacceptable to you.
- Connecting current political actions to history. Use current voter suppression actions (e.g., court cases to disqualify ballots) as an entry point to teach students about the history of voter suppression tactics (e.g., poll taxes, literacy tests, and violence).
- Participating in community actions. Be part of the community in which you teach. Identify resources and supports and take part in activities.
- Bringing the community in. You do not need to be the expert but rather the connector. Your school communities have rich resources to assist you in teaching about the current political climate as well as the past. Bring in community members to share stories and guide important conversations.

Resources to check out for further suggestions:

- + [Abolitionist Teaching in Action: Q&A with Bettina L. Love](#)
- + [How to Be an Antiracist Educator](#)
- + [What Antiracism Really Means for Educators](#)

Amplify Black Joy in Our Classrooms

Just as we need to be active and present in the fight against racism and injustice, we need to be just as active and present in the move towards healing, community building, celebration, and liberation.

Amplifying Black joy affirms children's identity. This affirmation is necessary to build resilience for Black children. And the ideas we explore around identity and celebration extend to all children of color, as well as children marginalized because of their gender identity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or ethnicity. When we amplify Black joy, we shift White children's understanding of Black culture and enrich the lives of every child in our classrooms.

Some ideas include:

- Read books aloud that center joy such as *Brown Sugar Babe* by Charlotte Watson Sherman.
- Invite community members into the classroom to share and celebrate with your children. If you are a white teacher, it is especially important to enlist the help of Black colleagues and community members to center Black voices and ideas in your classroom.
- Create opportunities for children to share and celebrate their own stories on their own terms.

No matter the outcome of the election, a groundswell has begun. As educators, it is our responsibility to provide children with the knowledge, tools, and skills to bring about effective change that will dismantle systemic oppression and result in a more equitable society.



"Amplifying black joy is not about dismissing or creating an 'alternative' black narrative that ignores the realities of our collective pain; rather, it is about holding the pain and injustices we experience as black folks around the world in tension with the joy we experience in pain's midst. It's about using that joy as an entry into understanding the oppressive forces we navigate through as a means to imagine and create a world free of them."

– Kleaver Cruz

Resources to check out for further suggestions:

- + Kleaver Cruz: [The Black Joy Project](#)
- + Be Loud Studios: [Celebrate Black Joy](#)
- + We Are Teachers: [20 Books Bursting With Black Joy](#)
- + Ready Brightly: [Books That Help Kids Know and Love Themselves](#)
- + Imagination Soup: [Picture Books About Identity, Inclusion, & Diverse Cultures](#)