

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE FOR **SUNFLOWER SISTERS**

WORDS BY MONIKA SINGH GANGOTRA PICTURES BY MICHAELA DIAS-HAYES



Created by Keisha Rembert

ABOUT THE BOOK

Amrita and Kiki are excited to celebrate the weddings of their siblings. Everything is being done to make sure the day is perfect for the weddings, but Amrita's aunties' opinion of perfect is not one that Amrita or her mother like or believe. Amrita's aunties don't realize their beliefs on beauty are outdated and their words can be hurtful. Amrita's mother won't let their words ruin the day, and instead makes sure her daughters know they are beautiful the way they are.

Monika Singh Gangotra's *Sunflower Sisters* celebrates the love of self and the skin you are in as she shows the reader through Amrita's mother how to address colorism and that any color skin is brilliantly beautiful.

TEACHER NOTES

This picture book can be used as a read and think aloud in class as students investigate their differences or as part of an elementary lesson set on skin tones, diversity, and acceptance. *Sunflower Sisters* lends itself nicely to use across the curriculum, bridging ELA, Science, and Social Studies/Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

Here are some important topics for discussion linked to the concepts in the book:

- **What is diversity?** Everyone is different. Diversity celebrates differences among people, whether it be how people look, the languages they speak, or what they believe.
- **What is colorism?** Colorism is being treated differently or valued differently because of the shade, tone, or color of your skin.
- **What is bias?** Bias is an opinion of someone or something that is not fair.

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PRE-READING ACTIVITIES/ BUILDING UNDERSTANDING

Beauty in Every Shade

Activate children's schema by showing them pictures of children of various skin colors from around the world. Ask students what they notice about the children in the pictures and how they may be like them and different. On chart paper, keep a list of the things they notice. Point out that all the children in the pictures come in different shades and each is beautiful. This is a good time to define and discuss diversity. Title the chart "Beauty in Every Shade."

Colors of You

Use a box of crayons in flesh tones (such as Crayola "Colors of the World") to talk through the colors that match the many people around the world and make them special and beautiful. Share your own crayon color and the colors of people you know or those in your family. Ask students to do the same.

Preview Colorism

Tell students some of the characters in this book you'll read are not happy the way they are. Explain colorism to students in age appropriate language (using the *Learning for Justice* link in the Educator Resources section at the end of this guide).

LANGUAGE ARTS CONNECTION

Picture Walk

Conduct a picture walk with students prior to reading the book. Point out the brilliant colors of the clothes and the skin color of all the characters in the book. Ask students to share their thoughts about the clothes and colors.

Inquiry Chart

While reading the book, chart what Amrita's mother says about colors and what Amrita's two aunts say about colors. Students can use the chart later to develop questions or discuss how each comment might make others feel and why it is helpful or hurtful.

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Discussion Questions

1. Why does Amrita's aunt want Jas to put lightening cream on her face?
2. What was Amrita's mother's reaction to Aunty's suggestion?
3. How do Kiki and Amrita feel about themselves and the color of their skin?
4. What does this story teach us about different skin colors?

Making Musical Connections

After the reading, listen to or view the music videos of Sesame Street's "My Beautiful Skin" and "The Color of Me" as a class. Ask students to compare the words of the songs to the words Amrita heard from her mother and her aunt. How are they similar? How are they different? Which types of words should be used?

My Me Is Beautiful Self Portrait

Using the flesh-tone crayons and the coloring space on the next page, students will create "My Me Is Beautiful" self-portrait. Students should write words like those Amrita's mother used under their picture.

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MY ME IS BEAUTIFUL

Amrita and Kiki understood that their skin color was beautiful just the way it was. Using the colors that match your skin, draw a picture of yourself. Add colors that celebrate you.

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SCIENCE CONNECTION

Visual Observations of Difference

Conduct a visual examination of a bowl of M&M's. Ask students to take a good look at the candy (show students multiple colors of M&M's) and identify what they notice. Once students have made observations of the outer appearance, break the candy in half to reveal that all the candies are the same on the inside. Connect this to people and their skin colors.

Skin Colors for Us All

In pairs, give students a [skin color chart](#). Let students explore the colors and see if they can find a skin color match for themselves on the chart. Ask them to use their arms first, then their cheeks and legs as we have different shades on these different areas. After the pairs have found color matches, add the data to a class chart. Ask students to come up with their own questions about the colors, chart, people, etc. Gather all the students' questions on a chart. Connect data and questions back to diversity and the beauty of difference. Sort the questions with students into common themes.

Why Are People Different Colors?

Using the [Global Map of Indigenous Skin Colors](#), explain to students in age appropriate language that the light from the sun over generations is why we have different skin colors. We have different beautiful shades on the outside because our skin was protecting people from the sun based on where they lived.

Collaborative Collage

Cutting out their skin color matches from the chart, students can add their color(s) to the collaborative word collage to represent and showcase the beauty of each student.

WE ARE BEAUTIFUL!

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SOCIAL STUDIES/SEL CONNECTION

Explaining Diversity & Colorism

Create a class word web for the word diversity and discuss its meaning and connection to the story. Use the back matter of *Sunflower Sisters* to discuss colorism and its effects with students and how it connects to diversity.

Discussion Questions

1. What can a person's skin color tell you about what kind of person they are?
 - a. Does a person's skin color make them friendlier or smarter?
2. What are some beautiful things you know about people with different skin colors?
3. How does diversity make us better?
4. What feelings might people have if they experience colorism?
 - a. What are kind words to replace the hurtful ones?

Self and Social Awareness

To promote self and social awareness in students, provide them with words and phrases to use in the event they experience or hear others say things that promote colorism. Offer structured opportunities for role-playing, so students can practice their use of the words and phrases.

Educator Resources

Learning for Justice: "What's Colorism?"
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2015/whats-colorism>

Sesame Street's "My Beautiful Skin" song
<https://youtu.be/oq9ydJK6Fn8>

Sesame Street's "The Color of Me" song
<https://youtu.be/uFIdGUmBD8Q>

Exploratorium Skin Tone Chart
https://www.exploratorium.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/ScienceSnack_ColorMeHuman_Skin-ToneChart.pdf

Global Map of Indigenous Skin Colors
<https://kids.britannica.com/students/assembly/view/52059>