

# READ ALOUD TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

## INTRODUCTION

*Something Happened in Our Town* follows a White family and a Black family as they discuss a police shooting of a Black man. It is designed to engage young children in a compelling story as well as spark important discussions about racial bias and injustice. In addition to modeling conversations about race, this book provides messages of empowerment, appreciation of diversity, and positive community support.

*Something Happened in Our Town* is designed for 4- to 8-year-olds. It may be read by a parent or caregiver to a young child or by a teacher working with a group of children. The book also includes a **Note to Parents and Caregivers** that provides general guidance about addressing racial bias and injustice with children, child-friendly vocabulary definitions, and conversation guides. You may find it quite helpful to review this section of the book before reading the book to your class. A list of **Additional Resources** is also available online at <http://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/441B228.aspx>, including resources specifically geared towards educators, so you may find additional helpful information there.

## CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

This story will be most effective when introduced in an organizational context that strives to minimize bias and support diverse children's positive identity development. Such an environment generally includes empathic teachers who have thought

about the impact of their own cultural identities on interpersonal relationships. For White teachers, recognizing institutional and personal privilege is an important prerequisite to establishing more equitable relationships and educational practices. Teachers with an anti-bias mindset will proactively support children's multi-faceted identities in choosing curriculum materials and in responding to instances of unfairness, disrespect, or bias. This is particularly important if you are a White teacher working with predominantly ethnic minority children.

*Something Happened in Our Town* was written by three psychologists—two White women and one Black woman—who have worked together for many years and are comfortable talking openly about racial issues. In addition, the authors sought consultation from several other individuals of different races and cultural identities, as well as staff from the American Psychological Association's Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs and Office of Children, Youth and Families. Collaboration among the authors and integration of feedback from diverse reviewers was a necessity to produce a book that is respectful and relevant to diverse families.

Depending on the setting, educators may want to consider partnering with parents to proactively address racism and social justice. Parents may vary in how prepared they feel to handle follow-up questions that their children may bring home. Parents

of children from ethnic minority groups often talk to their children about racial bias and injustice to prepare and protect them. In contrast, White parents may be less experienced and comfortable talking about these topics with their children. Educators may consider developing a workshop to help all parents address racial injustice with their children. Other options are to invite parents to collaborate in developing and sharing information via handouts or school website resources to accompany this book or other social justice activities. Between the **Note to Parents and Caregivers** and the **Additional Resources**, there are many materials that can be easily accessed and utilized to develop parent support information.

## SPECIFIC IDEAS FOR READING SOMETHING HAPPENED IN OUR TOWN

Your approach to reading *Something Happened in Our Town* to a group of children is likely to vary somewhat depending on the age of the students, the size and ethnic composition of the group, and the relationship of the reader to the group. For example, a teacher with a well-established and positive relationship with a group may feel more comfortable asking personal or challenging questions about racial injustice than a volunteer reader who is new to a group.

Although this book is frank about the reality of racial injustice, most children focus on the book's pro-social messages about how to counter unfairness in our interpersonal lives. However, if a student expresses a racist sentiment during discussion or suggests a maladaptive response to racial injustice (e.g. violent behavior), examples of how you might respond are included in the **Note to**

**Parents and Caregivers** which accompanies the book. It is important to handle those situations without shaming the child, while still promoting the belief that everyone should be treated with respect.

Most teachers will not ask all of the questions listed below, but instead select a number of questions appropriate to the group and time frame for the presentation. The goal is for children to be engaged with the story, so you want to encourage some discussion, but not "leave" the story for too long. If you feel that students are losing the thread of the story, you can always ask them to wait until the end of the story to comment or ask questions. Children are also likely to come up with their own questions and comments along the way. Be flexible and creative in deciding when and how to best address the issues and reactions that are engendered by the story.

### Sample Introductions:

1. Today I am going to read a book called *Something Happened in Our Town*. It is about a girl named Emma and a boy named Josh who are about your age and are in the same classroom (show cover). Listen carefully and imagine how you might feel if you were in their class. Raise your hand if you have a question or want to share your reaction.
2. What do you see happening on the cover? What do you see that makes you say that? What else can we find? Based on the cover, what do you think the book might be about? (This introduction represents a more open-ended and collaborative "whole book approach," recommended by educator Megan Dowd Lambert.)

Point in Book	Possible Discussion Prompts
After discussion of skin color and slavery by Emma's family	<p><i>What do you see happening in this picture? (Black slaves working while white owner or guard watches; a map in the background)</i></p> <p><i>How do you think Black slaves felt about having to do whatever White people said and not being treated like equal people?</i></p> <p><i>Who can show me where the United States is on this map?</i></p> <p><i>Who can show me Africa, where many Black Americans came from?</i></p> <p><i>Who can show me Europe and Russia, where many White Americans came from?</i></p> <p><i>Who knew that many Black people were enslaved (made to be slaves) a long time ago in the United States?</i></p> <p><i>How do you feel about Black people being enslaved (made to be slaves)?</i></p>
After discussion of unfair beliefs and patterns by Emma's family	<p><i>Do you know what the word <b>prejudice</b> means? (believing something negative about a person who is different from you without proof)</i></p> <p><i>What are some examples of <b>prejudiced</b> beliefs that some White people have about Black people? (That white people are better than Black people; That Black men or boys are dangerous)</i></p> <p><i>What does Emma's family believe? (These negative beliefs about Black people are not true; it's unfair to treat Black people worse than White people)</i></p>
After discussion of discriminatory actions by police and positive Black leaders by Josh's family	<p><i>What do people in Josh's family think about the police? (some make good choices and some do not; some treat White people better than Black people)</i></p> <p><i>Where is Harriet Tubman (MLK, Nelson Mandela) in this picture and what did she (he) do to help Black people be treated more fairly?</i></p>
After Omad is excluded from soccer teams	<p><i>How would you feel if you were Omad?</i></p> <p><i>Children get left out for lots of different reasons. Omad is being left out because of <b>prejudice</b>, a negative belief about a person who is different from you without proof.</i></p> <p><i>What prejudiced beliefs were some children having about Omad? (that he doesn't know how to play soccer because he is from a different country and doesn't know how to speak English well)</i></p> <p><i>Why is prejudice a problem? (You have made up your mind and have a bad belief about someone before you know them and this is not fair)</i></p>

At end of story	<p>How are Emma and Josh different? (different genders and different skin colors/ races)</p> <p>How are Emma and Josh the same? (both believe that it is not fair to treat people differently because of their race)</p> <p>How are Emma and Josh's families similar? (Both have 4 people; both believe that police were wrong to shoot a Black man who was not dangerous)</p> <p>How are Emma and Josh's families different? (Josh's family is even more upset about the police shooting because they are African-American and know what it's like to be treated unfairly)</p> <p>Has anyone here ever been treated unfairly because of skin color/race?</p> <p>What would be a good way to handle that situation?</p> <p>Did someone help you when you were not being treated fairly?</p> <p>Has anyone ever seen someone being treated unfairly because of skin color?</p> <p>How did that make you feel?</p> <p>What would be a good way to handle that situation?</p> <p>How can you stick up for someone who is being treated unfairly?</p> <p>Has anybody heard about a policeman shooting a Black person?</p> <p>Police try to solve problems without shooting people and most police never use their guns. But sometimes a policeman might have to shoot someone. When would that be a good choice? (If the person had a weapon and was about to hurt someone else or the policeman)</p> <p>When would it be a bad choice for a policeman to shoot someone? (When a person is not about to hurt someone else; when a policeman decides a Black person is dangerous for no good reason)</p> <p>Has anyone been helped by a policeman or policewoman?</p> <p>Do you know about any other Black leaders who stood up for fair treatment for Black people? What did he/she do?</p> <p>Omad's family moved to the United States from another country. Has anyone lived in or visited another country?</p> <p>What was it like? What was different?</p> <p>What did you learn from visiting another country? (Differences are okay and interesting)</p>
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At end of story	<p><i>(If a child has visited Africa or the class has studied Africa, you might highlight some positive aspects of Africa so that children do not think of Africa solely as a continent where enslavement occurred.)</i></p> <p><b><i>(For communities which have experienced a police violence incident)</i></b></p> <p><i>Has anyone heard about a police shooting in our town? What did you hear?</i></p> <p><i>What feelings and thoughts have you had because of the police shooting?</i></p> <p><i>How have you tried to cope with those feelings?</i></p> <p><i>What could you do to try to make unfair shootings less likely to happen?</i></p> <p><i>What did you learn from this story?</i></p> <p><i>Josh and Emma are trying to create a different, more fair pattern in their school. How could you try to make a positive difference in your community?</i></p>
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