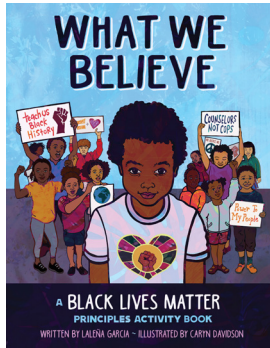


# What We Believe: A Black Lives Matter Principles Activity Book Resource & Activity Guide



Author **Laleña Garcia** has taught in New York City early childhood education programs for more than twenty years. *What We Believe* grew out of her work with Black Lives Matter in Schools, a teachers' organization striving for racial equity in education, and she has presented at local and national conferences on teaching the principles of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement to children. A graduate of Yale University and the Bank Street College of Education, she lives in Brooklyn, New York. Please visit her website at [rootedkids.org](http://rootedkids.org) and follow her on Instagram at @blm\_in\_kindergarten.

**The following question-and-answer session offers tips and suggestions from Laleña on how to include *What We Believe* in your relevant setting.**

## **Q: How do I introduce Black Lives Matter and What We Believe to young people?**

**A:** When I introduce Black Lives Matter to my students, I start in a community meeting in my school, where both the kindergarten classes are together. I sit down and say, "Today we're going to talk about Black Lives Matter. Raise your hand if you've heard these words. Great! Raise your hand if you have something to share about these words." Students' responses have ranged, but what usually comes up is "trying to make things fair for Black people." So then I can respond, "Great! Yes, Black Lives Matter is about making things fair for Black people. It's also about the ways we live in our communities. At school, we're part of a community, and there are things we do to take care of each other. The principles of BLM are ideas about how people can take care of each other. Today we're going to read a book about one of the principles, and then I'm going to show you a poster, to help remind you. We'll keep the posters up in our classroom ALL YEAR, so you can always look at them."

Keep in mind that these discussions come after we've talked about community norms, identity, and what you get to choose for yourself, and we've had matter-of-fact conversations about things like skin color, hair length, gender, and friends. It's essential to create a caring community first to ensure students' safety. We teachers also have to do work ourselves -- first by consulting resources, books, and other reputable organizations -- because if you're teaching new curriculum with your old attitudes, your students are actually going to still be learning the same lessons.

## **Q: How do I introduce the Black Lives Matter principles to young people?**

**A:** For each principle, I read a book (please see the list at the end of this guide, which should be added to every year, as more and more books centering Black joy are published), and then I show them the corresponding poster and we talk about the principle and one of the prompts. Now that the words and prompts are all together in one book, we can use that book during these discussions.

## **Q: How do I introduce the coloring pages to young people?**

**A:** I use the coloring book pages after we've had several conversations about the principles. We'll talk about how we've learned some of the principles, and I'll tell them that all the pages we've learned about are open, and they can choose to color on them; if they see a principle we haven't learned about yet, that page is closed, and we'll talk about it later. Then I'll read the prompt to them; some of them choose to answer the question with a picture, and some of them choose to just color. That's fine, because we've already had a conversation about the prompt as a class.



## Q: How should I teach other educators about the Black Lives Matter principles?

**A:** When I work with educators or other adults, I remind them to use *What We Believe* to frame the principles as not only the solutions to a specific problem—namely the imperialist, white-supremacist, capitalist patriarchy, as Bell Hooks puts it—but as a framework for us to build strong communities. The other thing I remind adults is that it's important for us to understand that adult discomfort is not the same as child discomfort. Naming the systems that make us uncomfortable talking about race, or class, or gender is important; children haven't yet fully internalized all of the messages our society is giving, so it's our responsibility to offer them ways to interrupt harmful narratives.

If you've never talked about race with your students, particularly if you are a white person, you'll need to do some work unpacking your own biases first. My school read *White Fragility* ([www.robindiangelo.com/publications](http://www.robindiangelo.com/publications)) by Robin DiAngelo a few summers ago. Chris Emdin's *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...And the Rest of Y'all, Too* ([chrisemdin.com/product/for-white-folks-who-teach-in-the-hood-and-the-rest-of-yall-too-reality-pedagogy-and-urban-education/](http://chrisemdin.com/product/for-white-folks-who-teach-in-the-hood-and-the-rest-of-yall-too-reality-pedagogy-and-urban-education/)) is an excellent resource. *The Abolitionist Teaching Network* ([abolitionistteachingnetwork.org](http://abolitionistteachingnetwork.org)) has a whole page of resources ([abolitionistteachingnetwork.org/resources-for-agitators](http://abolitionistteachingnetwork.org/resources-for-agitators)); if you're a visual learner, you can watch a conversation with Bettina Love, Gholdy Muhammad, Dena Simmons and Brian Jones about abolitionist teaching and antiracist education ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJZ3RPJ2rNc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJZ3RPJ2rNc)). If you want to put the principles into a historical context, you can even take a six-week class with me! ([www.rootedkids.org/past-courses](http://www.rootedkids.org/past-courses)) Make sure you're centering Black joy, resistance, and resilience. And remember, how you teach is just as important as what you teach.

## Q: What part of curriculum do you see *What We Believe* being used in?

**A:** When you decide you're ready to teach about Black Lives Matter, BLM AT SCHOOL ([www.blacklivesmatteratschool.com](http://www.blacklivesmatteratschool.com)) has a wealth of information for you, beginning with a video about **why** this is necessary for all students, and including an assortment of lesson plans and curriculum ([www.blacklivesmatteratschool.com/curriculum.html](http://www.blacklivesmatteratschool.com/curriculum.html)) from all disciplines and for all grade levels.

Want to teach a high-school math lesson with social-justice themes? Here you go ([drive.google.com/drive/folders/1\\_EKcW-6jvviDhW1IBbLKLdBJIF1Oz71Y8?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_EKcW-6jvviDhW1IBbLKLdBJIF1Oz71Y8?usp=sharing))!

Are you a middle-school teacher who wants to deconstruct some of your own biases and have a bunch of resources for each principle? Great ([drive.google.com/file/d/14KFMPoxnjl\\_jwIW3LJJJa3Hz\\_d2eNXcj7/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/14KFMPoxnjl_jwIW3LJJJa3Hz_d2eNXcj7/view?usp=sharing))!

Do you need some ideas for your elementary classroom, and would like to incorporate art and identity work? Done ([docs.google.com/document/d/1zk2lywRHXX32s90PF\\_jggLttX5YhWOWh2q5vR9Rak7A/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zk2lywRHXX32s90PF_jggLttX5YhWOWh2q5vR9Rak7A/edit?usp=sharing))!

My students refer back to the Black Lives Matter principles all year long, at random moments, which lets me know that they're internalizing the concepts. When we read *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone* ([leeandlow.com/books/little-melba-and-her-big-trombone](http://leeandlow.com/books/little-melba-and-her-big-trombone)), one student said, "That reminds me of that poster [pointing at "Loving Engagement"] because Melba loved her fans so much, and she traveled to see them, even when some people were mean." Another kid said, "It reminds me of 'Black Women,' because Melba was Black, and some people thought women couldn't be musicians the same way that men could." When we read from the stars in the sky to the fish in the sea about a child who was not a girl or a boy, one of my students just shook her head and said, "What those kids really need is some 'Transgender Affirming.'"

## Q: What kinds of activities and questions can I use with *What We Believe*?

**A:** Here are some additional discussion questions for five of the thirteen principles:

**LOVING ENGAGEMENT** - Practicing love and justice can be hard. Can you think of a time when something was unfair in your favor, such as when you accidentally got more than someone else? How did that make you feel? What did you do? Would you make the same choice now? Why or why not? If it's hard to give things up, even if you know it's not fair for you to have them, what makes it easier for us to do it? How can we help people decide to think about the good of the community? Are there times when individual people are more important than the community? How can we help communities make those kinds of decisions?



**BLACK WOMEN** - What are the stereotypes of black women that you know? How do you think these stereotypes impact Black women and girls? How many Black women have you studied in school – i.e. writers, artists, scientists, political or historical figures, etc.? How many current black female political leaders can you name? Why do you think that is?

See [www.blackenterprise.com/a-new-force-in-politics-black-women-as-game-changers/](http://www.blackenterprise.com/a-new-force-in-politics-black-women-as-game-changers/) for examples!

**QUEER AFFIRMING** - Think of ways that your grown ups and our world taught you about what it means to be a girl or a boy (or a man or a woman). Did you ever feel limited or confused by expectations about what you are supposed to look like or how you are supposed to act? Do you know any families that have two moms or two dads? Do you know any people who identify as queer? Share what you know and think about what it means to not identify as heterosexual or to not fit the stereotypes of what it means to be a “girl” or a “boy.”

**TRANSGENDER AFFIRMING** - Many people think a person’s gender is decided by their body. How does it feel to you to know that people can choose the gender that is right for them? Why do you think some people get worried or upset about other people choosing their gender? Do you have any ideas about how to help those people feel better? Some people use the words “non-binary” or “gender-fluid” when they don’t feel like just a girl or a boy; do you know anyone who uses these words?

**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE** - Have you ever been punished without a chance to talk through what happened and work out a solution with the people impacted (affected)? What do you think about restorative justice after learning what it is? Or share what you DID already know about it. Do you think it could work as a way for people to repair harm and live in community? What do you think some of the challenges of restorative justice might be?

## Q: Who benefits from engaging with *What We Believe*?

**A:** All students, no matter their race, can benefit from the principles outlined in *What We Believe*. You’re probably already teaching your students to take other people’s feelings into account, expecting children to respect each other’s families, and encouraging them to stand up for what they think is right. If you’re not, then I’d like you to rethink what early childhood education (or any education) is about. So if you’re just teaching this book for the principles, then you’re already on solid ground. If you’re ready to get into **why** we need a Black Lives Matter movement, then you know that the message that Black lives matter is for the people in power, who are often white. If you’ve got a majority white population, that’s exactly who needs to hear this message. Even if you have a completely homogeneous population both race and class-wise, there are probably some people who have some sort of difference who need to be protected. And even if you don’t, if we don’t teach white children that there are other people in the world, people who look different from them, but are still people, then we’re just setting them up to replicate our oppressive systems. Everyone needs to hear this. **Oppression hurts everyone, not just the oppressed.**

## Q. How do I deal with pushback and resistance?

**A:** It’s going to depend on your school/administration/parent body/situation. There are a bunch of great resources below, including National Association for the Education of Young Children position statements and New York State Early Learning Guidelines, for those of you who want some voices of authority to support your work. One thing I always tell teachers is to go back to your school’s mission statement. What does it say about supporting all children, or fostering equity, or working for change, or social justice, or building community, or anything that might be relevant?

Also, you know your school best. I recommend starting with Empathy and Restorative Justice. It takes a special kind of determination to say, “I don’t want my kid learning about empathy!” or “I don’t want someone who hurts my child’s feelings to have to fix the problem.” Go on from there. Pick your battles. I can’t tell you where you’ll find unexpected support -- the family that has a trans cousin, or the administrator who marched in the ‘60s, or the cafeteria worker who organizes -- but be open to it from all corners. By the same token, find your community. Are you the only teacher at your school who wants to do this? Who are your allies and your accomplices? Does the Lower School Director have a different position from the Upper School Director? These are all going to be specific to each school/situation. YOU are the expert on YOUR school, and since you’re willing to do the work, you’ll have more information.



Finally, remember that we all went to school to become teachers. We spent lots of time learning how to teach kids how to read and write. We spent lots of time learning how to teach kids how to do math, and many of us spent even more time unlearning how we were taught to do math so that we can teach kids how to do math effectively. We're not going to learn how to teach about race in sixty minutes. Unlearning what we've been taught about race is going to take a long time, as is learning how to teach kids so that they don't have to do the painful unlearning we have to. I hope that this book provides a jumping-off point.

## Q: What resources should I use when teaching about Black Lives Matter?

### TEACHER RESOURCES

- Black Lives Matter at School Starter Kit: [www.blacklivesmatteratschool.com/starter-kit.html](https://www.blacklivesmatteratschool.com/starter-kit.html)
- Black Lives Matter at School Curriculum: <https://www.blacklivesmatteratschool.com/curriculum.html>
- Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools FAQ: [www.dcareeducators4socialjustice.org/black-lives-matter/faq](https://www.dcareeducators4socialjustice.org/black-lives-matter/faq)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children:
  - Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement: [www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity](https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/equity)
  - Understanding Anti-Bias Education: Bringing the Four Core Goals to Every Facet of Your Curriculum: [www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2019/understanding-anti-bias](https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2019/understanding-anti-bias)
  - Black Boys Matter: Cultivating Their Identity, Agency, and Voice: [www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2019/black-boys-matter](https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2019/black-boys-matter)
  - "What About People Like Me?" Teaching Preschoolers about Segregation and "Peace Heroes": [www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2020/teaching-preschoolers-segregation](https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2020/teaching-preschoolers-segregation)
- New York State Early Learning Guidelines for Educators: [www.earlychildhoodny.org/pdi/elg.php](https://www.earlychildhoodny.org/pdi/elg.php)
- Woke Kindergarten [www.wokekindergarten.org](https://www.wokekindergarten.org)
- Abolitionist Teaching Network: [abolitionistteachingnetwork.org](https://abolitionistteachingnetwork.org)
- Rethinking Schools: [rethinkingschools.org](https://rethinkingschools.org)
- Teaching Tolerance: [www.tolerance.org](https://www.tolerance.org)
- Liberate and Chill\*: [www.liberateandchill.org](https://www.liberateandchill.org)
- Zinn Education Project: [www.zinnedproject.org](https://www.zinnedproject.org)

### RECOMMENDED BOOKS ALIGNED TO THE BLACK LIVES MATTER PRINCIPLES

\*Please note that these books are not exclusive to Lee & Low Books and availability is subject to change.

#### EMPATHY

- *I Walk With Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness*, written and illustrated by Kerascoët, Penguin Random House
- *The Rabbit Listened*, written and illustrated by Cori Doerrfeld, Penguin Random House
- *Yesterday I Had the Blues*, written by Jeron Ashford Frame, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie, Penguin Random House

**DIVERSITY**

- *I Am Enough*, written by Grace Byers, illustrated by Keturah A. Bobo, HarperCollins
- *The Colors of Us*, written and illustrated by Karen Katz, Henry Holt & Company
- *Horace and Morris but Mostly Delores*, written by James Howe, illustrated by Amy Walrod, Simon & Schuster
- *The Day You Begin*, written by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López, Penguin Random House

**RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

- *One*, written and illustrated by Kathryn Otoshi, KO Kids Books
- *Willow Finds a Way*, written by Lana Button, illustrated by Tania Howells, Kids Can Press

**QUEER AFFIRMING**

- *Harriet Gets Carried Away*, written and illustrated by Jessie Sima, Simon & Schuster
- *Jerome By Heart*, written by Thomas Scotto, illustrated by Olivier Tallec, Enchanted Lion Books
- *Stella Brings the Family*, written and illustrated by Miriam B. Schiffer, Chronicle Books
- *Two is Enough*, written by Janna Matthies, illustrated by Tuesday Mourning, Running Press Kids
- *What Makes a Baby*, written by Cory Silverberg, illustrated by Fiona Smyth, Seven Stories Press

**TRANS AFFIRMING**

- *When Aidan Became a Brother*, written by Kyle Lukoff, illustrated by Kaylani Juanita, Lee & Low Books
- *Julián Is a Mermaid*, written and illustrated by Jessica Love, Candlewick Press
- *It Feels Good to be Yourself: A Book About Gender Identity*, written by Theresa Thorn, illustrated by Noah Grigni, Henry Holt and Company
- *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress*, written by Christine Baldacchino, illustrated by Isabelle Malenfant, Groundwood Books
- *The Gender Wheel*, written and illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez, Reflection Press
- *They She He Me: Free to Be!*, written and illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez and Matthew SG, Reflection Press
- *From the Stars in the Sky to the Fish in the Sea*, written by Kai Cheng Thom, illustrated by Wai-Yant Li and Kai Yung Ching, Arsenal Pulp Press
- *Red: A Crayon's Story*, written and illustrated by Michael Hall, HarperCollins

**INTERGENERATIONAL**

- *These Hands*, written by Margaret H. Mason, illustrated by Floyd Cooper, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- *Max and the Tag-Along Moon*, written and illustrated by Floyd Cooper, Penguin Random House
- *When I Am Old With You*, written by Angela Johnson, illustrated by David Soman, Scholastic
- *Peeny Butter Fudge*, written by Toni Morrison and Slade Morrison, illustrated by Joe Cepeda, Simon & Schuster

**BLACK FAMILIES**

- *My Brother Charlie*, written by Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete, illustrated by Shane Evans, Scholastic
- *Kitchen Dance*, written and illustrated by Maurie J. Manning, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- *Peter's Chair*, written and illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats, Penguin Random House
- *In My Momma's Kitchen*, written by Jerdine Nolen, illustrated by Colin Bootman, Amistad



- *Lola Reads to Leo*, written by Anna McQuinn, illustrated by Rosalind Beardshaw, Charlesbridge
- *One of Three*, written by Angela Johnson, illustrated by David Soman, Scholastic
- *The Boy on the Beach*, written and illustrated by Niki Daly, Bloomsbury
- *Tell Me a Story, Mama*, written by Angela Johnson, illustrated by David Soman, Scholastic
- *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers*, written and illustrated by Javaka Steptoe, Lee & Low Books

## BLACK VILLAGES

- *Music, Music for Everyone*, written and illustrated by Vera B. Williams, HarperCollins
- *Guji Guji*, written and illustrated by Chih-Yuan Chen, Kane/Miller Book Publishers
- *When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop*, written by Laban Carrick Hill, illustrated by Theodore Taylor III, Macmillan
- *Raising Dragons*, written by Jerdine Nolen, illustrated by Elise Primavera, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

## COLLECTIVE VALUE

- *We March*, written and illustrated by Shane W. Evans, Macmillan
- *These Hands*, written by Margaret H. Mason, illustrated by Floyd Cooper, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- *The Book Itch: Freedom, Truth & Harlem's Greatest Bookstore*, written by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie, Lerner Publishing Group
- *Enough! 20 Protesters Who Changed America*, written by Emily Easton, illustrated by Ziyue Chen, Penguin Random House

## LOVING ENGAGEMENT

- *Martin's Big Words*, written by Doreen Rappaport, illustrated by Brian Collier, Little, Brown and Company
- *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, written by Robert Coles, illustrated by George Ford, Scholastic
- *I Walk With Vanessa: A Story About a Simple Act of Kindness*, written and illustrated by Kerascoët, Penguin Random House
- *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down*, written by Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Brian Pinkney, Little, Brown and Company
- *Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King!* written by Jean Marzollo, illustrated by Brian Pinkney, Scholastic
- *Last Stop on Market Street*, written by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson, Penguin Random House

## BLACK WOMEN

- *Rosa*, written by Nikki Giovanni, Macmillan
- *Ella: Queen of Jazz*, written and illustrated by Helen Hancocks, Frances Lincoln Children's Books
- *Nina: Jazz Legend and Civil-Rights Activist Nina Simone*, written by Alice Briere-Haquet, illustrated by Bruno Liance, Charlesbridge
- *Coretta Scott*, written by Ntozake Shange, illustrated by Kadir Nelson, HarperCollins
- *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone*, written by Katheryn Russell-Brown, illustrated by Frank Morrison, Lee & Low Books
- *Mae Among the Stars*, written by Roda Ahmed, illustrated by Stasia Burrington, HarperCollins
- *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History*, written and illustrated by Vashti Harrison, Hachette Book Group
- *Lily Brown's Paintings*, written by Angela Johnson, illustrated by E. B. Lewis, Scholastic



### UNAPOLOGETICALLY BLACK

- *I Love My Hair!*, written by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley, illustrated by E. B. Lewis, Hachette Book Group
- *Happy to Be Nappy*, written by bell hooks, illustrated by Chris Raschka, Little, Brown and Company
- *Nappy Hair*, written by Carolivia Herron, illustrated by Joe Cepeda, Dragonfly Books
- *The Colors of Us*, written and illustrated by Karen Katz, Henry Holt and Company
- *Don't Touch My Hair!*, written and illustrated by Sharee Miller, Little, Brown and Company
- *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*, written by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Gordon James, Agate Publishing

### GLOBALISM

- *My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken, And Me*, written by Maya Angelou, illustrated by Margaret Courtney-Clarke, Penguin Random House
- *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children*, written by Sandra L. Pinkney, photographed by Myles C. Pinkney, Scholastic
- *All the Colors We Are: The Story of How We Get Our Skin Color/Todos los colores de nuestra piel La historia de por qué tenemos diferentes colores de piel*, written by Katie Kissinger, photographed by Chris Bohnhoff, Redleaf Press
- *Dreamers*, written and illustrated by Yuyi Morales, Holiday House
- *Gugu's House*, written and illustrated by Catherine Stock, Clarion Books

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