

Questions to Consider when Talking About Slavery with Young Children

Kids are developing rapidly during the preschool and early elementary ages. A four-year old is dramatically different from a six-year old in their ability to comprehend concepts like time and empathy. And of course every child is different. That said, it is important for educators, caregivers, parents and social-justice advocates to come together in learning communities to discuss ways to meaningfully engage about slavery with young children.

Questions for educators, caregivers and aftercare providers to discuss:

Teaching Tolerance offers some helpful questions to get this conversation started with this article titled, *When and How to Talk with Young Children about Enslavement: Discussion Questions for Educators* by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards.

- When are kids old enough to understand different aspects of slavery? What do we want kids at different ages to understand?
- Do preschool and kindergarten age children actually understand the concept of “long ago”? Will talking about frightening aspects of history make them worry that these events happened yesterday or even today?
- How do Black children think and feel about learning people like them were enslaved? How does it impact their sense of belonging? Identity? What do they think/feel when we read about it in books?
- What do White, Asian, or Latino children think and feel when they learn about slavery? What do they think/feel when we read about it in books?
- What will young children learn about slavery from movies, TV, books or other adults if parents or educators don't discuss it with them first?
- How are families included this discussion? How do Black families and White families feel about how we teach slavery in school? How should we handle different beliefs about how slavery should be discussed?
- What overarching concepts about fairness/unfairness or inclusion/exclusion do we want children to understand? How can we talk about slavery in developmentally appropriate ways without sugar-coating the realities of slavery?
- What values do we want to share? How can we use stories about slavery teach compassion, empathy, perseverance and courage?
- What responses do we want to model for children in teaching about slavery? How can stories about slavery serve as opportunities to talk about speaking up for others, or standing up for fairness or human rights?

Adapted from Teaching for Change website: *When and How to Talk with Young Children about Enslavement: Discussion Questions for Educators* By Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards located at: <http://www.teachingforchange.org/when-how-children-enslavement>