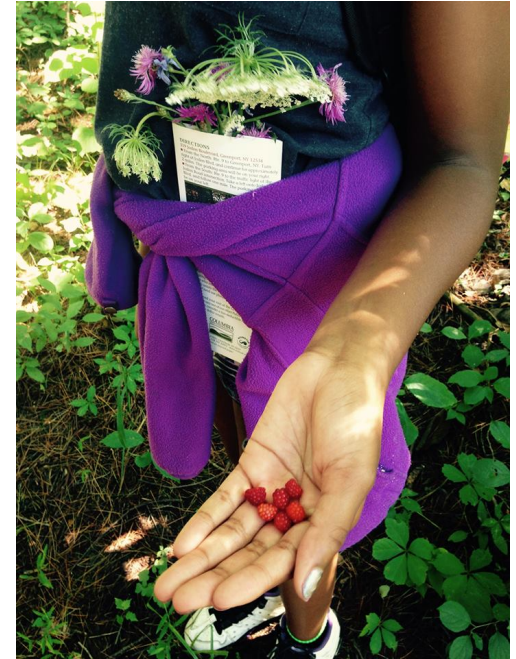


# I'm Not Playin':

Considerations While Introducing Black & Brown Urban Youth to Nature



By Vanessa Baehr  
CERJ Speaker Series  
Flying Deer Nature Center  
March 24, 2024

# OVERVIEW:

- ♥ Housekeeping
- ♥ My Background - mixed perspective & environmental education experiences in Hudson
- ♥ Brief BIPOC Environmental History
- ♥ Psychology Overview (i.e. communication, needs, trauma, learning styles)
- ♥ Cultural Considerations (i.e. names, time, food, clothing)
- 🧠 Activity & Bio Break: BIPOC Role Model Representation (10 min)
- ♥ Biggest barriers to accessing environmental connections.
- ♥ Suggestions & resources for creating an inclusive enviro. ed. program.
- ♥ Q & A Discussion

# Housekeeping

“Tact is making a point without making an enemy.”

-Sir Isaac Newton



“If you’re comfortable, I’m not teaching and you’re not learning.  
It’s going to get uncomfortable in here and that’s okay.  
It’s normal and it’s part of the process.”

-Brené Brown, “Atlas of the Heart”

Let's all take a deep breath.



# Your Journey Starts Here:

Search online for “Implicit Bias Test” for this link:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>



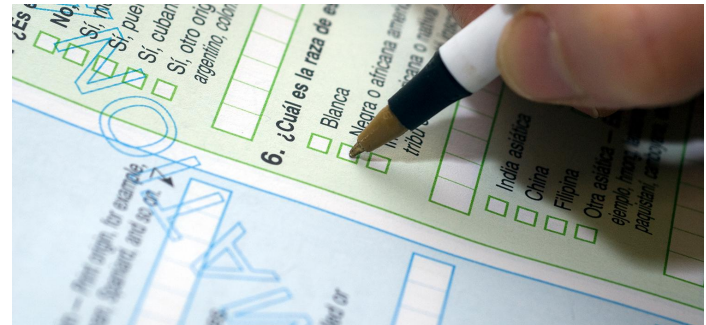
Project Implicit

- What were your results?
- Were you surprised?
  - Challenge yourself to step outside of your comfort circle.
  - What action steps can you take to adjust your behavior/results?

# My Mixed Perspective

Identity formation is both personal & societal.

How I see me is not how you see me.



# My Perspective: Being “Brown & Crunchy”



- Edith
- Summer camp in the Adirondacks. Swamp Queen.
- WWOOFing
- Black Out Camp Out
- Amphibian Crossing Parking
- Camping alone



## Environmental Educator since 2012

- Working w/ mostly BIPOC youth in Hudson.
- Direct-care Instructor & Program Coordinator
- My “Why I Teach”





# Brief BIPOC US Environmental History:

## *Severing Relationships to Nature*

- White-washed history taught of stolen land & stolen people.
- History of Trespassing Laws.

Implications of being BIPOC in wild spaces.

- Creation of National Parks.

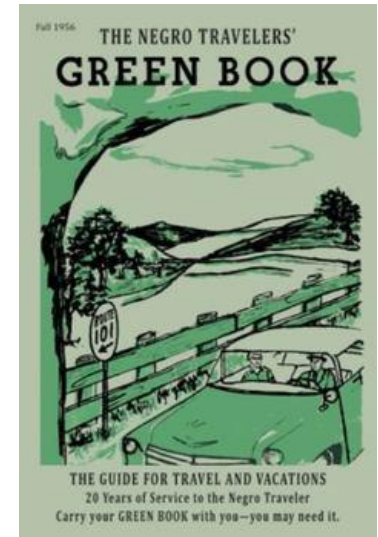
Who has access to leisure time and extra resources?

- Wayfinding while Black - Greenbook (1936-1966)
- Land Ownership (2% of all private agricultural land)

-“Who Owns the Land? Agricultural Land Ownership by Race/Ethnicity” (Gilbert, Wood, Sharp, 2002)



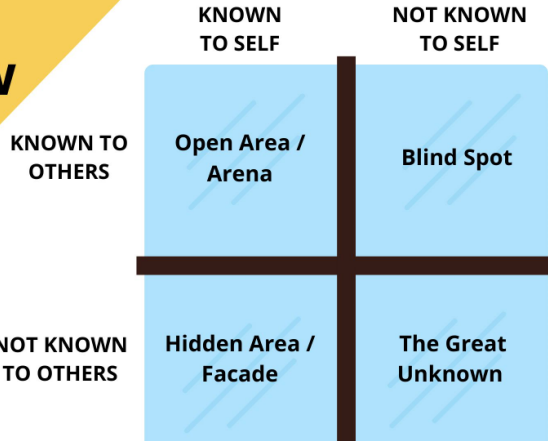
Download  
**'Native Land'** app  
to see who's land  
you're on.



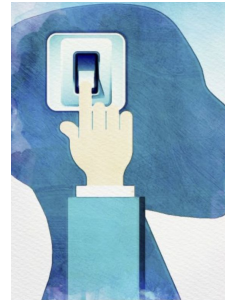
# Psychology: Image Management & Communication

*Communication is complicated, the majority of it is non-verbal body language.*

## THE JOHARI WINDOW



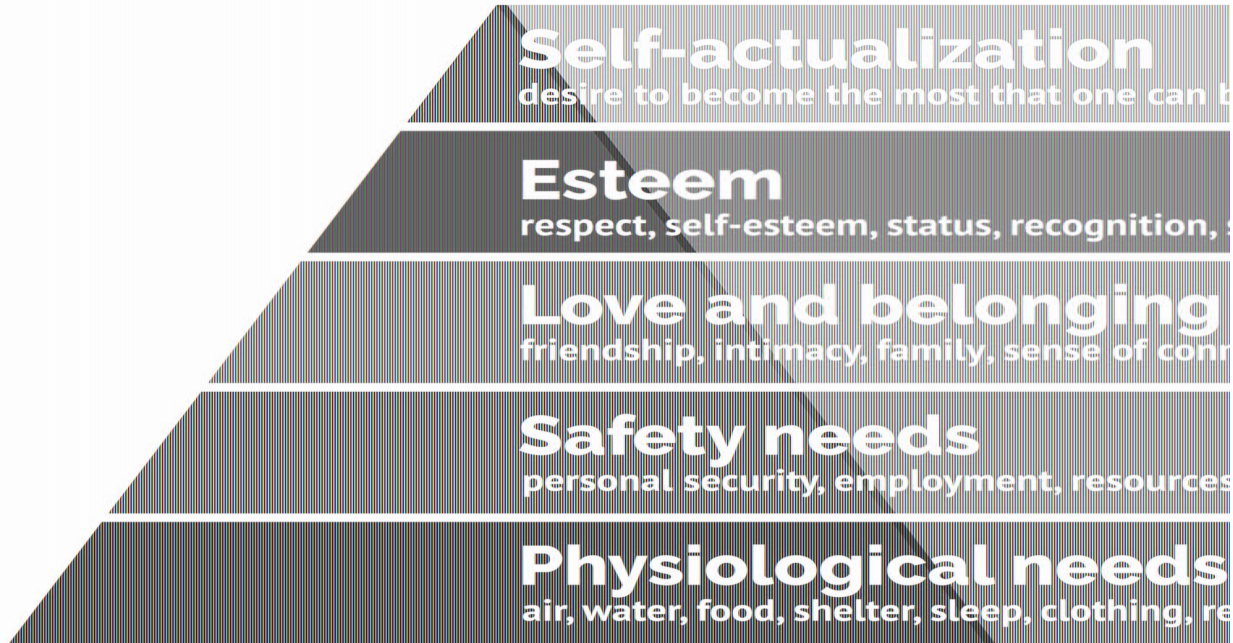
**Masking**  
as a defense strategy.



**Code-switching**  
as a coping mechanism.



# Psychology: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

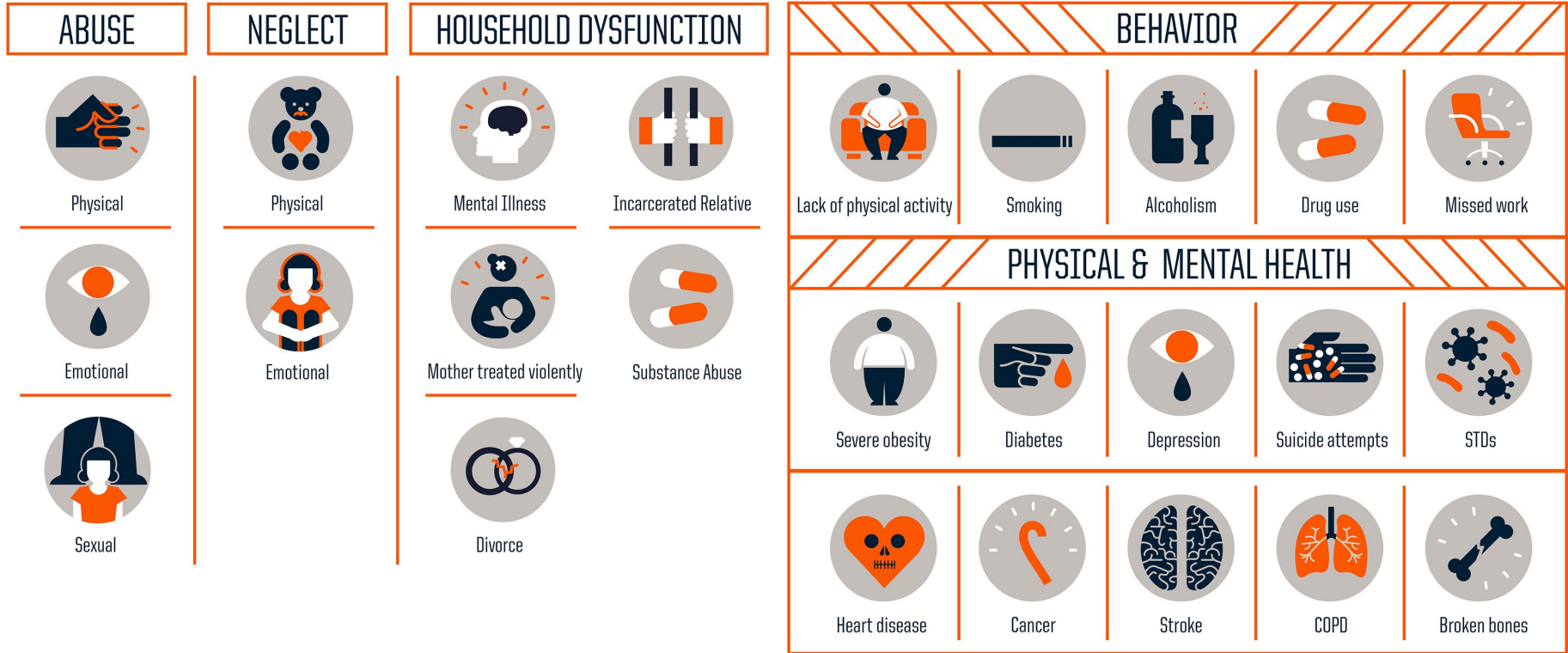


All of these steps requires money/time/energy.

How can someone care about the future of the environment if they do not know where they will sleep tonight or get their next meal?

# Psychology: Working with Trauma

## ACE Score - Adverse Childhood Experiences



# Culture: Urban Sneaker, Status Symbol

- Dirty shoes: The implications of being BIPOC & appearing dirty.
- Different perceptions of “dirt” in urban areas (pollution).

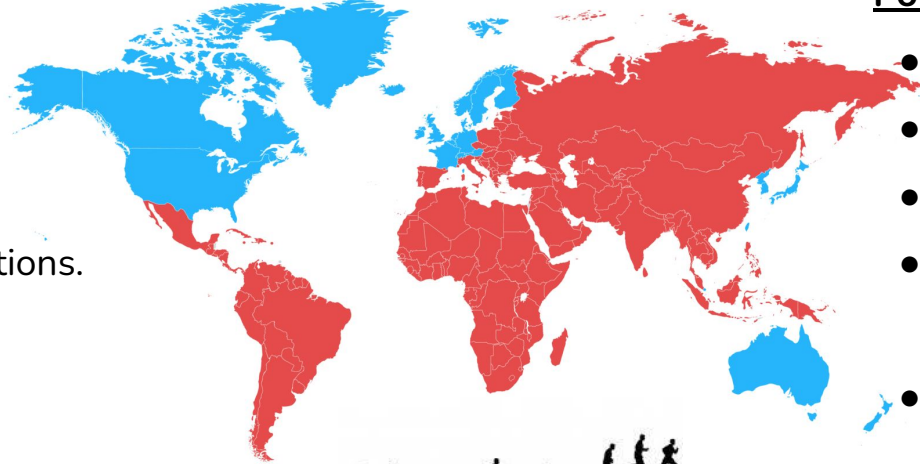


# The Culture of Time: Perceptions & Expectations

## Monochronic

- Individualistic
- One time.
- Time is money.
- No time for interruptions.
- Based on capitalist markets.
- Hustle culture.
- Mind your own business.

■ Monochronic  
■ Polychronic



## Polychronic

- Collectivist culture
- Much time available.
- Timelessness
- Prioritizes relationships over profits / institutions.
- Welcomes unplanned social interactions.
- It'll happen “mañana”
- Everyone's in your business.

Created with mapchart.net

*Do other needs override cultural responses?*

*Allow for flexibility in your schedule for parents. The struggle is real.  
Don't talk to kids about being late publicly, pull them aside later, check-in.*

# Culture: Immigrant Perspective

## Parallels in Policy Language:

### Non-Native, Invasive, Plants & People



Immigration & Conservation policies say populations of concern:

- are reproducing too fast.
- are outcompeting current population for resources.
- are creating an unhealthy influence on the native environment.
- must be eradicated/managed.



# Culture: “Where Are You From?” but make it not cringe.

- Family Tree Experiences for BIPOC
- Nature as a witness
  - Interview a big old tree

## Other Ways to Ask “Where are you from?”:

- Where do you live now?
- Where were you born/raised?
- Where are your parents from?
- What is your ethnic heritage/background?
- Do you speak another language?
- What are some of your favorite family meals?





# Culture: Representation Matters



Not uncommon for BIPOC in environmental education spaces to be the only one.

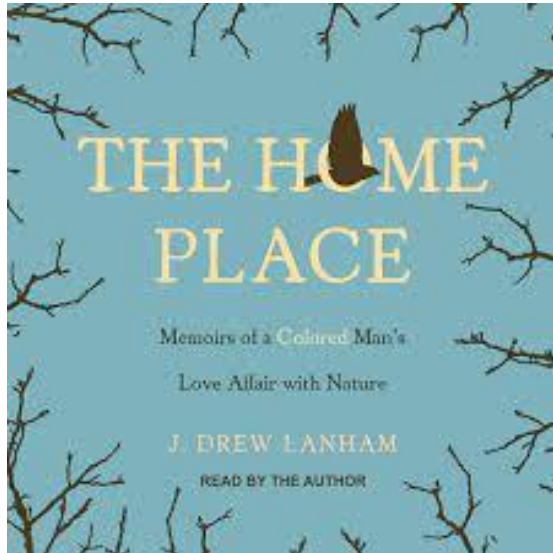
Imposter Syndrome.

Navigating microaggressions. Societal gaslighting.

“The Knowing Look”

Nature doesn't judge you the same way society does.

Being one's authentic self and reclaiming ancestral connection to old ways of knowing.

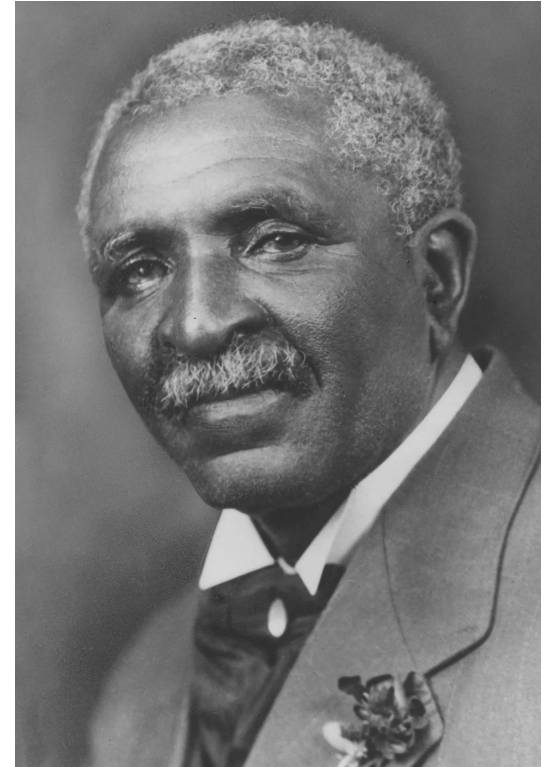


# ACTIVITY TIME: BIPOC Environmental Role Models



Who can name them?

What did they do?



## ACTIVITY TIME & BIO BREAK

10 min - bathroom / beverage / stretch

*All ages & races can benefit from being exposed to a more diverse range of role models.*

*Representation is important.*

*Amplify their work and voices.*

**Can you think of any BIPOC environmentalists, naturalists, scientists, conservationists?**

**Can you think of any BIPOC media about nature, history, folklore, for children or adults?**

If so, please write one or a bunch on your sticky note(s).

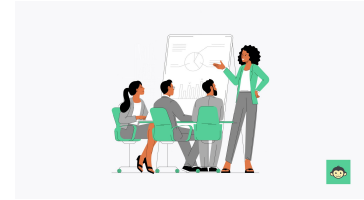
If you can't think of any, just write, "I have work to do in this area." on your sticky note.

**Post your sticky note on the designated wall.**

If you have any good Instagram account suggestions, please DM me [@butterflyseye](https://www.instagram.com/butterflyseye)  

# Suggestions: Macro (Admin/Directors/Coordinators)

For top employees of the organization, which hold much of the decision-making power and are often held by white people, making it difficult for BIPOC employees to speak their needs and truths, consider this list:



- Pay people. Don't assume a black or brown person's time is ever free, always offer compensation.
  - This also goes for teen programs, offer a stipend, it makes a huge difference in participation.
- Hire a DEI Coordinator, get a consultation, and/or staff trainings. Budget for it like it's a real priority, because I guarantee your staff & organization could benefit from it.
- Make an effort to hire a diverse staff and be prepared to provide them with mentorship that is culturally representative (see Soul Fire Farm's work-middle photo), even if it's outsourced.
- Support affinity groups. Everyone needs representative community where they can unmask.
- Make it a priority to hire diverse staff if you want to best serve diverse students. Be ready to be able to support them in a culturally-relevant way (i.e. include translations when needed & acknowledge other holidays/traditions).
- Be mindful how diversity is captured in photography & how it is presented in your social media/website/promo.

# BUDGET: Provide SCHOLARSHIPS

- Make it simple & discreet to apply.
- Directly create opportunities for students in low-income communities.
- Explore different funding models (i.e. sliding scale, volunteer/barter, tier system).



# BUDGET: For TRANSPORTATION options.



Huge barrier to accessing programs.

**Brainstorm a plan & set aside funding** for transportation solutions.

**Get creative with locations**, explore hosting programs elsewhere.

# BUDGET: For Gear Library

Provide alternative footwear, extra socks, warm clothes, hats that fit afros, backpacks, water bottles, knives, etc. Budget for it. Ask schools when they go through their lost & found.



# BUDGET: Provide a way to clean up

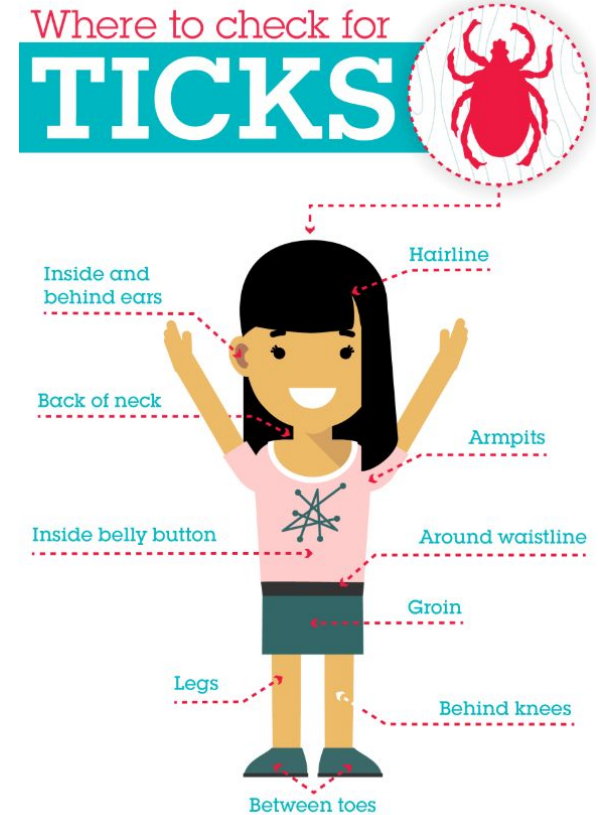
aprons, extra towels, extra clothes, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, soap & water





# Parent Communication: Let parents know what to expect

- Check in with parents at drop-off/pick-up when possible.
- Get to know parents names/faces. Don't make assumptions based on skin color, especially with mixed families or stepparents.
- List any allergies (i.e. bees, asthma protocol).
- Inform of activities & the possibility of **getting dirty or wet**.
- For public school programs where kids get dirty & parents weren't warned, send child home w/ a ready pre-made "sorry slip" w/ info.
- Ask them to send extra clothes, hat, bandana, skin & hair care kit (orgs are legally not allowed to provide or to help apply), and shoes that can get dirty.
- Include a 'gear library' section on the application / permission slip where they can indicate sizes and other details of items they would like to borrow.
- Send parents home with resources (e.g. tick check guide) & story of the day, include photos when possible.



# Suggestions: Micro (Instructors, Counselors, direct-care staff)

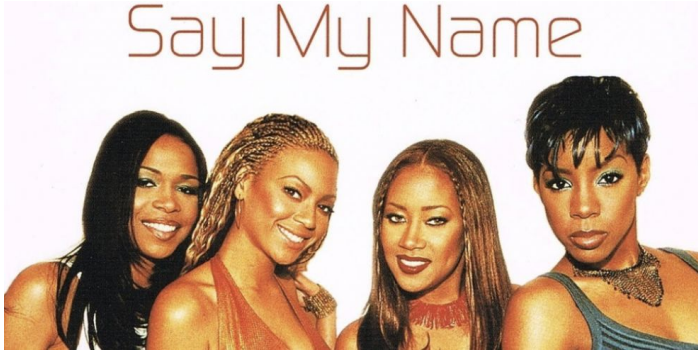
This position holds a lot of responsibility. The ways in which you manage classroom behavior & engage with students has a great impact on their sense of safety, group dynamics, & learning.

## REMEMBER:

- ✓ Don't make assumptions. Don't expect less from BIPOC youth.
- ✓ Check in, low-key. Ask considerate questions and answer any questions for clarification. Offer choices.
- ✓ Check in about comfort/skill levels, work closely with less experienced students, validate their feelings/fears, and support them to success (i.e. being out of sight of civilization, nature pee, ASTABS).
- ✓ Be aware of group dynamics. When grouping for games, be mindful about competitive aspects & power dynamics. Intervene in any bullying.



# Culture: The Importance of Names



*"A person's name is to them the sweetest and most important sound in any language."*

**Please be mindful of comments made about names.**

*What's in a name?* Cultural retention (e.g. Kunta Kinte) or assimilation pressures (e.g. Toby).

Look up games and other creative ways to remember names (i.e. picnic icebreaker)

Having a printed roster or notebook helps.

If you can remember obscure scientific terms, you can remember new names.

# Working with Kids with Trauma

*You never know. Check-in first (i.e. thumb meter) Circle up!*

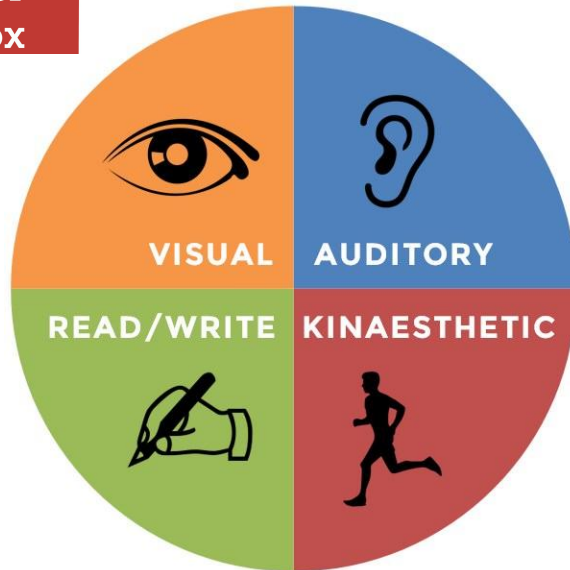
*Be ready to adjust accordingly based on group mood.*



- Build connections early on so students feel seen. Let them know through actions & words that you want to understand and support them.
- Learn what their individual needs are & communicate with parents and co-instructors for best practices and updates.
- Build in frequent check-ins with students without singling them out.

# Curriculum: Learning Styles

Offer a variety of activity and autonomy that can accommodate different age/comfort/experience levels.



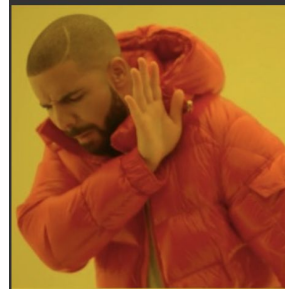
Always a  
dirty & clean  
option!



# Teaching: Honoring Origins & Histories

Be sure to acknowledge the cultural origin of any crafts, songs, stories, skills, games, etc. before teaching how to use it.

Do some research.



**cultural  
appropriation**



**cultural  
appreciation**

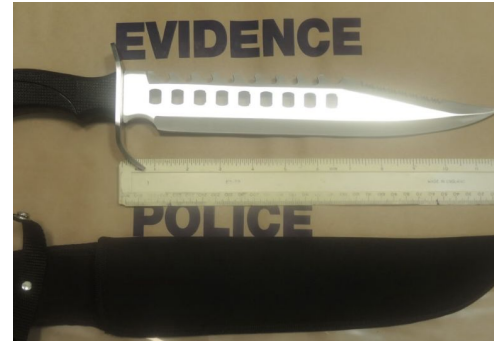
## Mindful Language Around Game Play



**FREEDOM!**



## Perceptions of BIPOC Youth with Knives in Urban Areas



Avoid using any references to “jail / jailbreak” or “cops & robbers” during play. You never know if a child in your group is dealing with incarceration within their family. Instead say: “Tagged,”/“Freedom!”

Teach ASTABS to urban youth to reclaim knife skills as a tool, instead of a weapon.

# Meet Them Where They Are / Speak Their Language

Urban life usually means less green space available and sometimes the streets aren't safe (i.e. air quality / pollution, criminal activity pressures).

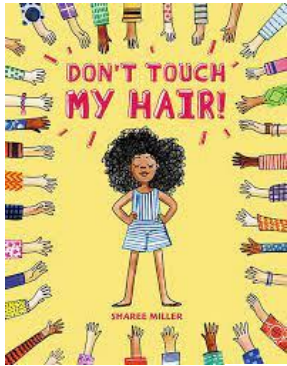
As a result, many urban youth spend lots of time indoors on tech.

Knowing Pokemon & Minecraft basics can forge a connection.





# Black Hair & Skin Care Considerations



- This should be covered under “Respecting Others” and Consent discussions without singling anyone out.
- History of “looking presentable” for Black hair.
- The Labor/Time/Money/Energy that goes into Black hair.
- Wash day is sacred. Takes hours.
- Give notice prior to any wet activities so people can prepare accordingly with their kit items. Give extra time & privacy to kids after getting wet.
- Provide headwear/gear for activities that actually fits various black hair styles (i.e. hats, helmets, bandanas) & bring silk cap protection.
- Black hair can hold heat, be mindful of overheating & being in sun too long. Check in subtly if you notice them slowing down, hydrate.
- Teaching Cordage = “Twists”
- Buy various skin color band-aids.

# Food as a Gateway to Caring for Nature

*Plan to provide for a culturally-relevant shared snack and/or meal.*

*Don't wait for them to ask, just offer it.*



Talk about food- favorites, dislikes, family recipes.

**Introducing new foods & fresh produce:**

*Make no assumptions. Urban barriers to accessing fresh food.*

**New food incentives:** Offer something familiar & comforting in addition to new foods.



# Shoestring Budget? Be Resourceful.

USE YOUR  
*imagination*



*Pinterest*



# In Closing...

- Don't let your learning stop here. Keep doing "the work":  
Admit that you may not have all the answers yet & be willing to learn. Read books. Listen to BIPOC voices. Discuss with friends/family. Join groups like CERJ/SURJ.
- Keep your mind & heart open.
- Seek actions instead of performances.
- Allow spaces for you to be held accountable & if this happens, acknowledge that you have received the message, apologize accordingly, and then take your time to process, unlearn, learn (i.e. avoiding white tears).

REMEMBER: It's about making people feel safe in nature so they can learn & have fun. This in turn helps them feel connection & care for the Earth & they can inspire others. You could be inspiring a future environmental educator!



*Thank you for listening.*

Q & A / Discussion