



Alaafia Kids Tidbits



Helping Mixed Race 8-11 Year Olds Navigate Racism

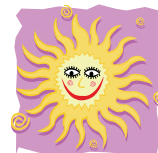
As discussed in a review of Barack Obama's book that appears later in this issue of *Alaafia Kids Tidbits*, young mixed race children between the ages of eight and eleven often encounter in some way for the first time of their lives not only the realization that they are "different," but also get the feeling that they are somehow "inferior" to their monoracial peers. For Obama, now U.S. Senator from Illinois, this occurred during what is commonly called his "middle childhood" years. Obama was struck in horror to see a picture of a black man after he had received a chemical treatment to become "white." The picture left a vivid impression on Obama's mind and life. Obama began to see himself differently, of being of a socially undesirable color. This incident led him to look for other signs in society, such as on TV and in newspapers, of the black or mixed person's "inferiority." What's important for us as parents of mixed race



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Letter from

Jeanne



Happy Summer, Everyone!

Reusable Alphabet Art Flip Charts by Alaafia Kids Company to be listed on www.abcstuff.com. What's even better, our *Flip Charts* will be showcased in their catalog that goes out to 85,000 repeat clients as a "good product created by a teacher that cannot get a good

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Alaafia Kids Company

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Special Points of Interest:

- ☺ Raising mixed race 8-11 year olds
- ☺ Barak Obama bio and book review
- ☺ Intermix from England

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children is to look for signs that our children are experiencing this. They may not be very vocal about their feelings, maybe not even sure how to express them.

This was true in Obama's case. After seeing the picture, Obama became suspicious of his mother's protectiveness, believing that she had not told him the "whole" story. Obama kept this to himself. We as parents should be aware of this and take measures to avoid it so as to maintain solid, honest relationships with our children, giving them faith in us as their supporters and also as people who can be counted on for honest information about the "whole" story.

The tricky part comes in when parents are not sure *when* they should start being honest about race and racism through open dialog. This is important to know because you don't want to over-exaggerate differences or make something an issue when it's not, possibly creating some dislike of others or unfavorable counter-stereotyping (two possible reactions) if you do.

Some things to keep in mind about racial identity issues as they occur in eight-to-eleven-year-olds:

- Peer interaction reaches a new level as groups of tightly knit friends form. A hierarchy of "cool" among groups develops.
- Children gain a deeper understanding of race, their race, and how they are

different from others. They understand "racism" because they probably have recently experienced it but they may not know the word *per se*. They can distinguish personal racism from societal racism.

- Children develop a keener sense of justice and become more outspoken about it. Conflicts arise when their desire to defend themselves against teasing or hurtful comments may decrease their chance of being accepted by their peers (so important to them at this time.)

What Parents Can Do to Help

- Maintain open dialog. Creating the emotional "space" that young people need to express themselves is difficult but not impossible. A trusting, loving environment where children feel secure is essential.
- Don't pry things out of your children; just make it clear that you're available whenever the child wants to share thoughts and feelings. This is especially pertinent when you sense that a racially charged incident occurred (after noting a change in your child's usual behavior or facial expression).
- Give children the language needed to describe themselves. Use words such as "mixed" and "biracial" interchangeably.
- Talk about their multiple roots and give them a sense of pride in their heritage. Do some family genealogy if possible.
- Provide stock phrases to your children to use in times of crisis and role play some scenarios with them.

(1) When they are asked "What are you?" they can say, "Why do you care?"

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Letter from *Jeanne*

exposure otherwise." We are excited about the prospect of getting our *Flip Charts* featuring multicultural children in the hands of thousands of children, parents, caregivers, and teachers. *Alaafia Kids Company* looks forward to a great working relationship with www.abcstuff.com. Visit them to see their high-quality educational products and the new home of our *Flip Charts*!

Alaafia Kids products to be listed and reviewed in *Leaping Antelope Productions* catalog! *Leaping Antelope Productions* is a small publisher in California that carries unique educational products for children, especially books and multimedia productions. They thought that our *Alaafia Kids Reusable Alphabet Art Flip Charts* and our *Coloring-Story Books* mesh nicely with their own belief in children's books that captivate attention, stimulate imagination, and teach important lessons. *Alaafia Kids Company* looks forward to a great relationship with *Leaping Antelope Productions* and hopes that our reach and vision in the name of mixed race children will expand even further! Check out their website and see what great products they have for you and your children! www.leapingantelope.com.

Anansi

Answers



Dear Anansi,

My mom, who is Jamaican-American, just told us that we are moving to another state to look for a better life because there are not many jobs around here. Our dad, who is white, doesn't live with us and from what my mom says, doesn't send money to help us out.

This is really bad news for my sister and for me, too. We don't have many friends and it took us a long time to get the ones we have. How are we supposed to get along now? She's 9 and I'm 12.

Robert S., Chicago, IL

Dear Robert,

I'm sorry to hear about your situation. I know that it's difficult when you live with only one parent. I also know that often mixed race youth have a hard time socializing and being accepted by their peers.

Since you have friends already, I'd bet that you and your sister know how to make and keep friends. You probably acted friendly towards others, didn't seem too self-conscious, and didn't criticize or speak negatively to anyone about anyone. Do the same thing in your new area. Look out for other mixed race youth, of course, but don't limit yourself to that group. Think positively and you're half way there!

Anansi

SPOTLIGHT on an ALAAFIA KID... *Barak Obama* *U.S. Senator from Illinois*

Celebrating an August birthday, the honorable United States Senator from Illinois, **Barak Obama** is featured this month in our *Alaafia Kids Spotlight*. We find it especially fitting to highlight the life and career of a U.S. politician around the time of July 4th, our nation's birthday.

After only eighteen months in office, Obama has already achieved celebrity status. Loved by the people for his engaging personality and leadership ability, Obama possesses many of the traits that presidents have.

What? Did I say *President*?

YES! A May 28, 2006 article in the *Chicago Tribune* raised a very interesting question, talked about for months in the Windy City: Will Obama run for President in 2008? We find the prospect just fascinating! An *Alaafia Kid* in the White House! Imagine that! We'll just have to wait and see.

Biographical Background

Barack Obama was born on August 4th, 1961, in Hawaii to Barack Obama, Sr. and Ann Dunham. His dad was a Kenyan exchange student in Hawaii and his

eighteen-year-old mom was a white woman who grew up in Kansas. When Obama's father went to Harvard alone, the marriage was effectively ended. His mother remarried another exchange student from Indonesia. Obama spent part of his childhood in Indonesia.

Obama graduated from Columbia University in 1983. He moved to Chicago in 1985 and did a lot of grassroots work for the needy. He worked for a church-based group seeking to improve living conditions in poor neighborhoods.

In 1991, Obama graduated from Harvard Law School where he was the first African American editor of the *Harvard Law Review*. Soon after, he received offers from major book publishers to write about his life and his work. *Dreams from My Father* was the result. (See below for a review.)

Obama practiced civil rights law and taught at the University of Chicago Law School. Then, Obama spent seven years in the Illinois state Senate before being elected as the junior senator from Illinois to the United States Senate. Obama spearheaded programs including the state Earned Income Tax Credit, which in three years provided over \$100 million in tax cuts to Illinois families.

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SPOTLIGHT on an ALAAFIA KID... *Barak Obama*

Obama also pushed through an expansion of early childhood education, and after a number of inmates on death row were found innocent, Senator Obama drafted legislation requiring the videotaping of interrogations and confessions in all capital cases.

He won a spot in the U.S. Senate after a race in a field of seven democrats, where he received a remarkable fifty-three per cent of the vote. He even won the "collar" counties around Chicago, communities that supposedly would never support a black candidate. This is amazing in a state where only 15% of the population is African American.

Sworn into the U.S. Senate on January 4, 2005, Senator Obama has as his primary objectives the promotion of economic growth and good paying jobs in Illinois. Obama serves on the Environment and Public Works Committee and on the Veterans' Affairs Committee where he is investigating the disability pay discrepancies that have left thousands of Illinois veterans without the benefits they earned. Senator Obama will also serve on the Foreign Relations Committee.

Obama was married in to Michelle in 1992. They live on Chicago's South Side where they attend Trinity United

Church of Christ. They have two daughters, Malia, 7 and Sasha, 4.

Dreams from My Father: A story of Race and Inheritance

Written when Obama was in his twenties, *Dreams from My Father* is an incredibly powerful reflection from a mixed race person on his family and his life. We at *Alaafia Kids Company* highly recommend it for all parents of mixed race children. However, because of several graphic passages sprinkled throughout the book, we cannot recommend it for people under the age of eighteen.

Dreams from My Father pieces together an image of his African father with the same name that the young Obama gleans over time from stories and pictures. During the construction of this image, Obama was also coming to terms with being mixed race. One of the things that we understood from this memoir was that Obama felt confused and alienated while growing up and didn't feel as if he belonged anywhere. His absent father was a constant enigma as he tried to piece together some meaning for himself.

The book contains unforgettable passages that detail the life of Obama. The section on Indonesia is especially vivid, describing Obama's relationship with his only "real" father figure, Lolo, his mother's second husband. It was during this time, when Obama was about nine years old, that his under-

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standing of race relations became real to him. Upon seeing a picture of an African American man who had dyed his skin white with a chemical treatment, he began to realize that being black could be undesirable to some. Obama writes, "...[T]hat one photograph...told me...that there was a hidden enemy out there, one that could reach me without anyone's knowledge, not even my own. When I got home that night...,I went into the bathroom and stood in front of the mirror..., and wondered if something was wrong with me...[T]he initial flush of anxiety would pass..., [b]ut my vision had been permanently altered...I began to notice that Cosby never got the girl on *I Spy*, that the black man on *Mission Impossible* spent all his time underground...I kept these observations myself, deciding that either my mother didn't see them or she was trying to protect me and that I shouldn't expose her efforts as having failed. I still trusted my mother's love— but I now faced the prospect that her account of the world, and my father's place in it, was somehow incomplete."

I quote this passage at length to give the reader some idea of how introspective this book really is. I recommend it largely for this reason.

The book also contains fascinating observations on racial issues in other respects, too. For example, in the *Introduction*, Obama writes, "When people...black or white, discover my background (and it usually is a dis-

covery, for I ceased to advertise my mother's race at the age of twelve or thirteen, when I began suspecting that by doing so I was ingratiating myself to whites), I see the split-second adjustments they have to make...They no longer know who I am. Privately, they guess at my troubled heart, I suppose—the mixed blood, the divided soul, the ghostly image of the tragic mulatto trapped between two worlds. And if I were to explain that no, the tragedy is not mine, or at least not mine alone, it is yours, sons and daughters of Plymouth Rock and Ellis Island, it is yours, children of Africa..."

Obama also includes the perspective of African Americans on race relations when he mentions a story told by his grandmother while living in Texas. At the bank where she worked, Obama's grandmother, Toots, had the habit of conversing with a black janitor in the hallway. One day during their conversation, a secretary came up to them and "hissed" that she should never, ever "call no nigger 'Mister.'" When Toots would see the janitor weeping in the corner and asked what was wrong, the janitor replied with a very simple but very powerful question, "What have we ever done to be treated so mean?"

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But the most gripping, and telling, part of the book is the section on his trip to Kenya in search of the mystique surrounding his recently deceased father. Even though his father left when he was merely a toddler, and returned to visit only once when Obama was ten, Obama felt the urgent need to know him upon hearing of his death while living in New York as a young man.

The climax of the memoir occurs when Obama is weeping by the side of his father's grave in his Luo village. After speaking to many members of his Kenyan family, Obama realizes that in spite of all of his father's intelligence, travels, wealth, and charm, his lack of faith—in people, meant that he never really succeeded and never really “escpaed” Africa in the way he had hoped, and died lonely and alone.

After a long time, when the tears finally stopped, Obama “...felt a calmness wash over me. I felt the circle finally close. I realized that who I was, what I cared about, was no longer just a matter of intellect or obligation...I saw that my life

in America—the black life, the white life, ...—all of it was connected with this small plot of earth an ocean away, connected by more than the accident of a name or the color of my skin. The pain I felt was my father's pain...[t]heir struggle, my birth-right.”

Personal Response to the Book

Dreams from My Father is a book that holds much personal significance for me. As a white woman who lived in Africa for over three years, I related to the descriptions and the stories of Obama's Africa trip. I also could relate to the Indonesia part expressing the difficulties that a white woman had living in that society and trying to walk between living in it and living in the American “subculture” in Indonesia at the same time.

As a white woman who married into an African family, (because that really is what you do; you don't just marry “an African,”) I understood some of the family maneuverings described in the book, too. Now, as a mother of mixed race children, I have a better idea of what my children may experience and feel later on in life. Thus, the book is sort of a preparation for me. I hope all parents of mixed race children, especially ones of African descent, will also read and appreciate this book as much as I have.

Surfing the.....

Multicultural Web



<http://www.intermix.org.uk>

Intermix

Intermix is a British organization offering information and support to mixed race individuals and their families. Although the group is across the Atlantic, their site has lots of pages and links filled with interesting news, facts, and stories, and so much more for us in the U.S.

The group strives to offer a contemporary view of the mixed-race experience through film, books, poetry, parenting techniques, and celebrity biographies, to name a few.

also coordinates several online forums where mixed race people can meet others, ask questions, and voice opinions. The group also publishes a monthly newsletter.

The website is very professional-looking and well-organized. One of the most interesting pages is titled "Gallery" and highlights photos of mixed race people, both celebrities and non-celebrities. The photographic exhibition *Interface* by London-based photographer Shambhala and the summary of highlights from the 2003

Intermix Day of Celebration of Mixed-Race Achievement were exceptional. Parents of mixed race children will find the *Parenting* page extremely useful for all sorts of reasons. Easily navigable, this is a site worth seeing and reading.

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- (2) Or they can say, 'I am ___ and ___ and ___ at the same time.'
- (3) A response that may stop people immediately is "I'm just me. That's who I am. All of me is both ___ and ___."

Conclusion

Being young and being mixed race is often challenging. It requires children to analyze themselves, their world, themselves in the world, and other people in it in order to get along. This analysis is sometimes painful and often occurs earlier than that carried out by monoracial peers. If we as parents give our children a sense of pride and security in who they are as discussed in this article, and assist them in dealing with racial remarks and behaviors, they will be able to cope and live full lives as members of the *human* race.

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World's Children Celebrating Our
Diversity and Heritage



Alaafia Kids Company was founded in 2004 by Jeanne Yacoubou, freelance writer, former educator, and now homeschooling mom to three children. Jeanne is married to Malik Yacoubou from Benin, West Africa.

Alaafia Kids Company specializes in multicultural gifts for children. We sell items that mixed race and transracially adopted children will love including handmade **multicultural dolls**, **handmade African clothes for children** and our own line of educational products with multicultural themes including **Reusable Alphabet Art Flip Charts**, **coloring-story books**, and **puzzles**. We also carry **multicultural books**, **music**, and **arts and crafts supplies**. Our web address is <http://www.AlaafiaKids.com>

Book Nook *The Lucky Grain of Corn* by Véronique Tadjo © 2000

To correspond with our soon-to-be-released *What's My Heritage?* Coloring-Story Book, we decided to feature one of the books from our *Multicultural Books* page that is distinctly African. *The Lucky Grain of Corn* is a fun and easy to read book that is sure to appeal to young listeners who love to hear stories! It is written, in fact, in the ancient African tradition of oral storytelling. *The Lucky Grain of Corn* tells the story of Soro, a little African boy. Soro discovers that objects, no matter how precious they are, can never equal the priceless value of friendship. We recommend *The Lucky Grain of Corn* as a great book for children of African descent because it serves as a pleasant manifestation of a part of their heritage. NOTE: A part of our *What's My Heritage?* Coloring-Story Book contains a description and artwork of an oral storytelling scene in an African village. The Activity Guide which accompanies it contains several activities for children related to African storytelling.

Alaafia Kids Company highly recommends this book for families. It is available in paperback through *Alaafia Kids Company* on its [Multicultural Books Page](#).

