# Middle School Curriculum Guide

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HISTORY OF AMAZEWORKS

One day in 1996, a second-grade girl named Ellie received a handmade birthday card from a classmate with the words, "I hate you girl lover!", because she had two moms. Ellie's moms were frequent volunteers at school and open about their family structure. They knew at some point they'd experience prejudice, but they never expected it would be aimed at their 7-year old daughter by another young child.
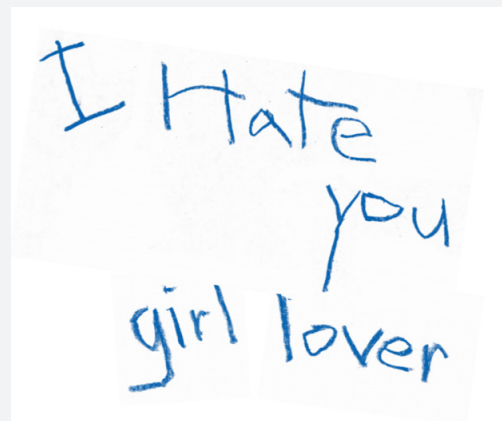
Thankfully, Ellie's moms saw this as a teachable moment. They called parents, teachers, school administrators, and child psychologists to create a curriculum to talk about diversity in a way that helps children learn about themselves and the people around them. This small task force created AmazeWorks and its flagship elementary curriculum. In 2000, AmazeWorks was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

OUR MISSION IS TO CHAMPION EQUITY AND BELONGING FOR ALL

For 25 years, AmazeWorks has provided research-based Anti-Bias curriculums, resources, training, and consultation to educators to create respectful learning communities of belonging for children. Through AmazeWorks, teachers and students build skills that foster healthy identity development and respect across differences of race, class, culture, gender, ability, beliefs, sexual orientation, and other social identities. They participate in regular, intentional conversations on identity, difference, and bias, which prevent the internalization of stereotypes, reduce bias levels in children, and increase learning and engagement. Teachers also engage in ongoing self-reflection about how their own identities and biases impact relationships and their work with students and families.

We know that when a student walks into a classroom, they survey their environment to determine: **Will I be seen? Will my voice be heard? Will my contributions be noticed and appreciated? Do I belong?**

For too many students with marginalized identities, the answer is NO. Research shows that when students don't feel a sense of belonging in their learning environment, they can't or won't fully engage in the learning process. Those who do not feel a connection with their school, other students, or teachers do not reach their potential and often drop out before graduation. We also know that students need to have the opportunity to see themselves reflected in classroom curricula while also learning about others who are different from them.

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Yvette Jackson's Pedagogy of Confidence cites neuroscience research that demonstrates how bias, prejudice, and stereotype threat lead to low self-esteem and decreased comprehension, resulting in poor academic achievement. This is why students need teachers who are aware of their own implicit bias and how their attitudes and actions affect a student's feeling of emotional, mental, and physical safety.

AmazeWorks partners with schools to create a positive school climate through the lens of Anti-Bias Education, social and emotional learning, and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. Our goal is to guide and support adults who work with youth in becoming Anti-Bias Educators who infuse the tenets of Anti-Bias Education into everything they do.

With this AmazeWorks Middle School Curriculum and Anti-Bias Education training, teachers create connected classrooms where all students are seen, heard, and valued. Educators learn to examine how identity, difference, and bias impact healthy relationships and engagement in learning, work, and community. They lead students through important conversations that help break down barriers to equity and belonging, address bias, and replace stereotypes with curiosity, understanding, and respect. Students develop the capacity to thrive in today's world because they learn how to appropriately deal with bias-based teasing, exclusion, and harassment through a preventive approach.

OUR PROCESS

AmazeWorks carefully curates the videos and resources we use in our program and identifies resources that are created from authentic voices as much as possible. We utilize task forces of educators, community members, and youth to vet and provide feedback on the videos, resources, and lessons to ensure that the program truly reflects the tenets of Anti-Bias Education and does not reinforce harmful stereotypes of groups of people.

The program was created using a backwards design process. Discussion questions and journal prompts are guided by the Six Facets of Understanding framework (Wiggins and McTighe).

THE AMAZEWORKS ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION MODEL

The Middle School Curriculum is centered around the AmazeWorks Anti-Bias Education model, developed from the work of Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards in early childhood education.

"Anti-bias education is a critical approach to teaching and learning that recognizes that change is needed. Anti-bias educators actively challenge prejudices and injustices. They engage in critical thinking and problem solving, supporting all children in developing a fuller understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Anti-bias teaching helps children strengthen their identities as capable and empowered human beings. Through anti-bias education, children identify issues and inequities in their lives, ask questions, consider multiple perspectives and think about their lives critically, growing to actively resist prejudice and discrimination. Anti-bias education acknowledges that while education is a human right, in today's classrooms, schools, and society, biases are shaping the experiences and very futures of children." (Derman-Sparks et al. *Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs: A Guide for Change.* Teachers College Press, 2015).
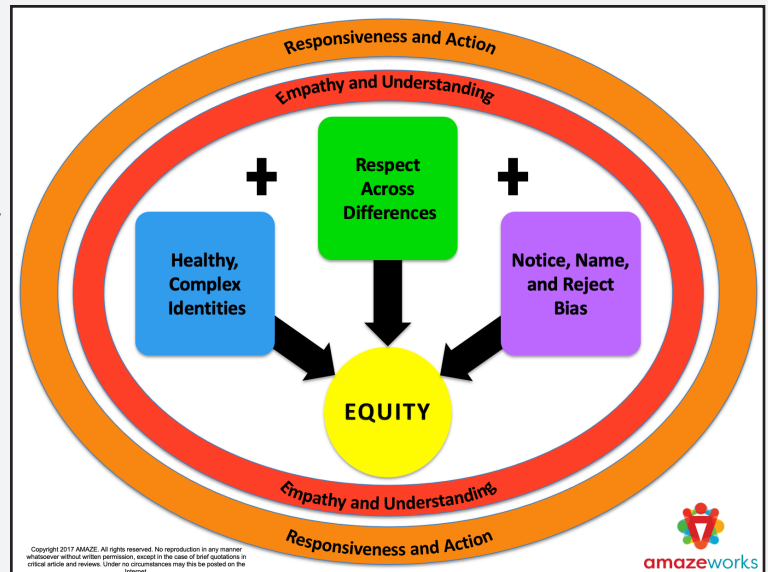
THE AMAZEWORKS ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION (ABE) MODEL PROMOTES:

- Empathy and understanding for self and others
- Healthy and complex identity development
- Respect across and appreciation of differences
- The ability to notice, name, and reject bias
- Responsiveness and action

Infused within Anti-Bias Education is **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).** When adolescents engage in discussions around identity, difference, and bias, they are developing and practicing the important SEL skills of:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

WHY ANTI-BIAS AND NOT EXPLICITLY ANTI-RACIST?

We believe that Anti-Bias Education is the foundation from which all other equity work stems because it is about the internal work that each of us needs to do to examine our identities, differences, and biases and the impact of each on ourselves and others. You cannot be truly anti-racist if you haven't examined the other biases you have around other identities (class, gender, sexual orientation, abiltiy, etc.) because you will just be perpetuating other harms. Also, we are never just our racial identities, so while anti-racist practices are centered in all of our work, our programs and training start from a foundation of Anti-Bias Education.

At the heart of all "isms" and "phobias" is the biased view that one group is superior to another. If we focus singularity on racism, then we just dismantle one hierarchy and leave many others intact. If we tackle the very nature of bias and how bias causes us to treat all types of people in different and inferior ways, then we dismantle the notion of social hierarchies in general, including racism. From that perspective, an Anti-Bias Education approach allows us to consider and attend to intersectionality and recognize that bias is harmful and perpetuates oppression across all identities and lived experiences.

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ABOUT THE AMAZEWORKS MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM

Students in the pre-teen and early-teen years are undergoing many changes physically, emotionally, and psychologically. They are extremely self-conscious and are beginning to ask themselves the question, "Who am I?" They may be trying on different identities, not only recognizing the various aspects of their identities, but also attaching meaning and value to these identities.

At the same time, they are continually absorbing messages from peers, adults in their lives, and the media about who is valued in this world, who has power and agency, and who doesn't. They are beginning to self-select themselves into peer groups based on social identity groups, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and beliefs. It is important that they have structured opportunities to talk about the differences they see in themselves and others and the bias, prejudice, and stereotypes they may witness and experience because of those differences. They must be empowered to practice the skills to interrupt and respond to bias so they can take action towards justice in small and big, daily and ongoing ways.

Using the foundations of Anti-Bias Education and Conditions for Belonging Framework, the AmazeWorks Middle School Curriculum supports teachers in navigating these important conversations with students on identity, difference, and bias. It engages students to consider:

- **Who do I want to be in this world?**
  - What are my beliefs, values, habits of mind, SEL skills, etc.?

- **How do I want to be in this world?**
  - What are my actions, behaviors, how I treat others, how I treat myself, etc.?
  - Are they congruent with WHO I want to be?

- **How do I want others to see me?**
  - Do others see me in the same way that I see myself in terms of WHO and HOW I want to be in this world?
  - How can my beliefs, values, attitudes, actions, and behaviors more consistently represent WHO and HOW I want to be in this world as well as how I want OTHERS to see me?

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In addition to combining Anti-Bias Education, social and emotional learning, and the Conditions for Belonging, the AmazeWorks Middle School Curriculum is distinct in several ways:

- It honors the fact that relationships, both family and friends, are central to students' identities.

- It builds community and belonging within the classroom. Adults and students become more aware, respectful, accepting, and inclusive.

- It includes a broad spectrum of diversity themes, ensuring that each student will have a windows/mirrors experience, e.g., viewing the lives of people different from themselves, while also getting to see people and lived experiences similar to theirs reflected in classroom curriculum.

- It helps teachers develop their students' capacity to thrive in today's changing world by promoting the understanding of everyone's uniqueness and each person's right to fair treatment.

- It establishes patterns for respectful communication, even when there is disagreement, and develops cooperative problem-solving skills. It provides guidance for teachers to develop their students' ability to safely deal with bias-based teasing, bullying, exclusion, and harassment by using a preventive approach.

- It provides the means for adults and students to internalize Anti-Bias Education goals and build social and emotional learning capacity.

- It is based on research and best practices.

- It approaches teachers as adult learners and provides the materials needed to immediately share their learning with students.

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Middle School Students on Stereotypes

Resources

- [Words Hurt: Middle School Stereotypes](#) (3:05)
- ["I pop out of my bubble" to make new friends](#) (2:30)
- [Middle School Students on Stereotypes (Lesson Slideshow)](#)

Identities & Themes

- Identity affirmation
- School success
- Bias, prejudice, and stereotypes
- General diversity
- Asian American and Pacific Islander

Summary of Resources

Both of the videos were produced by students and are part of the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs.

- **[Words Hurt: Middle School Stereotypes](#) (3:05)** - The first video features several teens and a school administrator who talk about their experiences with stereotypes and how they can affect students.

- **["I pop out of my bubble" to make new friends](#) (2:30)** - The second video features two teens who share their experiences with stereotypes. They talk about how they navigate being stereotyped by others and what they do to try to avoid stereotyping others.

Before You Teach

Vocabulary

Prejudice - Prejudice is a preconceived opinion, often negative, about a particular group, which is not based on reason or experience. It is a preconceived judgment toward a person because of their age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, education level, religion, or other personal or social identity.

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Stereotype - A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about a group of people based on a particular characteristic or attribute of the group. It is a belief that individuals belonging to a particular group will think, say, or act the same way. Though stereotypes can be both positive and negative, all stereotypes can have harmful effects on the individuals who are being stereotyped.

Teacher Reflection Questions

- How have stereotypes impacted your actions or self-perception as a child and as an adult?

- Picturing the students in your class, what stereotypes might they be subjected to?

- How can you help students build positive relationships with each other across differences and stereotypes?

Materials Needed for Lesson

- Middle School Students on Stereotypes (Lesson Slideshow)
- Ability to project video and slideshow
- Journal or notebook

Process of Implementing

- Project the Middle School Students on Stereotypes (Lesson Slideshow).

- Introduce the lesson and vocabulary/things-to-know.

- Show the video.

- After watching the video, give students time to complete a written reflection to at least one of the journal prompts.

- Lead students through the discussion questions.

Journal Prompts

- In the first video, Marissa says "Stereotypes can be harmful because they can hurt our personality." What are some examples from your own life?

- When have you ventured out of your comfort zone to make friends with someone who was different from you? What did you say or do? How was it received by others?

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Discussion Questions

*Essential questions are in bold.

- Share one of your journal responses.

- **What examples of stereotypes are shared in the two videos?**

- In the first video, Marissa says "Stereotypes can be harmful because they can hurt our personality." What are some examples of this?

- What advice do you have about how to "pop out of your bubble" and venture out of your comfort zone to make friends?

- **How easy or difficult is it to ignore stereotypes and not care about what other people think? Why?**

- **In the second video, Mr. Watson says, "Teachers don't know what you're going through." What advice do you have for your teachers about how they could better understand what your life is like?**

- **How can stereotypes affect our basic needs of survival, belonging, freedom, fun, or power?**

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Condition for Belonging: Identity Safety

ABE Connection	SEL Connection

ABE Connection

Healthy, Complex Identities
You as an adult learner will:
- Increase awareness and understanding of your own social identities and cultural contexts, both past and present.
- Make visible and support the personal and social identities and lived experiences of all students and their families.

Students will:
- Demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
- Explore their varied social identities and lived experiences.

Respect Across Differences
You as an adult learner will:
- Examine assumptions, fears, and misconceptions about what you have learned about human diversity.

Students will:
- Use accurate, respectful language in discussing human differences.
- Learn about how they are different from other students and how they are similar.

Notice, Name, and Reject Bias
You as an adult learner will:
- Identify how you have been advantaged or disadvantaged by the "isms" (racism, sexism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, etc.) and the stereotypes or prejudices you have absorbed about yourself or others.
- Foster each child's capacity to critically identify bias.
- Nurture each child's empathy for the hurt bias causes.

Students will:
- Increasingly recognize unfairness (injustice) and understand that unfairness hurts.
- Have the language to notice, name, and reject bias, prejudice, and stereotypes.

*Language borrowed and adapted from Derman-Sparks et al. *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020.

SEL Connection

Self-Awareness
- Identify feelings & needs
- Perspective taking
- Strengths in self, community, & culture
- Relationship between feelings, thoughts, behaviors, & judgements/bias
- Level of optimism

Self-Management
Demonstrate & practice:
- Regulating one's emotions & compassion for self & others
- Pause between stimulus & response
- Healthy boundaries
- Setting & monitoring personal & academic goals
- Resilience in the face of obstacles

Relationship Skills
Demonstrate & practice:
- Building relationships with diverse individuals & groups
- Listening & communication skills

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Why Do Labels Matter?

Resources

- [Why Do Labels Matter?](#) Video (4:16)
- [Why Do Labels Matter? (Lesson Slideshow)](#)

Identities & Themes

- Identity affirmation
- Standing up for self/others
- Racial bias/racism
- Bias, prejudice, and stereotypes
- General diversity

Summary of Resources

Why Do Labels Matter? **Video** - the participants of *How You See Me* discuss labels and social identities. The participants discuss why labels matter and how they can be used to start and continue conversations with others about identity.

Before You Teach

Vocabulary

Personal Identity - Personal identity refers to an individual's personal characteristics, personality traits, and experiences without regard to a larger group.

Social Identity - Social Identity refers to how an individual defines themselves based on their membership in a particular group. The groups are often based on the socially constructed categories of race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, age, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

Stereotype - A stereotype is an oversimplified generalization about a group of people based on a particular characteristic or attribute of the group. It is a belief that individuals belonging to a

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particular group will think, say, or act the same way. Though stereotypes can be both positive and negative, all stereotypes can have harmful effects on the individuals who are being stereotyped. ("The Negative In Positive Stereotypes")

Teacher Reflection Questions

- How have you been labeled by others in the past? Do you have positive or negative associations with these labels? Where do these associations come from?

- What labels has society put on your students and their families?

- How might these labels affect your students at school and at home?

- How might these labels affect your expectations for and interactions with students and their families?

Materials Needed for Lesson

- Why Do Labels Matter? (Lesson Slideshow)
- Ability to project a video
- Journal or notebook

Process of Implementing

- Project the Why Do Labels Matter? (Lesson Slideshow).

- Introduce the lesson and vocabulary.

- Show the video.

- After showing the video, give students time to complete a written reflection to at least one of the journal prompts.

- Lead students through the discussion questions.

- Complete the follow-up activity if time.

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Journal Prompts

- Do labels matter to you? Why or why not?

- What labels do you want to hold on to? Why?

- What labels do you want to let go of? Why?

Discussion Questions

*Essential questions are in bold.

- Share a response to one of your journal questions.

- What is the connection between labels and identity?

- What is the connection between labels and stereotypes?

- **What are some positive things about holding on to labels as a part of your identity?**

- **What are some negative things about labels and labeling others?**

- **How are labels given to us by others/society? How can we choose labels for ourselves?**

- Connecting to previous lessons**:** Think back to the "All That We Share" video about putting people in boxes. What is the difference between labels and boxes? Are both necessary? Positive? Negative?

Follow Up Activity

Students can create collages of the empowering labels they want to hold on to and the negative labels they would like others to stop using for them.

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Condition for Belonging: Identity Safety

ABE Connection	SEL Connection
Healthy, Complex Identities **You as an adult learner will:** ● Increase awareness and understanding of your own social identities and cultural contexts, both past and present. ● Make visible and support the personal and social identities and lived experiences of all students and their families. **Students will:** ● Demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities. ● Explore their varied social identities and lived experiences **Respect Across Differences** **You as an adult learner will:** ● Examine your own reactions and responsiveness to human differences. ● Promote each child's comfortable, empathetic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds. **Students will:** ● Use accurate, respectful language in discussing human differences. **Notice, Name, and Reject Bias** **You as an adult learner will:** ● Foster each child's capacity to critically identify bias. **Students will:** ● Have the language to notice, name, and reject bias, prejudice, and stereotypes. *Language borrowed and adapted from Derman-Sparks et al. *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020.	**Self-Awareness** ● Identify feelings & needs ● Perspective-taking ● Listening & communication skills ● Relationship between feelings, thoughts, behaviors, & judgments/bias **Social Awareness** Demonstrate & practice: ● Empathy & understanding ● Awareness of strengths in self & others **Relationship Skills** Demonstrate & practice: ● Building relationships with diverse individuals & groups ● Listening & communication skills

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