

# A PLACE TO BELONG

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



AMBER O'NEAL JOHNSTON

# GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

## INTRODUCTION

- What brought you to this book?  
Why are you reading it, and what do you hope to gain in the process?

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## PART 1: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

### CHAPTER 1 | EVALUATING YOUR FAMILY CULTURE:

#### What Are You Bringing to the Table?

- What does “identity is prismatic” mean to you? How does it relate to your family?

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- As you evaluate what you’re bringing to the family table, you’ll likely be challenging deeply held beliefs and long-held assumptions. Which questions made you the most uncomfortable, and how did you deal with the tension?

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- What do or would you find helpful as you humbly learn to see the world through someone else’s eyes?

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- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your willingness to set your self-interests aside in pursuit of understanding others? Why did you choose that rating?

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- Define “anti-racist” in your own words. Is this something you wish to be, or do you find it problematic? Why?

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- How is diversity multidimensional and intersectional?

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- Do you ever worry that teaching your children about how others live will lead to them embracing undesirable values? Why or why not? How do your thoughts impact how you share about different people with your kids?

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- Were you raised to be colorblind?  
How does the idea of walking away from that mentality make you feel?

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- What does having a colorful family culture mean to you?

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## CHAPTER 2 | EMBRACING TOUGH TABLE TOPICS:

### Normalizing Weighty Conversations

- Do you discuss discrimination, race, gender, and class with your kids?  
If not, what's holding you back, and when do you think you'll start?

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- What can you do to become a more askable parent?  
What do you think your biggest challenges will be in this area?

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- How comfortable are you discussing tough table topics with your kids?

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- What are your thoughts on the *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race & Racism* questions? Would you use them as conversation starters with your kids?

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- What about the examples from *Raising Race Conscious Children*?  
Do you already speak freely with your children in this way?  
If not, how does it make you feel to read the examples?

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- How comfortable are you talking about race with other adults?  
What about with your kids?

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- Do you see value in Du Bois's seven goals for *The Brownies' Book*?  
Do any of the goals surprise you, concern you, or especially resonate with you?

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### CHAPTER 3 | ESTABLISHING A BLUEPRINT:

#### Inclusive Family Ways and Home Culture

- Do you see yourself adopting any of the twenty family ways described in this chapter?  
Which ones feel most comfortable for your family?  
Are there any that don't seem relevant or worthwhile?

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- What are some inclusive family ways that you'd like to pursue in your family?

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- Are there any people in your life who don't uphold your family ways?  
How will you handle their comments or actions?

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- Do you think your children have a strong sense of “intergenerational self”?

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- Are you comfortable sharing family stories with your children on an ongoing basis?  
What would make it easier for you?

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- Answer the researchers’ questions for yourself:

- Do you know where your mother grew up?

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- Do you know where some of your grandparents met?

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- Do you know the source of your name?

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- Do you know which person in the family you act most like?

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- Do you know the national background of your family  
(such as English, German, Russian, etc.)?

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- Do you know some awards that your parents received  
when they were young?

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- Do you know the names of the schools that your dad went to?

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- How do you handle difficult narratives in your family?

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- Does your family have a long or short timeline from which to pull?  
How does that make you feel?  
What can you do to maximize what you have to work with?

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- Are there any people in your life who don't uphold your family ways?  
How will you handle their comments or actions?

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## PART 2: CURATING THE HOME LIBRARY

### CHAPTER 4 | MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL:

#### When Children See Themselves in Their Books

- What are literary mirrors? Describe the role they play in your home today.

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- Did the CCBC statistics on the primary characters in children's books surprise you?  
If so, what did you think of the publishing landscape before reading the stats?

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- Describe the “apartheid of literature.” How does the concept impact your thoughts on the availability of children’s books?

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- Had you ever thought about curating a home library before? If so, what types of selection parameters do you use (or are you planning to use)?

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- What do you think of colorblind vs. colorful bookshelves?

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- What other aspects of your child’s personhood, beyond race and ethnicity, would you like to see reflected in some of their books?

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## CHAPTER 5 | PULL BACK THE CURTAINS:

### Uncovering Books as Windows to the World

- What are literary windows? Describe the role they play in your home today.

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- Which types of windows do you think your children need more of and why?

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- Are there any barriers to you providing more windows in your home library?

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- What is the issue with the single story?  
What can you do to prevent the proliferation of the single story within your home?

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- If you have a son, does he hear or read stories that center the experiences of women?  
Do you believe that boys should read stories about girls? Why or why not?

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## CHAPTER 6 | LIFE-GIVING BOOKS:

### What Makes a Book “Good”?

- What role do classics play in your home library?

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- What are your thoughts on Newbery Award–winning books?

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- What are your thoughts on the #DisruptTexts movement?

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- How do you feel about the concept of “our own ideal libraries”?

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- What do you think about eliminating generally accepted booklists?

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- Describe your thoughts on classics, living books, life-giving books, and twaddle.  
What are the similarities and differences?  
Which types of books dominate your home library?

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- What percentage of the diverse books in your home center on “the struggle”? Do you have books depicting the joyful, everyday life or fun adventures of children of color?

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- Are #OwnVoices books important to you? Why or why not?

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- How often do your children select their own books?  
How do you feel about the books they pick?

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## PART 3: SHAPING THE HOME ATMOSPHERE

### CHAPTER 7 | DEEPLY ROOTED:

#### Leaning into Family Culture and History

- How do you connect your children to their cultural roots?  
Do you find this easy or difficult to do?

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- Which of the projects described most resonates with you?  
Are there any that you can't relate to?

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- Do you think you could comfortably integrate these types of activities into the rhythms of your home over time? If not, what do you see as the biggest barriers?

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- What is a legacy mindset, and how can you best infuse it into your home?

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## CHAPTER 8 | REPRESENTATION MATTERS:

### Navigating the Ups and Downs of Media and Pop Culture

- What are your thoughts on the #NotMyAriel outcry?  
Does it bother you when imaginary characters are reimagined as people of color?

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- Define invisibility, distortion, and tokenism. Give examples of where you've seen these in children's TV shows and movies. What about the media you consume as an adult?

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- Do you know exactly what your children watch or play on the TV or other devices?

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- Do you approve your kids' shows ahead of time, or do they pick their own?

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- What do you think about the distinction between consuming media and creating media?

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- What are the media rules of engagement in your home?  
Do you think any of them need to shift or change?

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## CHAPTER 9 | FROM TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH:

### Bringing Hard History into the Home

- What is your relationship with learning history? Is it something you enjoy?  
Is it something confined to the school day or something that permeates  
other areas of your family time?

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- Are your children learning hard history? If so, who's teaching it, or how do you decide  
what to share? If not, what's preventing you from sharing difficult truths with your kids?

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- Is your child receiving an inclusive and balanced view of history? If not, what can  
you do to ensure that they're experiencing the fullness of voices throughout history?

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- Do you visit local historical sites? Do you incorporate history into your family travels?

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- How can you help make history come alive for your children?

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## CHAPTER 10 | CHOOSING JOY:

### Finding Beauty Through Culturally Rich Learning

- Do you regularly incorporate art, music, and poetry into your home?  
If so, do your selections reflect the diversity of our country? Our world?  
If not, what would help you in that area?

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- What do you think about incorporating the beauty of cultural foodways into your home?  
Is this a new concept or something that comes naturally to you?

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- Were you aware of the history of exclusionary and racist practices  
in nature and environmentalism? What are your thoughts on how those  
past practices may be impacting families today?

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- How important is it for you to seek out examples of beauty within  
underrepresented cultures? What have you already done?  
What do you plan to do differently going forward?

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## PART FOUR: MOVING BEYOND THE FOUR WALLS

### CHAPTER 11 | THEORY TO PRACTICE:

#### Training Through Travel and Language-Learning

- What are your thoughts on global citizenship?  
Is this something your family values? Why or why not?

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- Have you ever considered worldschooling?  
What do you find most and least appealing about the idea?

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- Are your children learning other languages? If so, how are you leading them in the effort?  
If not, what would help you pursue that for your kids?

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- How can you connect your children to the world from the comfort of home?

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### CHAPTER 12 | SACRED SPACES AND PLACES:

#### Cultivating Safe Villages, Inclusive Community, and Cross-Cultural Kinship

- What are your thoughts on racial affinity spaces or safe villages?

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- If you disagree with the idea, what alternative solutions do you have for supporting children of color who live in mostly white communities?

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- If you agree with the concept, how can you join or create that space for your family, or how can you advocate or support the creation and existence of these groups for others?

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- What does it mean to be bicultural? Can you relate to that term?

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- What is code-switching? Is this something that you do?  
Have you seen others do it? If so, how did/ does it make you feel?

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- Do any of the ten points on the rationale for cultural micro-communities make you uncomfortable? If so, which ones and why?

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- How can you avoid seeking token friendships?  
Or, how can you avoid becoming a token friend?

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- Do you have authentic cross-racial friendships? If so, how are they cultivated and maintained? If not, what can you do to better position yourself for organic connection?

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## CHAPTER 13 | SOW, REAP, AND HARVEST:

### Launching Socially Conscious Changemakers

- What is a socially conscious changemaker?

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- Do you believe that white people are afforded certain privileges due to their skin color? Why or why not?

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- Do you benefit from any privileges simply because of who you are? If so, name a few and tell how you feel about them.

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- Do you consider yourself an ally and/or accomplice? Why or why not?

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- What is performative allyship? How can you avoid exhibiting it, and what can you do if you find yourself on the receiving end of it?

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- Describe ubuntu. How can you incorporate this concept into your family's value system?

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- What can you do to demonstrate your commitment to the common good of your local community? Our nation? The world? How can you help your children to do the same?

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- What are your three biggest takeaways from this book?

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