



Sesame Family Newsletter

The nonprofit organization behind Sesame Street and so much more

January 11, 2006



For Parents

[Celebrating Diversity](#)
by Jordan Brown

A dad guides his son to appreciate differences.

Featuring:

- January Birthdays
- Sticking Up for Others
- Lessons in Nonviolence
- Pride and Prejudice

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Games and More: Aaachoo!

Even Muppets get colds!

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From the Workshop



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Celebrating Diversity

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

What kind of cake will Martin be having at his party?

That was my 4-year-old son Finn's first question when I told him that January was not only his birthday month, but also the birthday month of an important man named Martin Luther King. I showed Finn a picture of Dr. King, and explained that he is no longer alive. But that on January 16, in honor of his birthday, millions of people in our country will celebrate by talking about all the wonderful things he did when he was alive.

Finn then asked, "How can Dr. King come to his birthday party if he's dead?"

Clearly this wasn't going to be easy. For weeks, Finn has been thinking about that exciting day near the end of the month when he will reach that marvelous milestone--5years old. But Finn, like many kids his age, has a tough time wrapping his head around the idea that people sometimes celebrate the birthdays of people that lived long ago.

Interested in honoring Dr. King's birthday with my son, but not sure how, I spoke with Finn's preschool teacher Miss Rachel. I wanted to see if she had any ideas about how to bring Dr. King's philosophy to life for young kids. She explained that while children are too young to grasp the concepts of prejudice and civil rights, there are related ideas that can be explored and developed. Miss Rachel had recently noticed that one of the children in Finn's class was getting teased during free time. Concerned, she encouraged the children to talk about how it feels to be left out. To spark a discussion, she read them a story by Dr. Seuss--HOOPER HUMPERDINK...? NOT HIM! In this story, a boy is planning to invite lots of different children to his birthday party--but is determined not to invite HOOPER HUMPERDINK because he's such a party pooper. In the end, the boy changes his mind and decides to invite Hooper because "A party great and grand as this/Is too good for anyone to miss."

Later that afternoon, I spoke with Finn about the HOOPER book, and what it feels like to be left out. We also talked about things you can do to help someone feel included. I then explained that Martin Luther King was like a superhero, except that he was a real person. He believed that everyone deserved to be treated fairly. He figured out smart ways to make the world a better place for everyone. Finn was curious and wanted to learn more.



MOMMY, WHY IS THAT BOY'S SKIN BROWN?

Teach your child to see the beauty in our differences.

YOU CAN ASK!

This advice can help you talk to your child about people's differences. Note: See the section on "Accepting Differences"

STICKING UP FOR OTHERS

While searching for ways to bring Dr. King's ideas to Finn's level, we read another Dr. Seuss tale--HORTON HEARS A WHO. As you may know, in this classic fable a sweet, stalwart elephant named Horton discovers a community of teeny tiny people--the Whos-- living on a speck of dust. Feeling a strong sense of responsibility, Horton protects and nurtures the dust speck--even at the expense of his own safety. All the other animals tease Horton, suggesting that the peppy pachyderm has lost his mind, and is wasting his time. In the end, Horton's persistence and compassion save the day for his itty bitty pals. Eventually all the doubters are convinced that the Whos really exist, and embrace the story's moral that "a person's a person no matter how small."

As we read this story together, I tried to help Finn understand the book's themes, such as having empathy for others, and being open-minded about people that are different. I ask him things like, "How do you think Horton felt when the kangaroos and the monkeys didn't believe that there were people living in that dust speck?" and "Why do you think Horton worked so hard to help his little friends?"



EMPATHY

Three experts discuss how children learn to identify with the feelings of others.

CALL OF THE CROW

Use this ancient South American tale to teach your child about acceptance and caring.

THROUGH THE YEARS: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A through-the-years look at emotional intelligence.

LESSONS IN NONVIOLENCE

Like many preschool children, Finn sometimes struggles with controlling his negative emotions. When Finn is especially angry or frustrated, he will sometimes hit me, have a screaming fit, or smash one of his favorite toys on the ground. When this happens, I try to calm him down. Once he's feeling more relaxed, we talk about it. I acknowledge his feelings by saying things like "I know you were really mad" but add "but it is not okay to hit someone." At such times, I wonder if he might benefit from knowing about Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence. Dr. King realized that violence only begets violence, so the way to break the cycle is by finding constructive outlets for anger.

Fortunately, as Finn has grown he's discovered more appropriate ways to release his feelings. For example, he loves to pretend he is a big, strong animal. During roughhousing time, he'll "shoot out his claws" like a lion, or chomp



STOP THE VIOLENCE!

Teach your children to avoid violence.

AGGRESSION: TWO TO FIVE

How young children learn to control their hostility.

the air with his "shark teeth." Fortunately, this mock aggressive behavior doesn't escalate to the real thing with his playmates. But I do know from other parents, that aggressiveness is a big concern. During the free play at the start of Finn's preschool day, for example, I frequently overhear parents say, "Use your words!" to their kids when they get frustrated. Children sometimes forget that when they feel angry, one of the best ways to handle the situation is to talk it out--to tell others how you feel, rather than using physical force.

ANGER

[Our experts explore how children cope with angry feelings.](#)

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Living in a major metropolitan area, Finn regularly spends time with people of all different ethnicities, nationalities, races, and religions. Finn's favorite teacher is African American, his most-adored babysitter is Korean, his best friend at school is Asian American, and so on. I hope that as Finn grows up, he'll continue to pick his favorite people based on their personalities, talents, and interests rather than superficial characteristics, such as skin color.



Like many children his age (and many adults, for that matter), Finn sometimes acts selfishly, or finds it hard to empathize with others who are less fortunate. At times I think how much growing he has to do in order to empathize with others. Then at other times I am delightfully surprised when he shows me that I'm the one who could improve. This morning, for example, he wandered into the room and out of the blue said, "The next time we see a man on the street, could we give him money? That way, he can go to the bank." Wow. I was so touched that my son's heart was in the right place. When I first moved to the city, I used to hand out spare change all the time. In recent years, I'd gotten out of the habit. With his simple comment, my son reminded me that I can learn as much from him as he does from me.

Here's to celebrating and honoring Dr. King's memory with your children.

Jordan Brown

Sesame Workshop

Weekly Trivia

In the first episodes of Sesame Street, thirty dots counted their way down the screen in between sketches. If you remember this, then you know you're over thirty-five!

FROM THE WORKSHOP

In 1968 when it began, it was one little street. Now Sesame Street reaches around the world to over 120 countries. Your gift of support will allow Sesame Workshop, the non-profit organization behind Sesame Street, to use media for what may be the greatest good, helping children around the world reach their highest potential.

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COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

[Tell us what's on your mind.](#) Kindly note that we are unable to respond to every email received.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary Sesame Street. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like Dragon Tales and Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat, Pinky Dinky Doo and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of Sesame Street, Dragon Tales and Sagwa products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at www.sesameworkshop.org

Sesame Workshop

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