

Antiracist Baby
Ibram X. Kendi
KoKila, 2020

Plot Summary

Take your first steps with Antiracist Baby! Or rather, follow Antiracist Baby's nine easy steps for building a more equitable world.

With bold art and thoughtful yet playful text, *Antiracist Baby* introduces the youngest readers and the grown-ups in their lives to the concept and power of antiracism. Providing the language necessary to begin critical conversations at the earliest age, *Antiracist Baby* is the perfect gift for readers of all ages dedicated to forming a just society. – [KoKila of Penguin Random House](#)

Reviews

- [AudioFile](#) (October/November 2020): ““Antiracist Baby is bred, not born. / Antiracist Baby is raised to make society transform.” So begins the picture book written by the author of *How to Be an Antiracist* to help explain racism to his young daughter. Shayna Small’s narration takes listeners through nine steps “to make equity a reality.” Her tone is authoritative, the strength of her voice made more powerful by the soft rhyming of the text. While the audio can be shared with babies, its clarity and simplicity will speak more deeply to parents, who will be guided by steps on “opening your eyes to all skin colors” and advice on how to “use your words to talk about race.” Guy Lockard reads Ibram X. Kendi’s author’s note to parents and caregivers., offering questions and discussion starters to facilitate conversation. His clear and gentle tone parallels Small’s.”
- [Common Sense Media](#) (Starred review): “Parents need to know that *Antiracist Baby* is a board book by Ibram X. Kendi (*Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*) that offers “nine steps to make equity a reality.” Like many books for babies, it primarily speaks to the parents, but babies and toddlers will enjoy Ashley Lukashovsky’s colorful, cartoon-like illustrations of adorable, diverse babies playing together, snuggling with their loving parents, and gathering with a wide range of families in their community. It both models an ideal world and challenges readers to step up and make it happen.

Families can talk about the babies in *Antiracist Baby*. Which ones look the most like you? Which of the adults looks like your parents or caregivers? Which picture do you like best? Do the babies look happy? What’s fun about playing with all kinds of kids? For parents: How can media [sic] help people think more deeply about topics like race and racism?”

- [The Horn Book Inc.](#) (25 March 2022). *Antiracist Baby* doesn’t hide its politics but puts them front and center with the claim that racists are “bred, *not* born.” In other words, we internalize racist ideas as we grow. The book puts forth nine things that can be done to “make equity a reality.” This is not a subtle book; it’s in your face

and not going away with its message that we all have hard work to do to become aware of our privilege and to check our biases.

Sure, books such as *Antiracist Baby* are didactic as hell, but they are doing the work of socializing kids on race consciousness in a post-George Floyd world. Like it or not, this is where we are right now. Racism hasn't gone away; it wasn't solved by the civil rights era. These books say: racism is still a problem, we need to be aware of it, and we all have work to do to fight racism. This should never be an idea we are ashamed of; it should never be a dangerous or disturbing idea, but one we should strive to embrace.

- [Kirkus Reviews](#) (15 July 2020): This book may be nominally for babies, but its audience is an adult one. Kendi makes this clear in the first two double-page spreads: “*Antiracist Baby* is bred, *not* born. / *Antiracist Baby* is raised to make society transform. // Babies are taught to be racist or antiracist—there is no neutrality. / Take these nine steps to make equity a reality.” Although this board book hardly substitutes for *How To Be an Antiracist* (2019), Kendi’s exploration of the topic for adults, it does serve to remind caregivers that raising an antiracist child is a conscious process. Importantly, points No. 1, “Open your eyes to all skin colors,” and No. 2, “Use your words to talk about race,” aim to correct anxious, usually white caregivers’ tendencies to “deny what’s right in front of you” when their children point out people who look different from them. To these and Kendi’s next seven points, Lukashevsky pairs bold, thickly outlined cartoons of babies and adults of many different skin tones, gender presentations, and body types. A couple of the depicted caregivers have tattoos; one wears the hijab. Several sets of parents can be read as LGBTQ+. The bright colors should keep babies and toddlers engaged while adults work to master the couplets, which do not always scan evenly. Some points are harder than others: “Confess when being racist,” for instance, may require several reads to internalize. Antiracism’s starting point. (*Board book. 6 mos.-3*)”
- [School Library Journal](#) (5 June 2020): “Toddler-PreS—Kendi and Lukashevsky offer a beautifully designed set of guidelines for parents (and anyone, really) to practice anti-racism. This bright and welcoming board book speaks directly to new parents. The opening illustration, rendered in lush primary colors and bold lines, features a smiling baby riding in her father’s baby sling as he participates in a peaceful protest. Other protestors of different ethnicities hold signs advocating for equity, climate change, and Black Lives Matter. Kendi is direct with his prose: “Babies are taught to be racist or antiracist—there’s no neutrality.” The text then offers nine steps to make “equity a reality.” Each step is presented with a short explanation that rhymes, accompanied by more of Lukashevsky’s inviting and cheerful illustrations. This excellent board book answers questions so many people are asking right now: What can I do? How can I help? Kendi’s choice to speak directly to new parents in this format works quite well. His succinct, impactful prose makes for an accessible guide to anti-racism for everyone.

Lukashevsky's artwork elevates the text even more with brilliant color and charming details that will inspire readers to linger on each page.

VERDICT: The timely and relevant anti-racist message so excellently delivered in this book makes it worthy of a place on all library shelves."

Awards

- N/A

Lists

- *Antiracist Baby* was among a handful of children's titles that Senator Ted Cruz cited during his questioning of judge Ketanji Brown Jackson at her Supreme Court confirmation hearing.
- Third on Children's Bestsellers for Picture Books for the week of August 2-8, 2020, according to [Publishers Weekly](#).
- According to publisher, *Antiracist Baby* is a #1 New York Times Bestseller

Response to challenges

- Ted Cruz's Questioning of Supreme Court Nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson, as discussed in [The Horn Book Inc.](#) (25 March 2022). According to *The Horn Book Inc.*: "I mean, children's books make their way into culture-wars debates all the time, but that usually happens in the once-sleepy contexts of school board meetings, not highly televised Supreme Court nomination hearings. As he made his way through a line of questioning about critical race theory, Cruz homed in on one book in particular, a picture book called *Antiracist Baby* by Ibram X. Kendi and illustrated by Ashley Lukashevsky. Cruz was attempting to make a throughline from the critical race theory (CRT) taught in law school and other graduate-level programs to picture books that were approved by a school on which Jackson is a board member. This picture book, in particular, Cruz said, was "stunning" (i.e., shocking) for its supposed promotion of CRT."

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