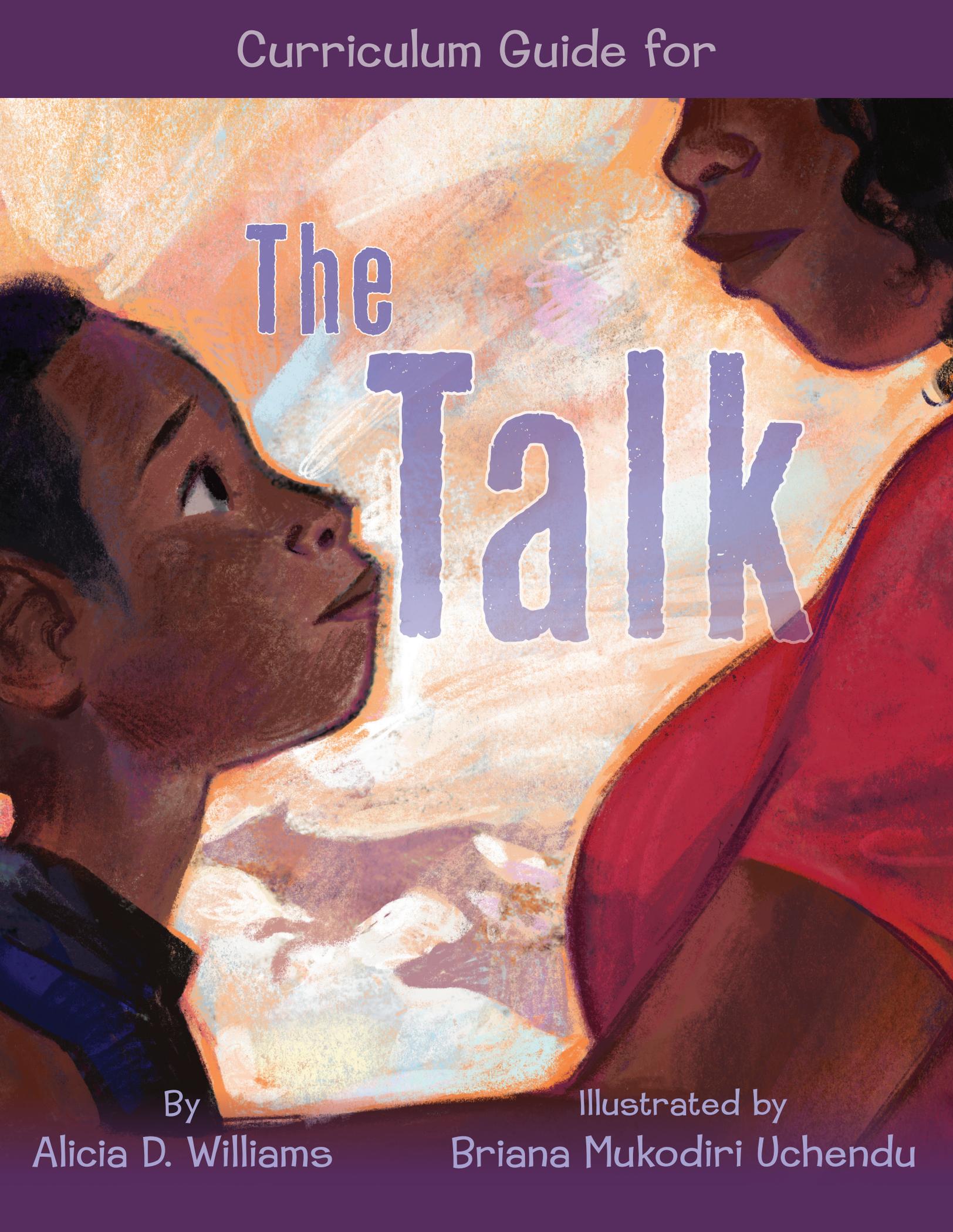


Curriculum Guide for

An artistic illustration in a painterly style. On the left, a man with dark skin and short hair is shown in profile, looking upwards and to the right. On the right, a woman with dark skin and curly hair is shown in profile, looking downwards and to the left. They appear to be in conversation. The background is a warm, textured wash of orange, yellow, and blue. The title 'The Talk' is written in a large, blue, stylized font with a white outline, centered over the background.

# The Talk

By  
Alicia D. Williams

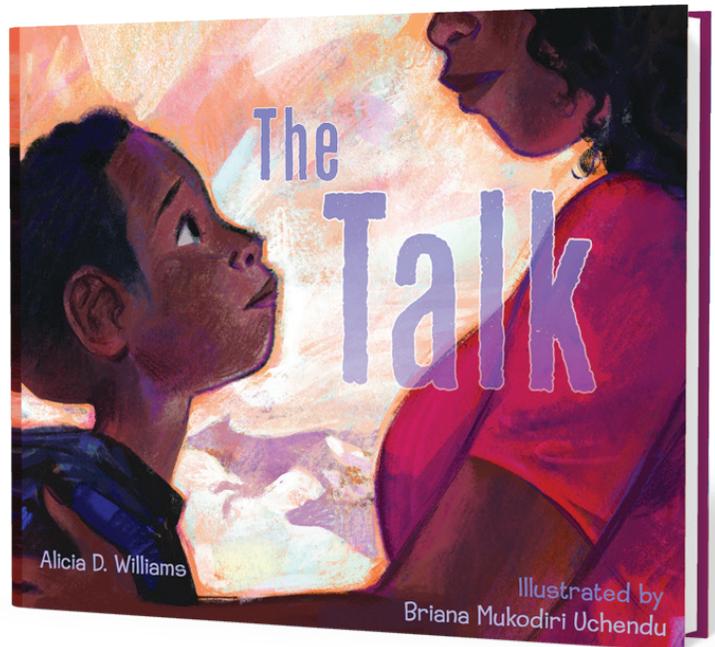
Illustrated by  
Briana Mukodiri Uchendu

## About the Book

*The Talk*, titled for the all-too-familiar conversation so many Black and Brown parents and families have to have with their children so they can stay safe amid society’s prejudices—a conversation that could mean the difference between life and death in a racist world—chronicles Black childhood in America. Following Jay and his crew of friends through early childhood into preadolescence, readers experience—through Jay’s eyes—the joy, frivolity, and innocence of childhood, juxtaposed with the weight of being brought into awareness of the prejudices and injustices of society.

Surrounded by the deep, endearing, and protective love of his family, Jay provides a narration that is lively and unobstructed—playing outside with friends, spending chore money on new things at the store—while peripheral details in the watercolor illustrations bring the reality for Black children more visibly into purview with each page’s turn.

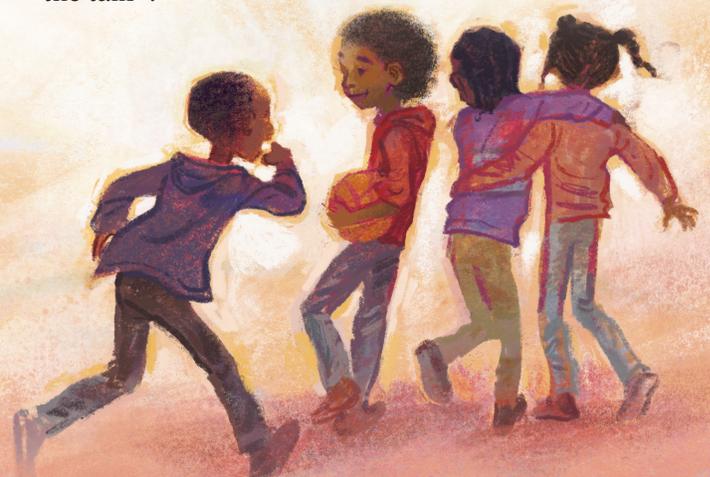
A story that spans the ages, *The Talk* makes room for important conversations that will hopefully spark understanding, empathy, and the desire for change.



## Discussion Questions and Activities

### Key Ideas and Details

1. Who is this story about? How do you know this? Please reference text and illustrations to support your answer.
2. What kinds of things do Jay and his friends like to do together?
3. What does Jay want you as the reader to know about . . .
  - a. him?
  - b. his friends?
  - c. his family?
4. How do Jay and his friends feel after Grandpa warns them not to hang out in crowds of four or more?
  - a. Why do you believe he gave this advice?
5. When does Mom begin to get sad?
  - a. Why do you think she starts to feel this way?
6. Why did Jay’s family sit him down for “the talk”?



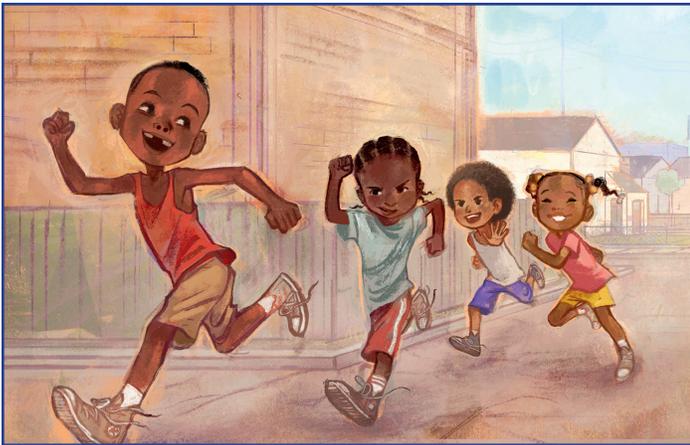
# Discussion Questions and Activities

## Craft and Structure

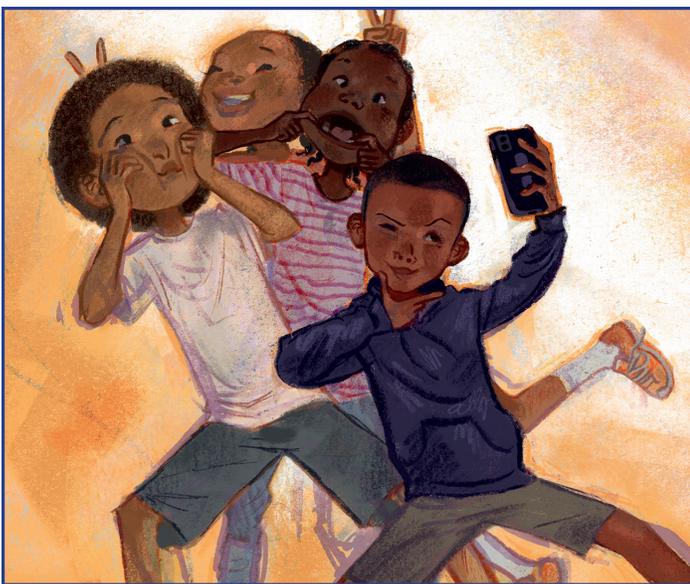
### Conveying the Passage of Time

In *The Talk*, the idea of time shows up in various ways, whether it's past, present, or future. Think about what you can interpret between the text and illustrations by paying close attention to "time" throughout the book.

*The Talk* begins with Jay and his crew running through the streets as young children. Take a look at the following illustrations from both the beginning and end of the book.



"Hi, I'm Jay. These are my friends, Eboni, Jamal, and Bryant."



"This is me and my friends. We want to bang and run, joke and laugh..."

1. What do you notice?
  - a. How does the illustrator use pictures to show that the characters are growing up?
  - b. Why do you think Jay reintroduces himself and his friends at the end of the book?

### Sequencing

Use the word bank below and have readers sequence each activity in order from the beginning of the book to the end. (Feel free to sequence together as a class/group as necessary.) Then answer the following questions.

- Skateboarding
- Racing
- Playing basketball
- Hanging out at the store
- Listening to stories with Grandpa

2. What do you notice about the order of the activities?
3. How does Jay, Eboni, Jamal, and Bryant's friendship change over time?
  - a. How do others' views of their friendship change as the four get older? (Hint: You may need to revisit the book and look closely at the illustrations.)



Throughout the book, Grandpa compares Jay and his young friends to Black historical figures such as Jesse Owens, Wilma Rudolph, and Thurgood Marshall.



4. Why do you think that Grandpa shared these comparisons to figures of past generations?
  - a. Take a closer look at the illustrations above. How are Jay, Eboni, Jamal, and Bryant the same as the figures? How are they different?
5. After telling the children they could be the next Thurgood Marshall, Elijah McCoy, and Bessie Coleman, Grandpa says, “But some folks might think you’re the next troublemaker.”
  - a. Why do you think he says this?
  - b. What does Grandpa think may happen in the future?
  - c. How is his prediction for the future the same or different from the lives of those figures from the past?

As Jay grows older, Mama and Nana both have special moments with him. They happen more than once throughout the book, so they are repetitive. For Mama, it’s measuring Jay’s height against the wall. For Grandma, it’s measuring the chubbiness of his cheeks.

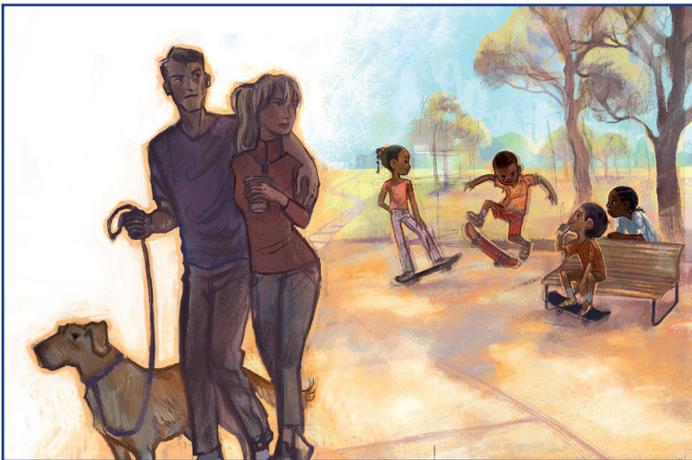


6. Why do you think the author chose to repeat these moments throughout the book?
7. How does Jay feel about each of these rituals? Do his feelings change over time?
8. How do Mama and Nana feel in these moments? Do their feelings change over time?

# Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

## Hidden in Plain Sight

In the second half of the book, we begin to see details in the illustrations that signal that things are changing in Jay's world. With readers, make observations of these changes, and prepare to support and give developmentally appropriate language and context for *racism*, *prejudice*, and *injustice*.



Break the classroom into pairs or small groups and assign each the task of closely observing one of the illustrations from above. Then, together, share observations and discuss the following:

1. Outside of Jay, his friends, and his family, what do you notice in this illustration?
2. What do you think is happening and why?
3. Why doesn't the author write words about the things that you see in the illustration?

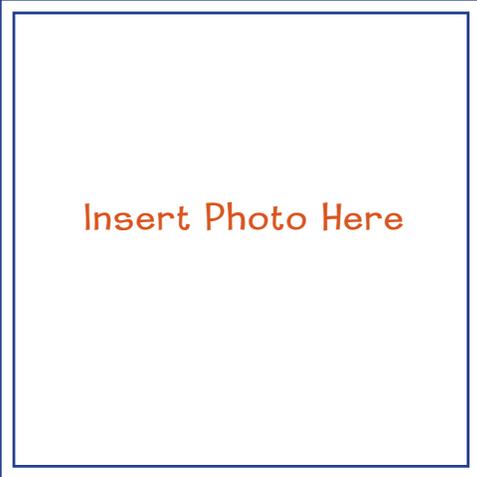
## Writing

1. Like Jay, invite children to write a story that introduces them, their family, and their friends. They may tell the story through writing, drawing, or both. Adjust the below structure to meet the diversity of student writing ability and personal choices around the medium being used.

- Book title
- Who are you? Who are two to three of your friends?
- What are you good at? What do you and your friends like to do?
- Who are your closest loved ones? Describe or show something you love to share with them.
- What's your favorite toy or clothing item? Why do you love it?
- Now that you're \_\_\_ years old, what's a challenge or obstacle that you are facing?
- How are your family and friends helping you to overcome your challenge?
- Reintroduce yourself. Tell the audience what you want most from life.

2. Grandpa believes that Jay, Eboni, Jamal, and Bryant will be great leaders one day. Invite readers to research the six leaders he mentions and create sports cards that highlight who they were and why they are important.

Invite readers to share their cards and observe the different facts, quotes, photos, and information they included on their cards.

	Name: _____
	Born: _____
	Hometown: _____
	Famous for: _____ _____
	Interesting Fact: _____ _____

Famous Quote: _____ _____
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## Extending the Experience

### Read Other Books and Writing by Alicia D. Williams

- *Genesis Begins Again*
- *Jump at the Sun: The True Life Tale of Unstoppable Storycatcher Zora Neale Hurston*
- *Shirley Chisholm Dared: The Story of the First Black Woman in Congress*
- *Recognize! An Anthology Honoring and Amplifying Black Life*

Find more art and illustrations by Briana Mukodiri Uchendo: <https://jillgrinbergliterary.com/book-illustrator/briana-mukodiri-uchendu/>

### Read Other Books Similar to *The Talk*

- *Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story about Racial Injustice* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard, illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin
- *A Door Made for Me* by Tyler Merritt, illustrated by Lonnie Ollivierre
- *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by E. B. Lewis
- *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson
- *Let's Talk About Race* by Julius Lester, illustrated by Karen Barbour

Melanie Kirkwood Marshall holds a BA in Secondary English Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a MEd in reading education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has taught in many learning contexts from high school ELA teacher to primary literacy interventionist. Currently, Melanie is completing her doctoral studies in multicultural children's literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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