

# YOUNG, PROUD, AND SUNG-JEE

A Children's Book on Fighting Anti-Asian  
Racism During COVID-19



JOYCE Y. LEE  
and EMILY KU

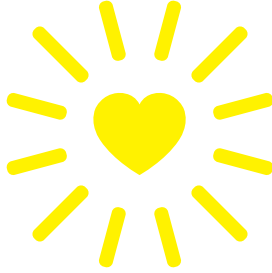
Illustrations by  
MAGGIE CHEN

**Note to parents, caregivers,  
and all those serving children:**

The purpose of this book is to provide a resource to help generate meaningful discussions between adults and children about anti-Asian racism. An incident involving anti-Asian racism is directly introduced in the story of this book.

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**To Luka**

– JYL

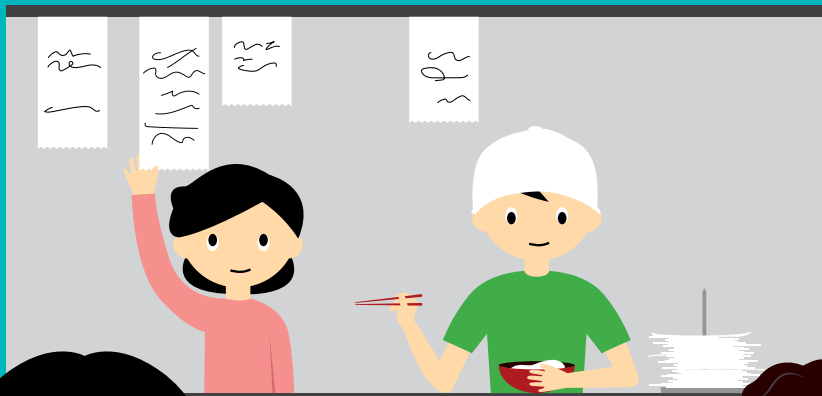
**To Ranja, Grace, and Johnny**

– EK

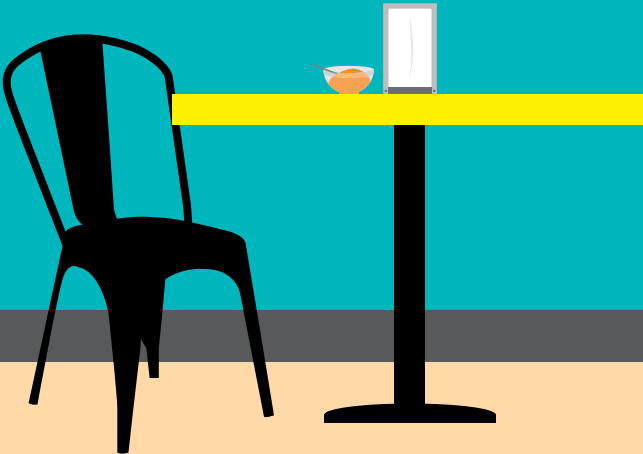
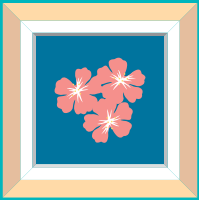
**To the world's future social workers, activists, and healers**

– MC

My family owns a Korean restaurant.  
My mom takes orders while my dad  
cooks, and my grandma watches  
over my baby brother.



Me, I greet our guests.  
I like that. Everyone  
calls me Sung-jee.



**But, normal days like these  
are changing quickly  
because of COVID-19.**

At school, my teacher said that we were no longer going to be coming to school because the virus was spreading. Instead, we would have to stay home. We had a lot of questions.

WHAT IS  
COVID-19?

WHERE  
DID IT COME  
FROM?

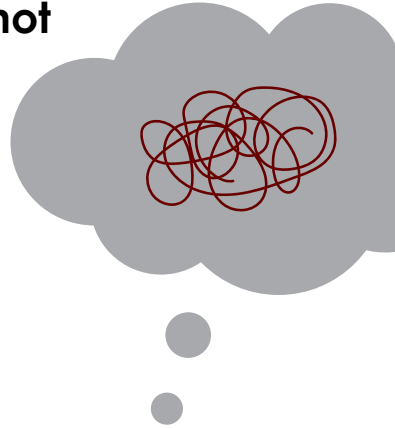
HOW LONG IS  
SCHOOL GOING TO  
BE CLOSED FOR?



**A classmate  
turned and said,  
“This is your fault.”**

**I felt shame.**

**I knew something  
was wrong but not  
sure why.**

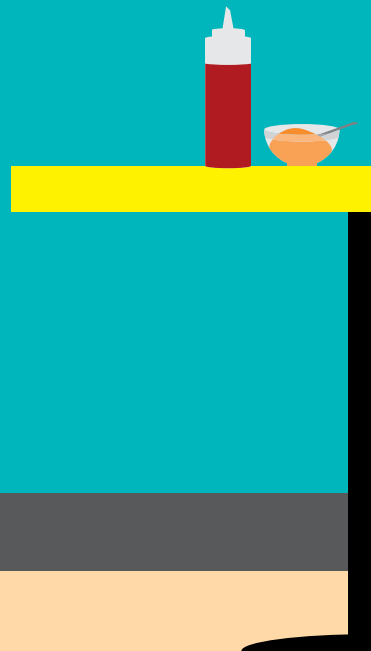


When I arrived back at the restaurant, I shared what had happened with my family. “Is something wrong with me?” I asked.

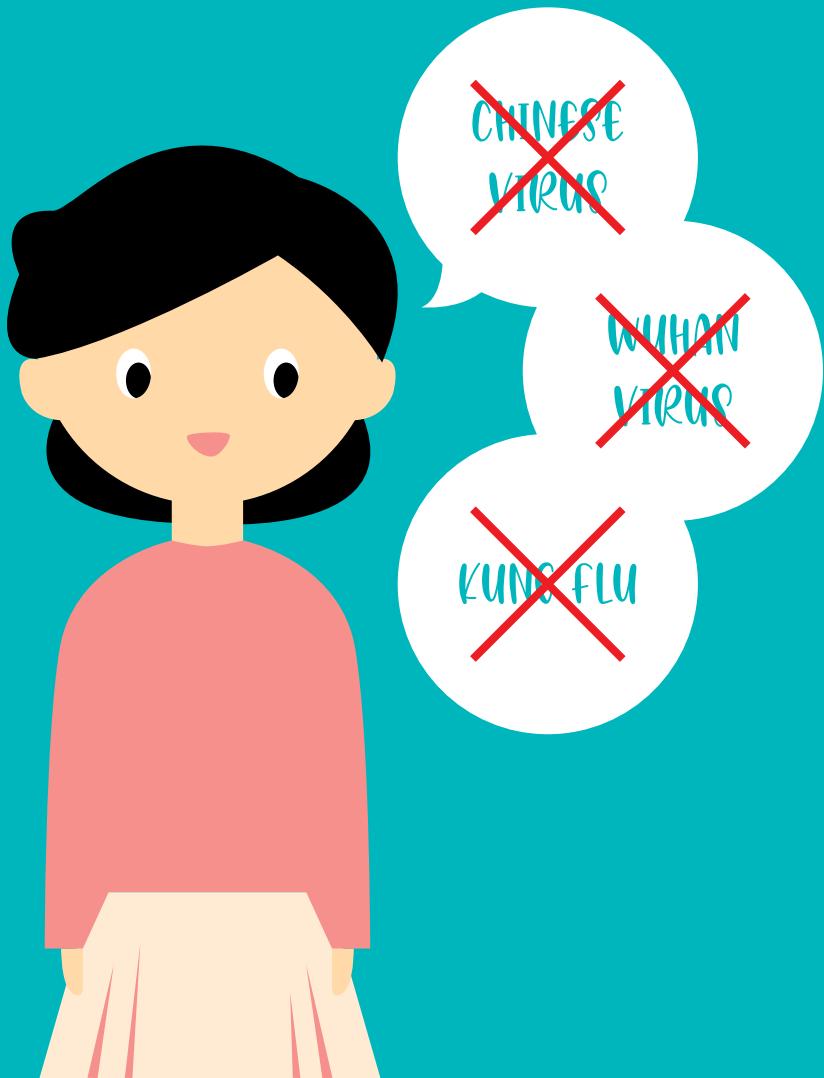


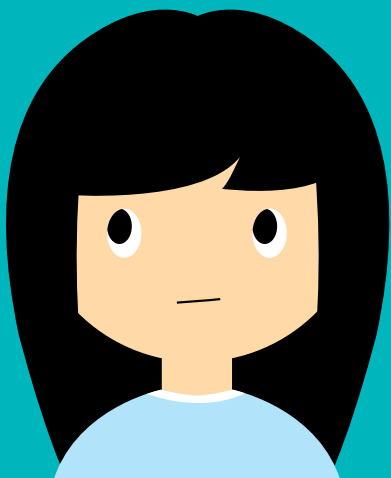


My dad said, “Oh sweetheart, COVID-19 is spreading all over the world. People are very scared. Some are even angry because they believe that Asians have caused the virus and are spreading it.”



Mom added, “Your friends may blame you for spreading the virus because of the way you look. This is called racism. Their actions and words really hurt. But, the truth is anyone can get and spread the virus.”





My grandmother chimed in,  
“Sung-gee, COVID-19 is not your  
fault. There is nothing wrong with  
you. You can be proud of being  
Korean, our culture, and our  
heritage. Let’s work on treating  
others with fairness and respect.”

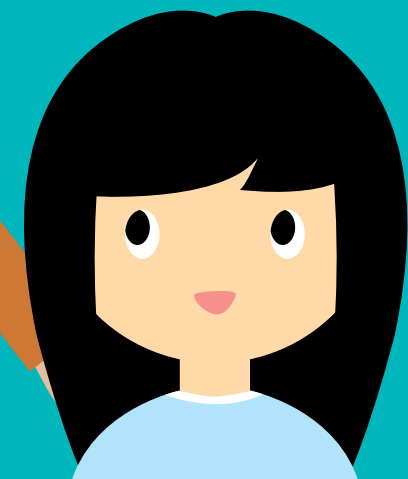
EQUITY

ANTI-RACISM

JUSTICE



After hearing this, I felt better inside because I stopped thinking there was something wrong about how I looked, about being me, about being Asian American.



The next day at the park, I saw a small group of kids calling Jingyi, my friend from China, names for spreading the virus.

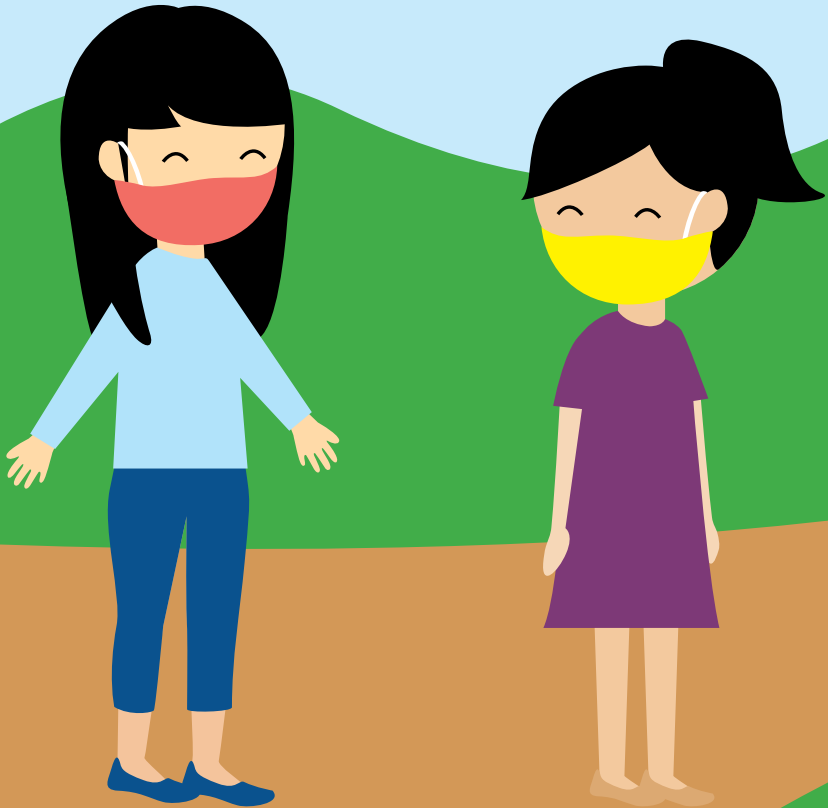


**From a distance I said, “It’s not okay to blame Jingyi for COVID-19 when anyone can get it. To say that Asians spread the virus is unfair, unkind, and disrespectful.”**



**The kids apologized and left.**

I said to Jingyi, “What’s happening isn’t your fault. What they did was very hurtful. Nothing’s wrong with you, Jingyi. You can be proud of being Chinese.”



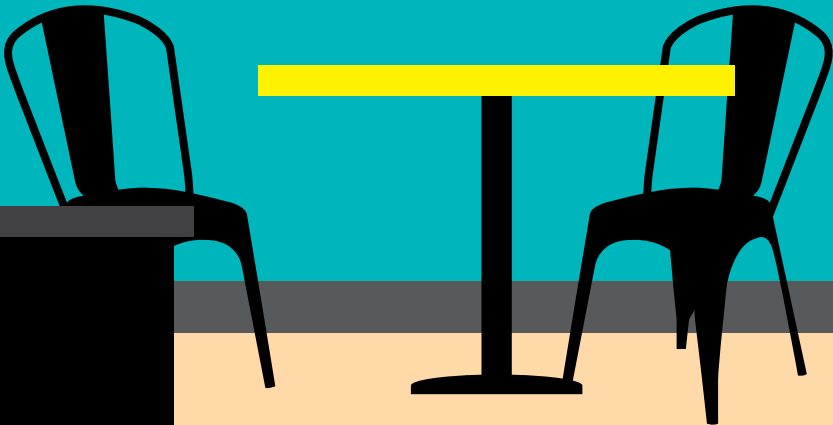
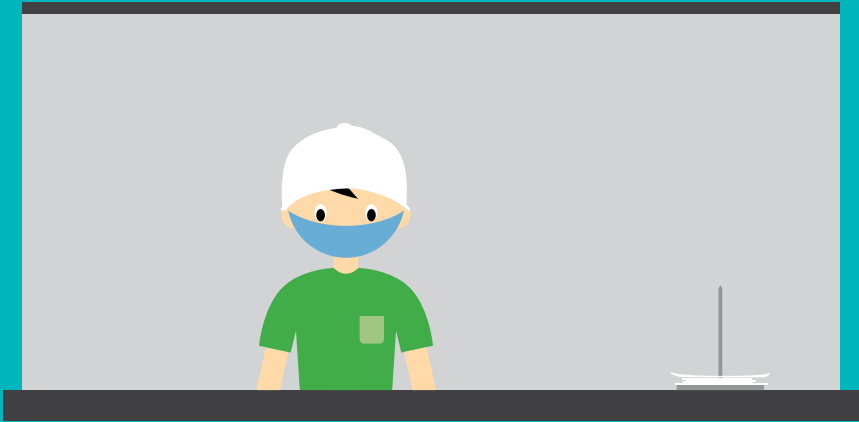




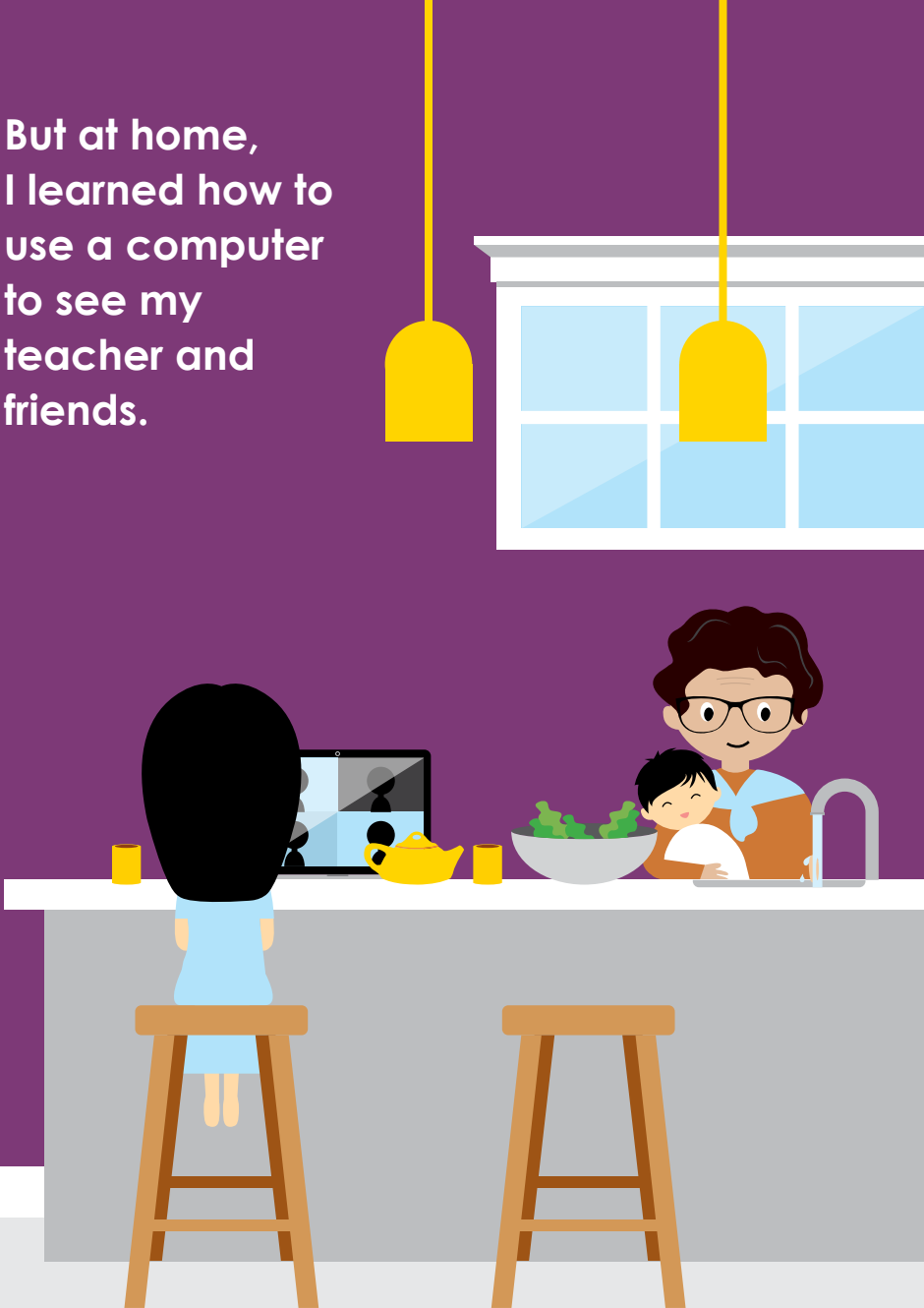
Let's treat all people with fairness and respect and be there for each other like those at the protest.”

Jingyi agreed as we both walked home.

At the restaurant,  
there were fewer  
and fewer customers.



But at home,  
I learned how to  
use a computer  
to see my  
teacher and  
friends.



I also helped my grandma cook and  
played with my baby brother.

Last night, I went into my brother's room, where he was fast asleep. I bent over his crib and whispered in his ears. "You're beautiful and perfect. I love you. Let's be proud of who we are!"

GOOD  
NIGHT!



# ABOUT

**Joyce Y. Lee (she/her/hers)** is a doctoral candidate in the Joint PhD Program in Social Work and Psychology at the University of Michigan, studying family processes that benefit children, especially children of color and those from family backgrounds with low income. She is also a licensed clinical social worker in the State of Michigan, serving children and families involved in child welfare.

**Emily Ku (she/her/hers)** is a current masters candidate in social work at the University of Michigan focusing on Community Organizing and Social Systems. Her interest meets at the intersection of storytelling and community change. In the future, she hopes to work with women and girls from different social, economic, diverse, global, and cultural communities to focus on well-being and education efforts for social justice change.

**Maggie Chen (she/her/hers)** is a social worker and artist. Whether she is facilitating youth programs, engaging with clients as a mental health therapist, or creating graphic design strategies, she loves listening to other people's dreams and collaborating on how to bring those dreams to life. She earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Social Work from the University of Michigan.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank Daniel S. Bai at the Ann Arbor Public Schools, the Asian Pacific Islanders Social Work Coalition at the University of Michigan School of Social Work, and Dr. Michael S. Spencer at the University of Washington School of Social Work for providing helpful feedback on previous versions of this book.



# APPENDIX

## Tips for Asian American parents and caregivers: Helping children cope with racism during COVID-19

1. Know that it is never too early to have a conversation about race and racism with your child.<sup>1</sup> Listen to your child and ask questions. Be attentive to what your child is sharing and use follow-up questions to see what they are hearing, seeing, and feeling.<sup>7,8</sup>
2. Use developmentally appropriate language to make abstract concepts like racism concrete. For example, preschoolers understand the concept of fairness pretty well.<sup>8</sup> Try describing racism as one group being treated better or worse than another group based on race. You can add that unfair rules, ideas, and behaviors stemming from racism need to be corrected so that everyone is treated fairly.<sup>8</sup>
3. Be proactive, instead of reactive, in talking about racism.<sup>2</sup> Be honest and open with your child. This allows your child to build trust in you and feel secure about coming to you with their concerns and questions.<sup>8</sup>
4. Know that when things about COVID-19 are unsaid, children may fill in the gaps with their own interpretations, which may not always be accurate. Directly share important facts with your child that can help decrease stigma.<sup>3,10</sup> For example, share that Asians are no more likely than other race groups to catch and spread COVID-19.<sup>9,10</sup>
5. Describe your child's emotions to help them label what they are feeling inside.<sup>4</sup> For example, you can try saying, "It sounds like you're feeling really sad about what happened to you today."

6. Help your child develop positive ethnic-racial identity by teaching them about the culture, history, and heritage of their ethnicity and help them feel proud about belonging to their ethnic group.<sup>11,5</sup> Positive ethnic-racial identity can help buffer against the effects of discrimination.<sup>5</sup> Ethnic-racial identity in Asian American children has been linked with lower levels of behavior problems and depressive symptoms and higher levels of happiness and self-esteem.<sup>6,11</sup>
7. Use the *Acknowledge, Validate, and Reframe* strategy to talk about COVID-19 related discrimination.<sup>15</sup> Acknowledge what happened, Validate your child's feelings, and Reframe the event to prevent your child's internalization of incorrect messages.<sup>12,15,19</sup> Consider reporting the discriminatory incident to Stop AAPI Hate.<sup>13</sup>
8. Teach your child to Use Your WITS strategy when faced with COVID-19 related discrimination. This involves *Walking away, Ignoring the perpetrator, Talking it out (if it is safe to do so), and Seeking help and support*.<sup>12,16</sup>
9. Be a role model for your child. For example, avoid stereotyping and making generalizations about people groups. Instead, talk about the individual and what they each did.<sup>14</sup> Recognize differences, including skin color, and celebrate diversity while also acknowledging things that are common amongst people.<sup>8</sup>
10. Support your child to do things that will make them feel good and strong. Create ample opportunities for your child to play and relax.<sup>18</sup>



# REFERENCED RESOURCES

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13. Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council. (2020). *Stop AAPI hate reporting center*. <http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/stop-aapi-hate>

14. Rhodes, M. (2017). *Combating stereotypes: How to talk to your children*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/combating-stereotypes-how-to-talk-to-your-children-71929>

### Videos:

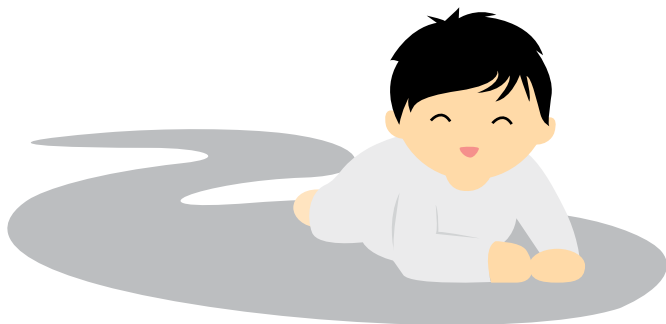
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# CHILD-FRIENDLY DEFINITIONS OF SOME “BIG” WORDS

**Anti-Racism:** The belief that all race groups are equal and actions that fight against racism

**Asian American:** An American having origins in East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, or the Pacific Islands

**Black Lives Matter (BLM):** A global movement focused on fighting all violence against Black people and building power to bring justice, healing, and freedom to Black individuals, groups, and communities all around the world

**COVID-19:** A disease caused by a virus that spreads from one person to another

**Equity:** Being fair to everyone

**Justice:** Doing what is right

**Racism:** The belief that one group should be treated better or worse than another group based on race and actions that stem from this belief

**Physical Distancing:** A fancy word for staying at least six feet apart when around other people to avoid the spread of COVID-19