

**DISCUSSION
GROUP WORKBOOK**



VILLAGE OF WISDOM

WHAT IS BLACK GENIUS?

It is VOW's belief that Black learners' performance is in direct correlation with the cultural relevance of their learning environment. Anytime an element is being compromised there are immediate and/or long-term consequences for the child's racial identity and academic performance. After listening with Black parents and caregivers, VOW matched their wisdom with evidence-based research to determine what a culturally relevant learning environment looks like. Together, we determined that cultural relevance can be qualified by the following elements:

- * **INTEREST AWARENESS**
- * **MULTI-CULTURAL NAVIGATION**
- * **RACIAL IDENTITY**
- * **SELECTIVE TRUST**
- * **SOCIAL JUSTICE**
- * **CAN-DO ATTITUDE**

WHAT IS A BLACK GENIUS PROFILE?

A Black Genius Profile (BGP) captures Black learners' genius using the language of the elements. Parents typically complete a Black Genius profile for their child(ren) for a number of reasons, including but not limited to:

1. as an advocacy tool when a child is being treated unfairly or being deprived of opportunities at school,
2. as a cultural tool to help the teacher learn how to be more responsive to the child's culture when teaching
3. as a personal learning tool for the parent to learn more about the child's interests, skills, expectations, strengths, and growth areas in order to support the child's healthy development.

Whatever your reason may be for completing a Black Genius profile, you should expect to learn something new about your child. It is a good idea to complete this profile with the input of your child as much as possible. Take time to reflect on each question, write your thoughts as they come, and answer ALL questions. There are no wrong answers!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Please use this workbook to support you as you complete your Black Genius Profile. Because everyone approaches this exercise differently, we want to encourage families to really make the process your own. For each element you can find:

ELEMENT "DEFINITION" We provide a definition of the element as we currently understand it. Because we are always learning from our Village, we like to leave the elements open for folks' individual interpretation. This "definition" is just to get your wheels turning.

ANCESTOR QUOTE Who better to learn from than our Black Genius Ancestors? We provide a short quote from an Ancestor to capture the Spirit of the element.

BLACK GENIUS PROFILE QUESTIONS - We've included questions from the BGP that match the element being discussed.

JOURNAL ENTRY / REFLECTION - Black Genius is ever evolving, so we love to learn what Black Genius means to you! Capture your thoughts and ideas about what you've discovered and save them to share with your family, community, or at a Wisdom Wednesday Discussion Group.

WISDOM WEDNESDAY DISCUSSION GROUP

This six-week engagement provides the opportunity for Black families to unpack the Black Genius framework one element at a time. The space also functions as an opportunity for parents to connect to other Black families prioritizing the positive racial identity formation of their student(s).

To learn more about the Wisdom Wednesday meeting schedule please contact Taylor Webber-Fields at twebberfields@villageofwisdom.org

INTEREST AWARENESS

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO? WHY?



"The things we truly love stay with us always, locked in our hearts as long as life remains."

- Josephine Baker

When students are engaged with materials that match their interests, they are more motivated to succeed. It's important to check in periodically on students' evolving interests to see where there might be potential for career goals! At VOW, we believe that interests can be uncovered in conversations with students, the activities that they're drawn to, and even the clothes that they wear. Parents and instructors are encouraged to ask about and keep an eye out for these interests, working to integrate them into students' learning environments.

BGP QUESTIONS

1. List 3-5 go-to activities/interests your child has.
2. List 3-5 careers your child has potential or interest in.
3. List 3-5 objects or activities that your child is showing a new interest in.

TIPS & HELPFUL HINTS

Children's interests are ever-evolving. Be sure to check in every once in a while to see how your students' interests are changing and why.

Interests are oftentimes easily observed in students' entertainment choices. When given the time and space, what is your child's go-to activity? Who's their favorite cartoon character? What subject makes their eyes light up when you ask them about it?

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RACIAL

PRIDE

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BEING BLACK?

“Black skin is not a badge of shame, but rather a symbol of...greatness.”

- Marcus Garvey

Increasing the number of positive images and messages a Black child is exposed to decreases the impact of negative ideas about Blackness and interpersonal racism.

Black students who receive frequent and consistent racially affirming messages from their parents are more likely to have greater academic performance and self-esteem (Neblett, Phillip, Cogburn and Sellers 2006). VOW encourages families to explore racial identity with their children, building them up and arming them with a positive knowledge of Self.



BGP QUESTIONS

1. List 3 feelings your child associates with being Black (Report positive and/or negative feelings as they apply).
2. List 3 cultural things/traditions your child associates with being Black.
3. List 3-5 Black role models/figures that inspire your child.

TIPS & HELPFUL HINTS

1. “How do YOU feel about Blackness?” This is often the section where parents have to check-in with themselves about their own feelings about Blackness. Because we don’t usually have the time to sit and think about the layers of our Black experience, this is a great time to fill out the profile for yourself as well!
2. There are no wrong answers. From comments about skin tone or hair to the people they most associate with, children observe and make meaning of race all the time. Whatever associations your child makes with Blackness comes from their own experience and approaching these questions with curiosity and an open-mind can open up a groundbreaking dialogue for families.

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CAN-DO

ATTITUDE

HOW DO YOU REACT TO CHALLENGES AND FAILURE?

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember you have the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”

- Harriet Tubman

Grit and determination are important, but they don't exist in a vacuum. Students must be encouraged and nurtured in their learning environments in a way that also embraces “failure” as a learning opportunity. Black students in particular, face the added threat of stereotyping that suggests Black students are more prone to failure when in fact they are not. Stereotype threat can impact a student's willingness to even try. We must create learning environments that embrace different learning styles and hold high expectations with the emphasis of trying as a measure of excellence.



BGP QUESTIONS

1. List 1-3 ways that your child defines success.
2. List 1-3 ways or strategies your child uses to overcome challenges related to their interests.
3. List 3 things that contribute to an environment being productive or creative for your child.
4. List 1-3 signs that your child needs help with something.
5. List 1-3 ways you'd like for your child to improve in school.
6. List 1-3 ways your child's teacher(s) could be more supportive of your child.

TIPS & HELPFUL HINTS

1. When you think about a time your child learned something new or challenging, what were the things in place that made them feel comfortable to try? Where were they? Who was around? How did they learn it? These are all clues into ways to support your child's learning.
2. Growth mindset is another way VOW talks about Can-do-Attitude. What does your child already believe about their abilities as a student? As a Black student? Interrogating these beliefs are a great starting point.
3. Think about a recent goal that your child set. Did they achieve it? If so, why or why not?

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MULTI-CULTURAL NAVIGATION

HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU WITH DIFFERENT CULTURES?



“Differences are not intended to separate, or to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another.”

-Desmond Tutu

The culture that Black students experience at home and/or in their communities, is oftentimes not reflected in the classroom setting. Instead, students are required to conform to a set of norms that uphold standards of Whiteness. At VOW, we encourage the exploration of various cultures while honoring the unique value of each. We believe that Black children should be able to navigate different cultures without forfeiting any part of their own.

BGP QUESTIONS

1. List 1-3 ways your child can be their full self at home versus in school.
2. List 1-3 things your child does when they are in an unfamiliar place (e.g., different country, culture, home etc.)

TIPS & HELPFUL HINTS

1. “Code-switching” has a close association with Multicultural Navigation in that it looks at the ways Black children assimilate or adjust to White culture. Multicultural navigation though, also looks at how non-Black spaces incorporate Black cultures.

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SELECTIVE TRUST

WHAT MAKES YOU TRUST PEOPLE?

“Students don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.”

-Anonymous

Did you know that our ability to learn is directly connected to feeling loved and cared for? At VOW, we describe this phenomenon as Selective Trust. When students feel cared for by their instructors, their trust levels increase making it easier for them to receive instruction, try new concepts, and receive feedback! These are key ingredients for a healthy learning partnership that we often take for granted. As with any relationship, instructors must earn trust from students -- not just expect it.

BGP QUESTIONS

1. List 1-3 things you have taught your child to look for when learning to trust someone.
2. List 1-3 ways a teacher or other mentor can gain your child’s trust.

TIPS & HELPFUL HINTS

1. Remember that, children have their own “spidey senses” about who to trust and who not to. Paying attention to the people your child confides in are a good window into your children’s feelings around support and safety.
2. Trust comes with time and intention.
3. Be mindful of any blockages that may keep you from trusting individuals who truly have your child’s best interests at heart. For instance, if you had a bad experience in school try not to let that put limitations on what your student can have for an experience.



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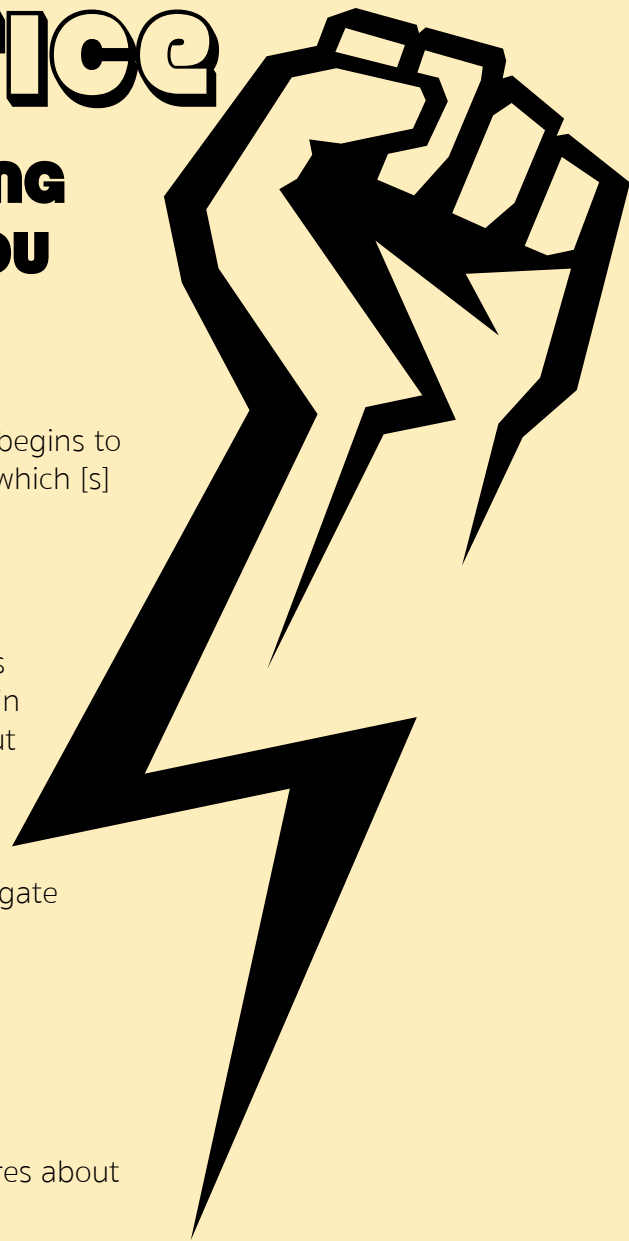
SOCIAL JUSTICE

WHAT'S AN ISSUE IMPACTING YOUR COMMUNITY THAT YOU CARE ABOUT?

“The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which [s] he is being educated.”

- James Baldwin

We want to encourage our students to see themselves as active citizens and to be motivated to shape our society in positive ways. Teaching Black students the “what” without the “how” of our society, leaves too much room for them to believe that the world they have inherited is the way it has to be. Connecting the dots and educating students about their communities invites them to interrogate those systems and create new ones!



BGP QUESTIONS

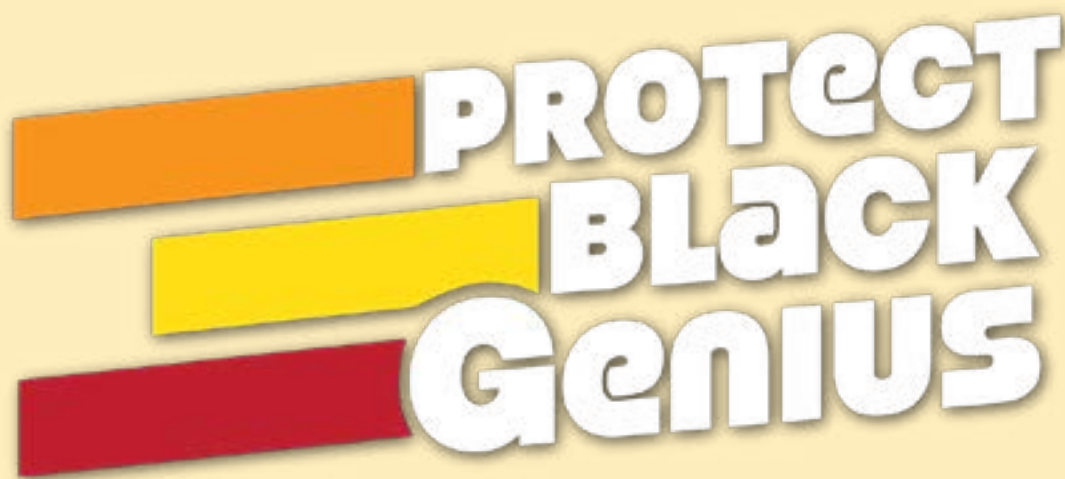
1. List 3 causes or social justice topics your child cares about

TIPS & HELPFUL HINTS

1. Looking at historical figures that your child identifies with could offer insight into the types of causes your child might be interested in.
2. Are there issues in your community that your child seems preoccupied with like homelessness, animal rights or environmental changes? Linking these phenomena to systemic issues help students see their agency in preventing the problem.

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**PROTECT
BLACK
GENIUS**

**THANK YOU FOR TRUSTING US
WITH THIS PIECE OF YOUR
BLACK GENIUS JOURNEY!**

Learn more about Village of Wisdom and Black Genius at
Villageofwisdom.org | Blackgenius.com