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Also available as an e-book



Photo by Ebru Yildiz

Grammy Award winner **RHIANNON GIDDENS** celebrates Black history and culture in her unflinching and uplifting picture book debut, gorgeously illustrated by Monica Mikai.

## IDENTITY EXPLORATION

The concept of identity is complex and nuanced. Our identities and lived experiences shape who we are. You might define *identity* for children as the qualities and traits that make a person who they are.

Invite students to create an identity web that is reflective of their identity. Model this by sharing parts of your identity on your own identity web. Include what can be seen, such as skin color, and what can't be, such as racial and cultural backgrounds, language, relationships, and activities you love.

Because identity is fluid, not fixed, and can change across contexts, spaces, and time, provide opportunities for students to revisit their identity web throughout the year and revise in ways that feel authentic to who they are at the time.

## DISCUSSIONS THROUGH THE LENS OF IDENTITY

Read *Build a House* with students. During a rereading of the book, invite students to lean in to the power of their identities to help them think more deeply about perspectives, events, and experiences. Provide guiding questions to support this work, such as:

- What are you learning about the resilience and ingenuity of Black people?
- Which part of your identity helps you connect with this story most strongly? Why?
- Which part of your identity helps you to more deeply understand the story? In what ways?
- Which part of your identity might be limiting you from understanding part of the story? How might you work through this challenge?

## MUSIC AS A FORM OF ACTIVISM

Access the QR code in the back of the book and have students listen to Rhiannon Giddens and Yo-Yo Ma perform “Build a House.” Invite students to discuss the song.

- What do you notice? What do you wonder?
- In what ways are the song and the book similar and different?
- In what ways are your responses to the song and to the book similar and different?
- What does the song invite you to feel and do? What does the book invite you to feel and do?

Select a particular decade in United States history to explore how Black creators use their musical brilliance as a form of activism. Students might also listen to songs that span a broader period of time. Invite students to discuss the meaning and message Black creators share about humanity.

### SAMPLE 1970s SONGS

Nina Simone, “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” (1970): <https://youtu.be/bIUxpTyQvWo>

Marvin Gaye, “What’s Going On” (1971): <https://youtu.be/H-kA3UtBj4M>

Gil Scott-Heron, “Revolution Will Not Be Televised” (1971): <https://youtu.be/vwSRqaZGsPw>

Stevie Wonder, “Living for the City” (1973): [https://youtu.be/Nu95a\\_RiH54](https://youtu.be/Nu95a_RiH54)

The Pointer Sisters, “Yes We Can Can” (1973): <https://youtu.be/w62rqCI3OoQ>

## PRESERVING YOUR STORY

Encourage students to be creators who have the power to tell their own stories. Invite students to listen to Rhiannon Giddens discuss the ways “art can challenge and transform and inspire” on the MacArthur Foundation website (<https://tinyurl.com/ysm5cb8w>). Ask students:

- What message does she share about preserving our stories and the various ways we can do so?
- What medium (oral storytelling, music, writing, art, dance, technology, etc.) brings you the most joy?
- How have you used that medium? How might you?
- What is your story and the unique way only you can tell it?

Have your students use the mediums they love to put their own story down!



Watch the Candlewick Black Creators series to learn more about RHIANNON GIDDENS.  
[BlackCreatorsSeries.candlewick.com](https://BlackCreatorsSeries.candlewick.com)

Tip sheet developed by Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul, founder of Red Clay Educators