The Adopted Child’s Experience in Schools and Methods to Improve it.
Elementary Education Honor’s Thesis
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INTRODUCTION

I started my junior year at Wheaton College with an idea that I had developed the previous summer. My work with Touched By Adoption, an organization based in Connecticut that aims to “strengthen the wellbeing of families formed through adoption,” inspired this idea. The plan was to write a children’s book about adopted kids, which would incorporate different types of families and to include some type of “curriculum” with it. This curriculum and book would then be published and distributed to classrooms across the United States to give students with a non-heteronormative biological (non-traditional) living situation a sense of inclusion and acceptance.

The book and curriculum would serve as a resource for teachers, who, while required to be educated in numerous areas such as special education and teaching English Language Learners (ELLs,) are not necessarily required to learn anything about the development of children from non-traditional families. As an education major, I decided to address this obvious gap in the curriculum, because it seems that non-traditional families have become the norm in our society, rather than the outlier.

In the fall semester of 2015, I met with the Dean of First Year students, Jocelyn Emerson, in a typical meeting to discuss our summers. Throughout my undergraduate years, I have developed a relationship with Dean Emerson through my involvement in the Precepting Program, she has become one of my “go to” resources when I am facing adversity. Once I mentioned my idea, her face lit up and she told me that I should consider writing an Honor’s Thesis about my project. Soon after that, I met with my advisor, Mary-Lee Griffin, and I told her about the idea. I asked her if she would be willing to be my thesis advisor, as I wanted to write this thesis through the Education
Department. Many meetings later, I sent a proposal to the education department and the ball started rolling.

Having been adopted, I have always wanted to help other adoptees in any way that I can. I was fortunate enough to be adopted into an amazing family with an incredible support system, and I was lucky to have attended the school district I did. As fortunate as I have been, I have always been acutely aware of the struggles that some other adopted or foster children have to endure. When I first met Risa Werner, from Touched By Adoption, I knew right away that this was a great opportunity for me to use my experiences to help others who might not have been as fortunate as me.

As I worked on the proposal and ultimately the thesis during the spring semester of my junior year, Mary-Lee and I decided to name the curriculum a unit of study. This allowed me to work on the unit more freely than a curriculum and add only the parts that I felt were necessary and user friendly for teachers. I wanted this resource to be easily accessible for teachers and universally inclusive.

In the summer of 2016, I held an internship at ‘r Kids Family Center, a nonprofit that works with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to promote “positive development, permanency, safety and stability for children and families.” Each and every member of the strong team at ‘r Kids Family Center inspired me to continue my determination to help other adoptees and children who grew up with difficult backstories. Through my internship with ‘r Kids Family Center, I was able to meet many children as well as parents who had been involved with DCF in different capacities. Meeting people who could be directly impacted from the work I was doing on my thesis made my aspirations for this project come to life in a way that continued to encourage me.
My project aims to ultimately enhance the understanding that teachers have about students who come from non-traditional families, especially adopted children, as well as work to promote acceptance and inclusivity among children who come from many different backgrounds and living situations.

Although the idea started as a book and a unit specifically on the adopted child, it ultimately turned into a book and unit that tried to be as inclusive as possible. The children’s book includes families created through adoption, kinship care, divorce, families with same sex parents, military parents, multiracial parents, and a family that is traditional with two heterosexual parents and a biological child. The unit also includes lessons that are favorable not just for adopted children but children from all different family types as well.
LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many kinds of adoptions within the United States. There are formal adoptions through public agencies, private agencies, or independently arranged through a third party (Stolley, 1993). According to the websites for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2014, there were 50,644 adoptions of children with public child welfare agency involvement in the United States. This is a decrease from the number of adoptions reported in 2005, which was 51,625. While the number of public agency adoptions has decreased, the exact number of private or independent adoptions is still unknown. It is guessed that there is about 1.4 million children in schools that are labeled as, “adopted child.” (Vandivere, 2009)

Research demonstrates that a higher proportion of adopted children receive some sort of mental health treatment (Bower, 1994). According to Bower, 2% of Americans under 18 are adopted, but these children make up 5% of the patients receiving psychotherapy. Many of the studies that Bower cites show that adopted children tend to “display overall psychological adjustment comparable to that of nonadopted controls,” but the number of children in mental health treatment continues to remain proportionally higher.

In August of 1994, the Uniform Adoption Act was approved by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL) and endorsed by the American Bar Association House of Delegates and its Family Law Section. (Hollinger, 1995) This act was revolutionary in the adoption world, with Hollinger pointing out the 10 most significant elements. These significant elements include specific protections of minors, birthparents and their families, and also protections of adoptive families. The
Uniform Adoption act was particularly noteworthy, since many states did not have the protections of those parties in place before the act. According to Hollinger, as of July 1995, there were at least 12 states enacting parts of the Uniform Adoption Act. Since the Uniform Adoption Act was introduced, there have been more colloquial conversations about adoption and it has gotten more attention in the last 20 years. The increase of attention on adoptions, internationally and domestically, is particularly important, as it helps to raise awareness about adoption related issues such as the development and assimilation of adopted children into the classroom.

Although adoption is a widely known topic, it is important to note that it is not widely understood. Adoption has become more mainstream through the years, bringing more questions to the table and more attempts to understand the effects adoption has on individuals. While many studies suggest adopted children may experience difficult transitions, the studies examining parental opinions seem to suggest the opposite. For example, in a study done by Castle and colleagues (2009), the satisfaction of adoptive parents was overwhelmingly positive when the child was about 11 years old. Adopted children are also generally shown to have more financial stability than children who are born to premarital mothers (Bachrach, 1986). Though these statistics may be valid, it is important to note the difficulty many adopted children have adjusting to life after adoption. As these two studies show, the exterior of an adopted child’s life may look settled, but we also have to be aware of internal facts and struggles. (Castle et al, 2009; Bachrach, 1986).

There has been minimal psychological research done on the experiences adopted children have, specifically in school. That being said, there has been some significant
research conducted about the development of adopted children and how they relate to their peers. According to a study by Van Londen et al (2007), “a substantial minority of adoptees develop disorganized attachment, which is associated with lower levels of concurrent developmental functioning.” This finding could be beneficial, not only for clinical psychologists, but also for all of the people present in the adopted child’s life.

Even though Van Londen’s study was limited to international adoptees who were adopted before their first birthday, the study found some very significant findings. In this population, the children were not at a higher risk for “infant attachment security” than children who stay with their birthparents. However, the chance that the children were “disorganized” was significantly higher for the adopted children than normative children (Van Londen et al, 2007). A disorganized attachment puts the child at a higher chance of having behavior and cognitive problems as they grow up (Van Londen et al, 2007). Attachment disorders often result in life-long problems, which can include,

- “low self-esteem,
- being needy, clingy, or pseudo-independent,
- decompensating while facing stress and adversity,
- Lacking self control,
- Inability to develop and maintain friendships,
- Alienation from and opposition to, parents, caregivers, and other authority figures,
- Difficulty with genuine trust, intimacy, and affection, etc.” (Orlans & Levy, 2014. Pg. 17-18)

The dissemination of the research on disorganized attachment as well as other disorders found in adopted children is essential. This could help ensure the mental health of adopted children, since the research shows they may be more susceptible to these types of disorders. Without widespread knowledge of these attachment disorders, children have
a chance of being significantly misunderstood while dealing with these difficult situations.

In his book, *Children's Adjustment to Adoption: Developmental and Clinical Issues*, David Brodzinsky (Brodzinsky et al, 1998) looks into the development of children who are adopted. Brodzinsky and his colleagues, Daniel W. Smith and Anne B. Brodzinsky, begin the book by talking about the lack of research done on the topic of adoption in the world of psychology. The authors continue the book talking about the history and theories, as well as the “Adoptive Family Life Cycle,” and some different types of adoption and adopted children. The section of the book labeled “Middle Childhood,” which they define at 6 to 12 years old, examines adopted children during those years. The adopted child, by about 7 or 8 years old, begins to realize the differences between their family and the families of many of their peers. (Brodzinsky et al 1998) Around this age, children are beginning to think critically and are learning to be problem solvers in their school setting. This proves to be difficult when non-adopted children begin to ask questions, and the adopted children also begin to think more critically about their individual situation. “Although individual children do react differently to their adoption or placement in foster care, all have developmental tasks, in addition to those of same-age peers, related to their unique family structure.” (Meese, 2012)

As children begin to understand and think about their unique situations, it can have an effect on their relationships with their family, as well as their emotional states (Brodzinsky et al, 1984). Brodzinsky’s study determined that while children at 4 years old were unaware of the specifics of adoption, children at 6 years old were able to grasp the concept. He goes on to state that between the ages of 8 and 11 years old, children
become aware of the unique qualities of their adoption. This awareness could either have a very positive outcome or a very negative outcome with not much room for children in the middle. Brodzinsky continues to back up his studies with new information, like in his paper, *Adjustment to adoption: A psychosocial perspective* (Brodzinsky, 1987) when he looks into, “the increased vulnerability of adopted children to behavioral and psychological problems.” Without the significant research that David Brodzinsky has conducted on adopted people and the differences between them and non-adopted people, we would not be aware of these differences. This research allows us to understand how we can research further to better assist adopted children in the school setting.

As an elementary school teacher in the state of Massachusetts, the state which is home to some of the best school districts in the country, some basic requirements that are mandatory include special education, teaching English language learners, and child development. Teachers are also required to take classes related to math, science, history, and reading/language arts. Among all of the requirements for a person to become a well-rounded teacher, there are no classes in regards to family structures or the possible backgrounds of the students you will interact with as you teach.

While psychology explores the development of children, it often focusses on how most children develop similarly, not always highlighting some significant differences between children with different backgrounds and normative children. “Adopted children appear to show the same cognitive potentials as their environmental comparisons, as these two groups do not differ in IQ. However, they are not able to catch up completely in school performance” (van IJzendoorn,, 2005). Since information such as van IJzendoorn’s study on *Adoption [as] a Successful Natural Intervention Enhancing*
Adopted Children’s IQ and School Performance may not be mentioned in these child development classes, teachers may not be equipped to handle diverse backgrounds of children that come into their classroom unless they have some personal experience with such children. One way that teachers can better understand the different situations that some children in their classroom come from, as well as help all of their students learn about these differences in a healthy and productive way, is through the literature.

Children’s books about accepting people who are different than you are critical for elementary students today. “When children are exposed to adoption picture books, they… are able to better understand the complexities of adoption and appreciate the special and unique factors that makes each of us “precious” within our own families” (Mattix 2011). The number of children’s books about adoption is quickly growing. While it is not difficult to find books about adoption and international adoption, there are not many available about how to be an adopted child in a set of peers who are not. Books on adoption come in all different shapes and sizes, ranging from children’s books to novels, and there is no shortage of “how to” parenting books when it comes to adopting children. “Quality children's literature containing adoption or foster care themes should not perpetuate myths or stereotypical images.” (Meese, 2012). In this article, Meese also suggests the power of specific books such as Star of the Week: A Story of Love, Adoption, and Brownies with Sprinkles. It is essential to find books that directly relate to the students you have in your classroom. Many authors have difficulty distinguishing foster parents and adoptive parents, causing the “crucial distinction between temporary foster care and the permanence of adoption [to be] blurred.” (Sharkey, 1998)
The amount of diversity represented in children’s literature is not only important for the children when they are in school, but also when they are at home. Inclusive literature is essential for the development of children’s acceptance of themselves and their peers. “Children spend as much as two fewer hours per week of learning time in [some] nontraditional family types” (Ono, 2010), which can mean less opportunity for those students to be exposed to literature that include characters similar to them.

Some books about adoption, such as *The Best Single Mom in the World: How I was Adopted*, or *My Mei Mei*, seem to be more about the parents than the child. These books appear to be created for the parents to feel comfortable with their decision to adopt a child more than for the child himself. They aim to reassure parents how loved their child is and often have happy and encouraging endings. It is important for the child to hear these stories too, but the parents seem to benefit the most with books like this. Another thing that I found difficult when reading the children’s literature around adoption is that the books are not generalizable. These books are directly for adopted children and their families. Even though it is extremely important for children to have books that are specifically tailored towards them, it is also important for children to learn about each other and how everyone is different. Recent research on the topic of inclusivity shows just how important that is.

Many inclusivity models begin with “a dualistic conceptualization of diversity” in order to raise awareness and incorporate the understanding of the group that is meant to be included. (Deluca, 2013). In that article, Deluca talks about the importance of shifting from a dualistic conceptualization to a process that “recognize(s) the complexity of cultural identification as non-static and multiple.” (Deluca, 2013). This approach to
inclusivity is especially important, because there are so many factors that create one’s identity, and there is not an all-inclusive way to identify an entire group of people, such as adoptees.

Looking through the available literature, there seems to be a lack of books for middle aged children. There are many outstanding picture books about adoption, such as, *Tell me again about the night I was born*, and *Every year on your birthday*, and countless more. However, even with these outstanding books, it was hard to find many books that were created at the reading level for children in the middle elementary grades. Most of the books that are currently available are appropriate to read to young children who are just learning about adoption and what it means to be adopted. These books can also be read by the adoptee once the child is a bit older, but once the children are introduced to the idea of adoption, there aren’t many follow-up books, or many books that have characters who represent them at all. Throughout my research, I found only a handful of books that included an adopted character, but many of them were mysteries in which the adoption played a role in solving the mystery.

At the libraries I visited, the librarians and I looked for “adoption” as a subject, and some of the books that we found through our searches were about adopting an a pet, or other types of adoption. I had to sift through the books we found to see which ones actually included an adopted child as a character. While searching, I did not find books that included an adopted character’s struggle with acceptance. Books that answer questions such as, “how are you different from your peers and what does that difference mean?” are so vitally important for students in their middle to upper elementary ages.
As children grow up, they begin to notice differences between others and themselves (Brodzinsky et al 1998). As well as noticing differences, “naming practices [of different nationalities] are often ignored and minimalized in children’s books” (Sweeney 2016), which can further dissociate the adopted child from his birth family. This information means that the adopted child is more likely to realize that their adoption makes them different, and there is not much besides family and friend support for those children to cling to.

According to Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development, children reach the ‘Concrete Operational Stage” around the ages of 7-11 years old. This age corresponds almost directly to middle elementary. Piaget’s theory claims that children at this stage start to think more logically, but they tend to have difficulty understanding abstract and hypothetical concepts. Also, children at this stage are moving away from the egocentric thoughts of the “Pre-operational Stage,” and they begin to think about how other people think and feel. This can cause insecurity in children that have different qualities than their peers. Children at this stage may feel that their peers will not accept them because of their differences.

Another widely known theory of development is Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development. At the early elementary age, Erikson states that children are struggling with “industry vs. inferiority.” Children at this stage begin to feel proud of their accomplishments if they are being praised for them. However, if children are being discouraged or feel that they are lesser than their peers in any way, they will be left with feeling of inferiority.

It is widely known that not everyone is good at everything, but students need to learn that their differences do not make them beneath their peers, but that the
diversity makes them each unique. Without being taught this by the adults in their lives, children may be stuck feeling inferior to their peers. Educators, as well as parents and caregivers, have the extremely important job of creating a sense of pride and self-love within their students and children in regards to their differences.

There is a high need for books that are more developmentally appropriate for middle elementary aged children about accepting the differences among them. Without such resources, there is a stronger likelihood that adopted children will feel more out of place with their peers as they begin to further develop.

While the majority of sources about adopted children’s development and achievement throughout their schooling is outdated, it is important to recognize that the inclusion of adopted children in schools is relevant now more than ever. With an increasing number of families brought together non-traditionally, the representation of these new families are essential when trying to create the most inclusive and accepting classrooms for our students.
INTERVIEWS

Analysis

When I decided what I ultimately wanted the result of this thesis to be, I realized that I was only coming at the project from my experience as an adopted person. In order to widen my lens about the experience of adoptees in the United States, I decided to conduct interviews. These interviews would serve as additional information for me to understand more of the facets that come along with being adopted. Knowing other adopted people throughout my life has always made me acutely aware of how similar someone could be to you while being so different at the same time. My intention behind these interviews was to get other opinions on what important information should be used when educating others about adoption.

Each interview began with a few demographic questions such as age and where the interviewee lives (see Appendix A). I also asked how old they were when they were adopted, which is a significant question for many reasons. It is generally understood that the older you were when you were adopted, the more difficult the transition might be into your adoptive family, as “age at adoption and previous adverse experiences or deprivation may make a substantial difference for the influence of the adoption experience” (van IJzendoorn, 2005). The adoptees I interviewed were between the ages of 19 and 22 and the age they were when they were adopted ranged from 2 days to 2 ½ years old. Four of the people that I interviewed were adopted internationally, two from China, one from Fiji, and one from Russia. The fifth adoptee was adopted domestically.

All five interviewees were given the chance to talk about a situation or situations that they remember from their childhood that was either positive, negative, or one of each that was specifically related to the fact that they were adopted. While all of the situations
were unique, they also seemed to all have one thing in common, which was the lack of awareness among non-adopted people. In the interviews, fellow classmates who were unintentionally ignorant were mentioned, as well as teachers who could have been more aware of possible situations that were represented in their classrooms. The fellow students and teachers of the adoptees interviewed were ignorant in many different ways. Many of the students did not know what adoption was or what it meant. They were also unaware of how to appropriately interact with an adopted person. All of my interviewees received comments from peers that indicated their lack of knowledge about adoption.

Some of these interactions included:

- “Your mom’s not even your real mom!”
- “Where are your real parents?”
- “Why did your parents put you up for adoption?”

When adult adoptees receive these questions, they are more likely to be able to answer them confidently and informatively, however, when these questions are asked by peers at a young age, it becomes a burden for the child to have to explain all of the time. This is a facet of themselves that should be celebrated. As one interviewee put it, “You learn to become a story-teller for your entire life, and it somehow makes other people feel entitled to know your history… like those little things always chip away at your sense of self and your sense of belonging in your family.”

The most common discussions across the board related to the fact that many teachers have little awareness of diverse families in the school unless they had a personal experience with that type of family. The adoptees that I interviewed each mentioned that educating teachers about non-nuclear families should be one of the first steps. Looking to
promote awareness among the children in the school would be the second step. As an educator, you cannot be helpful and informative if you are not aware that a problem exists. Hearing this from other adoptees validated the work I am doing to raise awareness of the experiences of the adopted child.

After discussing positive or negative situations from childhood, I asked the interviewees what they thought should be taught to teachers and others within our school systems about adopted children. Certain themes emerged: 1) The importance of teaching students that “you’re not alone” in the circumstances you face, 2) Teaching acceptance and understanding about other types of families, 3) Demonstrating that adopted kids are no different than any other child in your classroom, 4) Teaching students that we are all different, learning differently, and communicating a little differently, and 5) That in learning about differences, we become our better selves.

I found it really interesting that one of my interviewees mentioned that teachers should have to take a “difficult discussions” course. Stone, Heene, and Patton’s book, *Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most.*, shows us that teaching people how to have difficult discussions can lead to a plethora of positives (Stone, Heene, & Patton, 2010). In the Preface to the Second Edition alone, the authors discuss the huge range of people their first book (2000) helped. The authors explain how people such as parents, teachers, siblings, spouses, neighbors, businesses, and more were helped by the original book.

A difficult discussions course could be beneficial not only to teachers, but anyone working in a setting with other people. Not just students, but co-workers could have drastically different life experiences and learning how to talk about the hard stuff could
promote acceptance and inclusivity throughout the workplace. Many of my interviewees mentioned that the lack of awareness and understanding of adoption itself, not just in elementary school but even at the college level and in the workplace, was unbelievable to them. People don’t always become less ignorant as time goes on, and they are only forced to learn about something when it is presented to them. Many people are not taught about adoption unless it directly affects their lives, which is why we need to begin educating children at a young age. It would be irresponsible for us to expect the non-adopted people to learn about adoption on their own.

The most powerful answers came at the end of the interview, when I asked the interviewees about one take-away they would want teachers to know about adoption and adopted children in their classroom. Included in the answers were:

- “Part of your job is to take on a role that you might not at first want to take on, but in part of that, you have to also realize that… family isn’t by birth always…. you need to be a little bit more flexible also and understanding.”
- “We want to be accepted by both you and our peers.”
- “…be aware of what’s going on and what they might be going through… be aware of the other students and how they might be behaving.”
- “…yes, I am adopted, but I’m also [a] daughter, friend... promote the positives There are so many positives about it. Like I very likely would not have gotten to college.”
- “Adopted kids are just as loved as biological kids.”

After conducting these interviews, I think that my biggest take-away is a better understanding of others’ experiences as well as my own. My research has shown that education about the topic of adoption is seriously lacking, not just in my hometown, but
everywhere. If my book and unit could touch just five classrooms throughout the U.S. and help adopted children and children of non-traditional families in those classrooms, I would feel like my part in positively affecting those lives was worthwhile. We all have different experiences, but the education of educators about non-traditional families is so important in the 21st century. The experiences and needs of adopted children, as well as children with single parents, same sex parents, divorced parents, and many more deserve to be valued and represented in school just as much as nuclear families are. Non-nuclear families are becoming more and more common. These interviews revealed the disservices the education system is doing to the children and families by ignoring their background and experiences in the social curriculum of school.
The idea to write a children’s book about adopted kids began in the summer of 2015 at a lunch with Risa Werner and Susan Baron of Touched By Adoption. The conversation steered towards talking about what might really help adopted kids who struggle with their identity as they grow up. It is well known that growing up is tough. Very few people go through their lives without any struggle, and for kids who are “different,” it can be particularly difficult. How can we help those struggling? To me, the best way to do that is to look back on our lives, and ask ourselves, “What would have helped me? My friend? My sibling?” Children in elementary school often do a lot of reading in the classroom, as a class or individually, and they could be reading fictional chapter books, graphic novels, nonfiction books, or any other literature they are interested in.

The characters in these books may help the reader understand him/herself more or might just be fun characters that help the reader to step away from reality if only just for a few minutes. The stories that are portrayed in these books must also be relatable. Even superheros, as unrealistic some of their powers and actions may be, have relatable backstories. The strategic way authors create them to be easy to identify and empathize with is the reason they are so appealing to such a wide audience.

Throughout my work with Touched By Adoption, ‘r Kids Family Center, and my enrollment at Wheaton College, I have learned a lot about people who are dissimilar to me. I have always tried to push myself to learn more about people and communities that I have less experience with in order to be educated and understanding of situations other than my own. Although I was acutely aware of many differences between me and those
around me, I still had a lot to learn. While utilizing my experiences in these new settings and educating myself during those experiences, I became even more aware of the danger and negative impact that stereotypes have while encouraging separation among individuals rather than togetherness. My work at ‘r Kids, Touched By Adoption, and Wheaton has inspired me even more and convinced me that my perception on inclusivity is important. The realization of the importance of my book and unit assisted in my motivation to continue working on this project. The ultimate goal is to help the students who need this intervention in the system as soon as possible.

Some resources related to adoption as well as resources about other non-traditional families are very dated (see Literature Review). While some of the material is dated, the resources for middle elementary aged children are not as prevalent as the materials available to young adoptees, adoptive parents, or adult adoptees. There are many outstanding children’s books about adoption, including *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born* (Jamie Lee Curtis, 1996), *I Wished for You* (Marianne R. Richmond, 2008), *A Mother for Choco* (Keiko Kasza, 1992), just to name a few. However, the vast majority of these books are picture books to be read to young children or for very early readers. I also found some books for adults such as Brodzinsky’s, *Being adopted: The lifelong search for self* (1992), among others. While there are great resources out there for adopted children and their families, very few of these items are for students within the middle elementary ages.

Through my research, I found that the majority of the children in middle elementary school who come from non-traditional families are primarily ignored when it comes to the books they read. Many of the books at the middle elementary level have
very little representation of children similar to them. In my experience, this can cause some distress and a sense of exile among the students who feel underrepresented. As one adoptee stated, “I knew I was different and I didn’t really know why.” When it comes to how to change that, the same interviewee said that we should promote “that we all are different, we all learn differently, we all communicate a little differently, but then that’s how we become better for ourselves. And you can start that at a young age.”

When deciding the age group that I wanted to target with the book, it was my aim to create a book that would be easily accessible for middle elementary aged students to assist in the relatability and acceptance at their age level. It is important for students at all ages, but especially the young children who are beginning to be peer oriented, to gain a good sense of self. According to John W. Stantrock, “children’s self-understanding in middle and late childhood includes increasing reference to social comparison.” Stantrock (2007) suggests that students in elementary school also compare themselves to others. If they are different than their peers and are not encouraged to embrace those differences, students are less likely to to breed a “high self-esteem and a positive self-concept,” which Santrock says is especially important for children at this age. By bringing more literature into the classroom that promotes acceptance and understanding of differences, we can encourage all students to breed that high self-esteem and positive self-concept.

Knowing my audience would most likely be young students who would have a vast range of life experiences, I quickly decided that I didn’t want to just write about a child who was adopted. I wanted to make my book as inclusive as possible. With some help from three members of a support group at Touched By Adoption, I was able to create characters that came from a wide variety of experiences. I set out to include a
family brought together through adoption, a single parent family, a character with same-sex parents, a divorced family, a military family, a kinship family, a multiracial family, and a nuclear family. This way, the characters in my book would come with significantly different histories and still be able to come together as friends, providing children with a storyline that celebrates differences and embraces similarities at the same time. By representing all different family types in my book, I would be able to show my audience that there is no “normal.” Normal does not exist in our world, even though we still perpetuate the negative stereotypes that exclude the people who are different than us. It is important to recognize that each and every family is “normal” in its own way, and that is what my book aims to show.

When I began thinking through the creation of the book, I decided to first develop the characters. The three members of the “Touched by Adoption” support group helped me to develop the characters of Zane, Abby, and Lily. In April of 2016, we met and discussed their vision for these three characters. I asked them many questions in order to understand exactly how they wanted their characters to be represented. The questions included the character’s family type; personality; favorite food, animal, color, game; and what their appearance looked like. Once I knew the background of these three characters, I started to brainstorm the other characters. Many of the names as well as the backgrounds of the characters were inspired by a few of the many important people in my life. I was able to consult with them in order to determine exactly what I wanted the characters in my book to be represented by.

After the characters had been developed, I began to develop the storyline. I knew that I wanted my book to be read at a middle elementary level (grades 1-4), so I decided
that my characters would be in the fifth grade. In making the characters a bit older than the children who would be reading the book, my hope was that it would encourage my readers to look up to the characters and follow the trend of inclusivity the characters foster. From the beginning, this book was meant to promote inclusivity in the classroom as well as encourage positive conversations about our differences. In a time in history such as this one, where differences seem to constantly be exploited in a negative light, I felt that showing my readers the power of accepting differences and recognizing similarities at the same time was especially important. Without the juxtaposition of the characters’ differences and the addition of being brought together by their similarities, I feel that the book would not have had as much of an impact.

It didn’t take long for me, Abby, and Zack to come up with a name for the town the story would take place in and school the characters would attend. Harmonyville, and Harmonyville Elementary School. Ultimately in the storyline, the characters would come together in harmony, in more ways than one, which made the name just click.

From the start, the intention of the storyline was to have the kids end up unified despite their differences. Thus, I needed to think of something that would unify the characters. Based on both my love of music and the fact that each of the character descriptions I received from the mentors at Touched By Adoption had a musical interest, I decided that the event that would unify the characters would be a school talent show. Another reason I chose a talent show is because it is a common event, especially in elementary schools.

Talent shows help bring students together to celebrate their abilities and skills. Students love seeing what their classmates are capable of, and it is especially fun when
groups of students come together to perform an act. Although their differences seem to be too overbearing at first, the characters in my book would ultimately find commonalities between them and grow as friends because of it. The talent show would be the culmination of the book, as the classmates became bandmates and friends, working hard to compete in their school’s first annual talent show.

Although I already had the plot and the characters planned out, beginning the book proved more difficult than I thought it would. How do I interest my readers? What would the title be? I quickly decided I should wait until the end to create the title so I could wait and see how the plot developed through the writing process. In order to make an educated decision on the best way to start the book, I looked back at the children’s books that I reviewed as well as my literature review of the children’s books about adoption that have already been written. When I did this, I noticed there wasn’t much rhyme or reason to the beginning of a book. All of the books that I looked at started in their own unique way. It seemed to me, that the author's preference paired with their purpose for the story was what decided how a book was to begin. This realization helped me understand that this was my creation, and ultimately it was my choice how to begin the book.

Once I started the first chapter, I was amazed at how fast the story flowed. I had thought about the entire book, including the plot, setting, characters, and obstacles they might face, for so long that the words came out of my fingers onto the page magically. Writing the book was so important to me and helped me externalize what I have been feeling for so long. By the time I finished the book, I felt certain that it was going to help children who feel like their lives are underrepresented in the literature.
It took me a while to decide that I would make Zane, the adopted child, another character in the book rather than the focal point. As the adopted child, I know how it feels to be invisible in the literature. I did not want that feeling to be experienced by children from different types of families as well when they read my book. Although I tried to be as inclusive as possible, there are still families that were not represented in my book. I did not want to give any one family type more attention than the others, and tried to even out the playing field as much as possible when it came to the extent to which each family was portrayed throughout the book.

Another part of the book that was difficult to write was the ending. I was not sure whether I wanted United Harmony to win the talent show or to come in second. To me, winning the talent show would have been too cliche, but then I remembered my audience. Since I was aiming for my audience to be around 5-10 years old, I realized that if the students didn’t win the talent show, it might disappoint my readers. Throughout the book, they are rooting for this diverse group of children to persevere, become friends, and succeed in the talent show. Therefore, I ultimately decided that United Harmony would win the show. It was critical for me to find an ending to the story that would encourage my readers to embrace their differences and create friendships with all types of people.

The next steps for me are to illustrate, then publish my book. The goal is to make the book available to libraries, teachers, and individuals in order to promote inclusivity and acceptance inside as well as outside the classroom. I believe that the more exposure we have to people who are different than us, the greater the chance is that we will be accepting and understanding of them. Interactions with people who are different than you
and that defy stereotypes may provide the first steps in eliminating stereotypes and false beliefs within our society.

Once the book was completed, I decided to level the book. With help from Mary Lee Griffin, we decided to compare my book to others, using the Fountas and Pinnell levels. Reading the criteria for the K, L, M, and N, as well as comparing my book to series such as Pee Wee Scouts and Cam Jansen books, we decided that the book was a Level L.
DEVELOPMENT OF UNIT PLAN

What is now known as a Unit Plan, started out as a very loose idea from a lunch I had with Risa and Susan from Touched By Adoption in the summer of 2015. The conversation began when we realized that future teachers are not required to learn about different types of families. This absence in the curriculum of an education degree was baffling to me. This meant that the only way teachers would be empathetic towards students from non-traditional families would be if they had some type of personal experience with non-traditional families themselves. To Risa, Susan, and myself, this was unacceptable. The conversation quickly moved from what the issue seemed to be, to how we could change it.

Risa and Susan suggested that I write a curriculum that could either be taught to teachers about adoption or taught to students about adoption. It took me a long time to decide which of these options would most benefit the students I was targeting. The most important part of this endeavor was to keep in mind the students that have been directly affected by the losses and help them feel more included and confident about their situations. The direction I would go was contingent on how many students I felt I would be able to assist with my production of this curriculum. After a lot of thought and many meetings with my advisor, Mary Lee Griffin, I decided that the best route would be a unit of study. The unit would incorporate classroom lessons that are typically difficult for adoptees and would include a list of alternative lessons that were more inclusive to adopted children as well as children from non-traditional families. These lessons would be different options for teachers to utilize in their classrooms when their class included children who are raised in a nontraditional way.
Many teachers are left empty handed when thinking of alternative lessons to the traditional ones that have been proven problematic for either adopted children or any child within a non-traditional family. For example, when a science teacher in a story from my fourth interview didn’t consider the fact that she could be adopted, “…it didn’t even cross his mind that there could be some adopted kids in the classroom that couldn’t do it.” Teachers are required to learn about lesson differentiation, special education, and English language learners, and are encouraged to make their lessons as inclusive as possible, but there seem to be few materials to help teachers when it comes to including a variety of family types in their classroom. Historically, it was more taboo to have a non-traditional family, however, it is becoming more common for families today to be oriented in other ways. The rate of families that come together through adoption, foster care, same sex families, divorced families, multiracial families and in many other ways is on the rise. Unfortunately, the training of teachers is not changing as quickly as the demographics of the students. It is essential, now more than ever before, for teachers to have access to more options when aiming to include every student in their classroom.

My goal for this unit is to take traditionally well-loved lessons, and give teachers alternatives that wouldn’t necessarily take away the point or meaning of the original lesson. Many teachers have familiar lessons that most of the students in their class enjoy every year. However, most is not equivalent to all. Teachers should not have to sacrifice the well-being of some students in their class in order to make the majority happy. Without alternatives at hand, it may be difficult for teachers to come up with replacement lessons on the spot.
Teachers have many demands and responsibilities and may not always have time to think about how to be more inclusive than they already are. With this unit as a resource, they will be able to think about all of their students when planning to do one of the typically well-loved lessons. By retaining the purposes of the original lesson, these alternative lessons will still be well-loved, while being more culturally sensitive, especially when thinking about children from different families.

In thinking about how these plans would be implemented in the classroom, I decided that I would make a complete lesson plan for each topic and each alternative lesson I was providing. One of the lessons that came to mind the first, was the family tree. The family tree, has been widely seen as controversial for many years. In 1999, the New York Times published an article about a school teacher who saw that “traditional” family trees were no longer applicable for many of her students who come from non-traditional backgrounds (Holloway, 1999). Since it has been so controversial, it seemed like an appropriate beginning. From there, I researched other lessons that could be adapted to be more inclusive and generalizable. After writing one detailed lesson plan as an alternative, I realized that this was not realistic. If my goal was for this unit of study to be used by teachers and school districts across the country, how would I write one alternative lesson for each topic that would “magically” make everything better? Instead, I decided to write a more generalizable unit with multiple alternatives that could be adapted throughout many grades and ages, depending upon the individual teachers as well as the specific students that were present in any given classroom. The alternatives family tree plan are the first lessons that are introduced in my unit.
As I continued my work, I realized how many different lessons could be used in place of the originals. Ultimately, I wrote four alternative lesson ideas for five different lessons that typically lend themselves to the exclusion of some students in non-traditional homes. Through my research, I found that these lessons such as, the family tree, baby photo assignments, “Story of my Life” lessons, family history lessons, and projects created during Mother’s Day or Father’s Day presented the most difficulties for students from non-traditional families.

Some of the alternative lessons came to mind very quickly, while others took significantly more thought. The lessons that were created through this process include:
• Family Orchard,
• Caring Tree,
• Important People Tree,
• Types of Trees,
• Favorite Photo,
• Baby Self Portrait,
• Hero Biographies,
• My Favorite Memory,
• Story of an Important Person,
• Accomplishment,
• Where My Shoes Have Been,
• Origins of Your Last Name,
• Immigration day,
• Compare and Contrast: Characters’ Histories,
• “Cinderella Family Tree,”
• Someone Who Loves Me,
• Adult’s Day, Random Acts of Kindness, and
• Self-Love Day.
While writing these lessons, the most helpful thing for me was to picture myself as an elementary school student again. As one adoptee put it, “We want[ed] to be accepted by [our teachers] and our peers. I think one thing is that I relied a lot on my teachers, and I wanted more peer acceptance and that was difficult.” Growing up as an adopted child, not many people understood the complexity of that, including myself. I attempted to brainstorm ideas and lessons that would be better received in a more diverse setting.

“What is something all children can relate to?” was the big question that I kept asking myself. Especially in the United States, the diversity of families as well as experiences is so strong that there is nothing that will be universal for all of the children in the country. However, it was valuable for me to continue the development of this unit by keeping in mind that some lessons lend themselves particularly well to certain children’s experiences while others focus on the experiences of other students.

An interviewee said, “I think race plays a huge role in your upbringing… I grew up in a predominately white area and that was hard for me… I know my mom was very good about trying to understand, but some people don’t understand the implications and don’t want to deal with it.” When it comes to teachers, it is especially important that they do want to deal with the implications of race and the other factors that make us different. The goal of the unit is to give teachers who typically did not have many options, more options to work with. This would mean encouraging the thoughtful choosing of which lesson would be best for a particular group of students for that individual class.
CONCLUSION

Throughout this process, I have learned so much about the adopted child and the challenges adopted children face throughout their lives. As an adopted child myself, I have faced some of these challenges, many of them at the subconscious level. I have been lucky enough to grow up in a very supportive home with amazing parents, family members, and friends who have contributed to my success throughout my life. Without them, I would not be where I am today, and I could have easily become another statistic as an ill-adjusted adopted child. It is important for me to recognize my privileges in order for me to assist the children who might not have been as lucky as me.

Throughout my research, I learned of disorders such as disorganized attachment that are prevalent throughout society, but at higher rates in people who are adopted (Van Londen et al, 2007). I also explored children’s literature that currently exists as well as literature for and about adoptive parents and adult adoptees. While the research on the adopted child is sometimes difficult to find, there was significantly more than I had originally anticipated, which was illuminating.

I interviewed five adoptees, in order to move beyond my own experiences and understand multiple perspectives. While developing a book and a unit to be helpful to children of non-traditional families, it was essential for me to get a better understanding of the insights and experiences that other adoptees were able to provide for my goal of inclusivity. These interviews were extremely beneficial, and it was eye-opening for me to listen to the alternative perspectives. The most exciting part about conducting these interviews was that I was able to draw on the many similarities from seemingly contrasting lives.
The adoptees I interviewed were adopted from all over the world, including one from within the United States. They were different ages at the time of their adoption, and grew up in different parts of the country. Despite these differences, there were similarities between all of their experiences as growing up an adopted child. At times, the idea of a book and a unit that was as inclusive as possible seemed particularly daunting, due to the vast diversity of the United States, however, the common experiences among the five adopted people whom I interviewed confirmed my belief that people are more similar to one another than different. As my interviews showed, it was important for people to find commonalities among their peers in order to fit in, especially when the child is in elementary and middle school. I also found that it was particularly difficult for adoptees to be seen as equals by their peers if myths about adoption were not dispelled. As mentioned by an interviewee, “Adoption isn’t talked about, or at least wasn’t talked about when I was in school.” These interviews supported my personal feelings about adoption in schools and gave impetus to my work.

Two of the goals of my thesis involved producing a children’s book as well as a unit of study that I hope to publish. It is my hope that these resources will assist adopted children in the classroom by promoting inclusivity and acceptance both in the classroom as well as at home. My research and writing produced an original children’s book that includes eight different types of families. The characters in my book are fifth graders and the families consist of an adopted child, a child with a nuclear family, a divorced family, a military family, a family with same-sex parents, a kinship family, and a multiracial family. It was important for me to not focus solely on an adopted child, but to be as inclusive as possible when it came to the children that were represented in the book. If I
was going to make a book to promote inclusivity and acceptance, it would be hypocritical to exclude other family types.

The unit that was created through this thesis aimed to give teachers lessons that were alternatives to typically well-loved lessons that are not very inclusive. Family Trees, Baby Photos, Story of My Life, Family History, and Mother’s and Father’s Day activities all tend to exclude children that are adopted as well as children who come from other non-nuclear families. By developing these alternative lessons, my hope is to help students who come from these non-traditional families feel more included in the classroom when these well-loved lessons are being taught. Ultimately, the unit consists of five different well-loved lessons that are typically difficult for adopted students, and four alternative lessons for each of these traditional lessons. The goal is for teachers to be aware of the families and cultures from which their students come and choose one of the alternative lessons in order to make all of their students comfortable and confident in their personal situations.

As my research of books for adoptees shows, the lack of resources for adopted children in middle childhood is stunning. This book and unit are particularly important because they zero in on the scant resources for adopted children and provide two tangible resources that teachers, families, and students can use to better understand each other’s differences.

Since my original thoughts about this project in the summer of 2015, I had my mind set on one goal. The goal was to create a book and unit to help the students in the education system who feel forgotten to feel more represented within their classrooms, however, in the last two years, my thoughts and perspectives have broadened. I have
learned a lot about family structure and the importance of self-understanding and self-acceptance in children. I have also learned about the lives of five wonderful adoptees who significantly helped expand my viewpoints about adoptions.

While I was surprised to find as many similarities between all five interviewees and myself, I was not as surprised in the differences I found in children’s development depending upon family structure and background. The differences sometimes seem minimal, but it is important to remember that those differences could positively or negatively affect a child based on factors that are out of the child’s control. By minimizing some of the inequalities, it will help us to celebrate our differences while giving each student a fair opportunity within the classroom.

Interview data are not generalizable to all adoptees, but the interviews were conducted in order to get a broader sense of an adoptee’s experience while in the school setting. These limitations show that there still needs to be further research on the topic of the adopted child’s experience in schools. The current research is minimal, but the field seems to be going in the right direction. In the future, I hope to publish the book and the unit so that they will be available to teachers, families, and individuals who want to promote inclusivity and understanding in their students and children.

It is crucial that teachers, as well as families, promote acceptance and appreciation for people who are different than ourselves. Whether it is race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, or family type, children are born without preconceived notions in regards to our differences. These behaviors are learned, which would mean that children can be unaware to the negative connotations attached to different types of people if we teach them the positive implications instead.
Works Cited

Literature:


**Children’s Literature:**


Curtis, J. L. (2000). *Tell me again about the night I was born.* Harper Collins.

**Online Sources:**

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Recruitment Paragraph:
I am currently writing an Honor’s Thesis on the topic of adopted kid’s experiences in schools and how it can be improved. I was wondering if you or anyone you know would be willing to participate in an interview that will assist my research and development of a children’s book and unit plan which will promote inclusivity and acceptance in elementary classrooms. Please let me know if you would like to participate!

Thank you so much,
Emory

Interview Outline:

*Begin Recording*

“Hi, I’m Emory. Thank you so much for volunteering to be interviewed for my thesis research! I will be asking you some questions. Just as it said in the consent form you just signed, you may stop answering any question at anytime if you get uncomfortable, and you may choose to stop answering questions for the time being or completely if you want to. These questions have the potential to bring up tough memories so please let me know if you ever feel uncomfortable.”

Interview Questions:
These questions are a loose script of what I will follow. If the conversation goes somewhere else on its own, I will let it naturally flow.

1. How old are you/where are you from?
2. How old were you when you were adopted?
3. How old were you when you learned that you were adopted? (i.e. Have you always known or did you find out at some point?)

4. Do/did you celebrate the day you were adopted?

5. Can you think of an incident (positive or negative) that sticks out to you from your youth that has to do with the fact that you were adopted?
   a. If yes: Can you explain it? How did it make you feel? Did it change your feelings about you being adopted? Etc.
      i. If the incident was in a school setting: What do you think could have been done differently?
   b. If no: “That’s alright!” and continue with the questions.

6. What do you think teachers/others within the school system should be taught about adopted kids?

7. If you were to educate teachers or administrators more about the experience of adopted kids in the classroom, what do you think would be the one most important thing you would tell them?

   “Thank you so much for helping me out! Do you have anything else that you would like to share or any questions for me? (If yes: listen, answer; if no: continue) If you have any further questions or concerns feel free to contact me at any point.”

*End Recording*
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: Emory Manguilli’s Honor’s Thesis: Adopted kids’ experience in schools and how it can be improved.
Investigator: Emory Manguilli; Elementary Education and Psychology Majors; (203)980-6325

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted through Wheaton College. The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. Nature and Purpose of the Project: The purpose of these interviews is to understand the general experiences of adopted students in schools. Any answers that you provide will be used to inform my thesis, the development of a unit plan and a children’s book which will eventually be published and sold to schools and individuals to teach young students about adoption and different types of families.

2. Explanation of the Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed for 30-45 minutes. You will be asked 7-10 questions about your experience as an adopted
person both in general and as it relates to the school(s) you attended. Your interview will be audio recorded if you agree to participate.

3. Discomfort and Risks: There may be questions in this interview that make you uncomfortable or bring up difficult memories. You may stop answering any or all of the questions at any point, and you may choose to skip one and continue onto the next if you wish.

4. Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participation in this study.

5. Confidentiality: All information will be kept confidential and I will not use your real name in any part of my thesis or works related to my thesis (book and/or unit.)

6. Refusal/Withdrawal: Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the College. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

I understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and I believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

___ I understand that I will be audio recorded.

Participant Signature: ___________________ Date: ______

Witness Signature: ___________________ Date: ______

ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF THE PROJECT OR QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT OR RESEARCH RELATED INJURY SHOULD BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF
THE IRB ADMINISTRATOR, JOEL RELIHAN AT PHONE NUMBER (508) 286-3662.

ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONDUCT OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT SHOULD BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR.

NAME: Emory Manguilli
ADDRESS: 26 E Main Street Box W1308, Norton Mass, 02766
TELEPHONE: (203) 980-6325
Appendix B: Interview Data

Interview 1:
*Begin Recording*
“Hi, I’m Emory. Thank you so much for volunteering to be interviewed for my thesis research! I will be asking you some questions. Just as it said in the consent form you just signed, you may stop answering any question at any time if you get uncomfortable, and you may choose to stop answering questions for the time being or completely if you want to. These questions have the potential to bring up tough memories so please let me know if you ever feel uncomfortable.”

I’ll be as open as I can, because this is something I care about deeply.
Okay thank you
1. How old are you/where are you from?
   I am 20 years old. I’m almost 21, St. Petersburg, Russia- *Clarifying* Where do you live in the states? Massachusetts
2. How old were you when you were adopted?
   Almost a year
3. How old were you when you learned that you were adopted? (i.e. Have you always known or did you find out at some point?)
   I have always known that I was adopted I think, 'cause... it’s a question I often get, but it’s not a question I have like a solid answer for, so it’s kinda just been the culture... The adopted culture I guess you could call it is what I kind of just grew up in I guess.
4. Do/did you celebrate the day you were adopted?
   Yes. Do you do anything special or how did you celebrate it as you were growing up?
   Sooo... normally we would have a cake, it would either be, that was kind of one of the... exciting things would be making the cake and being able to decorate it either my siblings or myself um and then we would always sing happy adoption day. So it’s basically happy birthday, but we take out birthday and put in adoption day soo... we would always sing that. Umm for my sister’s adoption day, she’s the 5th of July, we all facetime and I sang it with them on the phone to her, nothing happened for me this year which was fine with me, I just have so much to do anyway- but yeah that was just what we did it would just kind of be like it would be your day you got to do what you wanted to do, if we were home you got to hang out, yeah.
5. Can you think of an incident (positive or negative) that sticks out to you from your youth that has to do with the fact that you were adopted?
   So... whether or not this was something that I made up in my head or not, because I think that’s something that adopted kids also can do is that they can... they have a big tendency to... and I’m going off on a side note, but umm is that... it’s almost like you’re schizophrenic but you’re not schizophrenic because you know that
you’re doing it, but you make up... you can like put yourself in another situation and you can tell yourself that you’re thinking a certain way... regardless of that fact, in... I think it was 7th grade? I... or 8th grade I think it was 8th grade... I had like made up to myself that my birth parents had died on a bridge bombing right off the island that the orphanage was on... and ... essentially it went into me thinking and wondering about what my family was like, wanting to learn more about it. It was the first time it ever really hit me that I had nothing from them that had any face value that I could understand who they were or where I was from, all I knew was that I was from... this orphanage on this island in St. Petersburg, and yada yada yada, so that was all I really knew. So that was really the first time it really hit me I guess, and then I didn't really wanna talk to my mom about it at the time, this is... my mom now... umm so I was talking to one of my best friends at the time and what ended up happening was that she had been talking to her mom about it so then her mom brought it up with my mom when... Uh... ‘cause we would always work on projects together, so when she was dropping me off it was raised and my mom ended up having a conversation with me and it was just, “you know you can always be open about that part of your life with me, it’s not gonna offend me. Every time it’s your birthday I think about your birth mom and....what it was like for her and all the emotions she must have had to go through. Don’t be scared to like talk about that or be open or wanting to explore it more.” So that was kinda like the first time that... like... the whole part of being adopted and the fact that you are from one place and you’re now in a completely different one kinda hit me and it was really before I became so grateful for this like... The fact that I am.

a. If yes: Can you explain it? How did it make you feel? Did it change your feelings about you being adopted? So would you say that is really a changing point in your views on being adopted?
I think so, yeah. I think so like it was the first time I was cognizant of it. Because like when I was growing up... we were in a play group with a bunch of different adopted kids, I mean my best friend... she and I were in the same crib and she is my neighbor now, we’re still very very close, our families were pretty close for a long time, but so again I think it really had to do with nature vs. nurture type thing if you wanna get all psychological and it was more the nurture of it than like I guess like being able to understand it and wanting to accept it and stuff.

I. If the incident was in a school setting: school?
In 5th grade... Umm.. I would get, it wasn’t because I was adopted at all that I would get into fights with kids, but umm... I would just have... We would butt heads let’s say. Umm anyway so there was an incident where I was going back and forth with one of the guys in my class, and he had said something along the lines of, umm like “your moms not even your real mom” or basically it was one of those lines, um and my teacher was standing right there with me I think if I’m remembering things
right and she was like *gasp* and it took me a second to kind of like realize what he had said, 'cause I was like “wait what?!” and then it was like “ohmygosh” like you a**hole-type thing. Umm yeah. So I would say that would be really the only incident in school for a bad situation. What do you think could have been done differently? I think it would... Its actually interesting you ask that question, umm now thinking about it as if I were the teacher.. Umm maybe even if you were to be very direct about it and be like ____ that’s actually like yes he’s adopted, that’s actually a very real type of thing like you have to understand that because especially at that age where you can still talk about it a little bit more openly and not necessarily say oh that’s right his moms not his real mom, but almost say yes he has a birth mom and a mom now. Umm either that or idk I just don’t think punishing for that kind of thing is the best way to handle it, it’s more of there needs to be a discussion about it.

b. If no: “That’s alright!” and continue with the questions.

6. What do you think teachers/others within the school system should be taught about adopted kids?

... so I think with more research that comes out about this topic, like about being adopted and the psychological research even about the psychological effects of adoption, uhh which is also very difficult because you need to rule out all the other stuff that goes on with it, anyway... Umm there definitely should be some type of special course even like a psych course even that kind of just the thought process and how the mental development comes into play and kind of just go along with how all these different things could have happened in an early stage because of the adoption, that could translate later into life without us necessarily knowing them, but if you like look along the lifespan, it makes sense. And it’s kinda scary if you really think about it like you’ll have thoughts in your head and you’re just like holy crap that’s because of... like it’s possible that this is because of this this this and this... and it’s scary if you try to start and trace it back, and that’s when you get into your head a lot. Anyway, I think that could be one type of educational experience, just starting to talk about what could happen along that development line, not even necessarily in terms of adoption but just like a normal child and lifespan development course... Umm but also I think that with that, because I don’t think you can really narrow it down to “oh this is because of adoption all the time,” umm but a lot of the time, as someone who is adopted, that is usually what you start to realize and you’re like oh I have this issue with relationships because of the fact that I’m adopted. Like it kind of all stems from it, umm I guess yeah like a lifespan development-type course and make sure there’s like an understanding of the fact that if you’re in a teaching setting almost you need to be cognizant of it like if it comes up you need to be aware of it, and not make special treatment of that kid because of it but kinda just... I mean you’re going to have to feel out the situation
regardless of it, but umm basically like a course on how you could talk about that so almost like a “difficult discussion” course for teachers idk.

7. If you were to educate teachers or administrators more about the experience of adopted kids in the classroom, what do you think would be the one most important thing you would tell them?

That… you have to, like as a teacher or a leader in a classroom or whatever you are as an educator, you… part of your job is to take on a role that you might not at first want to take on, but in part of that, you have to also realize that umm… Family isn’t by birth always and that in some ways especially for kids who were adopted, like you can… You have to be very understanding of that and not be… understand that everyone’s family is from a different place and that everyone might not have someone that they can call “mom” yet or someone that they can call “dad” or that they’re not comfortable with the people they’re living with yet and because of that you need to be a little bit more flexible also and understanding and have that, to bring it in business terms, emotional intelligence to be able to feel out that situation given the information you know, whether that be limited, whether that be very extensive and be able to feel out the situation and be very flexible to try to not jump to conclusions when they might do something that might not make sense like if they act out or they’re having issues with other kids, like be cognizant enough to be able to reach out to them and be like “hey bud” like, what’s up? how’s home? If you wanna talk, talk, if you don’t want to talk we don’t need to talk but just know that there’s someone who cares about you um and kinda just make that first leap is the only thing you really can do and from there, there’s no advice that you can give really other than you really have to feel it out by situation, which is the worst piece of advice, but that’s what it is is that it’s not gonna be the same with every single kid you see. Anything else I should take into consideration? Umm this is kind of on a side note, but umm is how divorce can affect kids of adoption also, and just like how we’ve experienced it.

“Thank you so much for helping me out! Do you have anything else that you would like to share or any questions for me? (If yes: listen, answer; if no: continue) If you have any further questions or concerns feel free to contact me at any point.”

*End Recording*

**Interview 2:**

*Begin Recording*

“Hi, I’m Emory. Thank you so much for volunteering to be interviewed for my thesis research! I will be asking you some questions. Just as it said in the consent form you just signed, you may stop answering any question at any time if you get uncomfortable, and you may choose to stop answering questions for the time being or completely if you want
to. These questions have the potential to bring up tough memories so please let me know if you ever feel uncomfortable.”

Interview Questions:

1. How old are you/where are you from?
   I’m 22. Connecticut.

2. How old were you when you were adopted?
   I was 2 1/2, possibly older. I was adopted from China.

3. How old were you when you learned that you were adopted? (i.e. Have you always known or did you find out at some point?)
   Umm I think I knew that I was adopted. Well I don’t know what age I knew what it really meant though until I was a little bit older, 5 maybe?

4. Do/did you celebrate the day you were adopted?
   Ummm I guess in the way that family came to the airport to come and meet me for the first time, so that was a celebration for sure.
   Do you celebrate it every year?
   Ummm not necessarily every year, it’s not really a tradition, but we think about it! Like its around Chinese new year, so it’s kind of thought of, but actually there’s not really a specific date that we celebrate it every year.

5. Can you think of an incident (positive or negative) that sticks out to you from your youth that has to do with the fact that you were adopted?
   Looking in the mirror and realizing that I didn’t have long eyelashes or blue eyes. And then lighter hair. That would be the constant reminder if I looked in the mirror, but otherwise I didn’t really realize I was adopted. It actually wasn’t really talked about that much. I actually really didn’t start talking about it until I was much older because I just fit right in, so I didn’t really think any differently.
   Any negative situations friends/school?
   Yeah definitely. I think a big difference was I had trouble with my language. My language was a little off because I didn’t speak English for a while in the beginning and I had trouble transitioning. So that was hard when trying to speak to kids I wasn’t necessarily included in the sense that I talked, and sounded funny to them.
   a. How did it make you feel? Did it change your feelings about you being adopted?
   I never really related it… I knew I was different and I didn’t really know why. I didn’t really discuss it and think about it so much in terms of adoption, I didn’t question it really more until later on, more even in college and stuff when I was having more trouble with all the work. And as the work got harder, that’s where it kinda… there are some things that I struggled with when I was young, but it didn't really come out until later. I think I just didn't really understand why I was different. I think I was just more confused.
   I. If the incident was in a school setting: What do you think could have been done differently?
b. If no: “That’s alright!” and continue with the questions.

6. What do you think teachers/others within the school system should be taught about adopted kids?

Umm definitely that we’re no different than anyone else and we might learn in a different way but that shouldn’t umm… in my experience, I have to say, my teachers really enjoyed me if anything because… they thought I was really smart. They knew I learned a little differently, but I think that’s what challenged them and they enjoyed that. And I appreciated the teachers connecting because I have to say I connected more with them. I think it’s more the students that it was hard for them to wrap their mind around because they’re young and they’re at the same age and they kinda want to assume with whoever you can talk to and connect with the best, and maybe promoting that we all are different, we all learn differently, we all communicate a little differently, but then that’s how we become better for ourselves. And you can start that at a young age. I think people think it always has to kinda start later, especially in college is pretty good, high school is okay, but even in middle school we should start and elementary school, and that’s where I think the difference should be.

7. If you were to educate teachers or administrators more about the experience of adopted kids in the classroom, what do you think would be the one most important thing you would tell them?

We want to be accepted by both you and our peers. I think one thing is that I relied a lot on my teachers, and I wanted more peer acceptance and that was difficult. And I think that’s the biggest challenge. Getting that peer acceptance. But that’s a lot harder to control, parents and their influences, it goes back to racism and stuff and if they’re kind of brought up in this certain way, certain people to kinda naturally like or dislike, even just based on physical looks. And then even again, just if they’re socially inept and stuff and…. the teacher needs to be aware of that and how to open the avenues for opening their minds, because they are capable. And don’t underestimate that they’re capable.

“Thank you so much for helping me out! Do you have anything else that you would like to share or any questions for me? (If yes: listen, answer; if no: continue)I think it’s so important to do it young still, because you’re not so set in your ways, you haven’t experienced too much to like one thing vs. another, so that’s why: don’t wait! It might seem like a heavy topic but you can put it in a level that they can understand it.

If you have any further questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at any point.”

*End Recording*
Interview 3:

*Begin Recording*

“Hi, I’m Emory. Thank you so much for volunteering to be interviewed for my thesis research! I will be asking you some questions. Just as it said in the consent form you just signed, you may stop answering any question at any time if you get uncomfortable, and you may choose to stop answering questions for the time being or completely if you want to. These questions have the potential to bring up tough memories so please let me know if you ever feel uncomfortable.”

1. How old are you/where are you from?
   I am 20 right now, 21 next week. I’m from Connecticut and I’m adopted from china.

2. How old were you when you were adopted?
   I was just about 1 when I was adopted.

3. How old were you when you learned that you were adopted? (i.e. Have you always known or did you find out at some point?)
   There was never a point that “found out,” there was a point that I could conceptualize it though... you know like when I could really understand it, but I always knew I was adopted. Because my mom is white and blonde, you just look in the mirror and realize that she doesn’t look like you and I mean that’s a pretty big signifier right there.

4. Do/did you celebrate the day you were adopted? Do you do anything special or how did you celebrate it as you were growing up?
   No, I did not. That was not something my family decided to do because my mom wanted to really acknowledge both sides of adoption and she thinks that adoption is both a gain and a loss for two different families. So we never celebrated it per se... um and actually we never really acknowledged it but like she just didn’t feel comfortable celebrating it because she didn’t feel like it was completely a celebration. Like it really was not only a loss for, you know, a family somewhere out there in china, but like also a loss for me of my culture, of my language, a loss of umm a history that I had once had. So she never wanted to make it as simple as a celebration- that being said - I know lots of people who do celebrate and I go to lots of other people’s celebrations but for some reason my family just never did.

5. Can you think of an incident (positive or negative) that sticks out to you from your youth that has to do with the fact that you were adopted?
   My mom was always really positive about it in terms of what it gave to her, but I mean I always remember having to tell the story over and over and like it was never... and especially since it was a transracial adoption people would look and say “oh where are you from?” and you could see from my family when you took a look at us you know, and you could tell right away so it was like always out in the open and always being questioned which was like slightly annoying. You learn to become a story-teller for your entire life and it somehow makes other people feel entitled to
know your history. I find in non-transracial adoptions it can kind of be ignored—like people will make the assumption that you’re all related even if you totally look the same. And I know for some of my friends who were adopted and it wasn’t transracial it was like, people would just assume even if they didn’t look anything alike just because they were of the same race, it was enough for them. But I don’t know, I think I have many of the experiences that a lot of adopted people do, the whole “Where are your real parents?” or “Why did your parents put you up for adoption?” and so a lot of invasive questions that were fairly unnecessary, and you know, I guess those were negative. I can’t think of any time that I had a really really negative experience, but like those little things always chip away at your sense of self and yourself of belonging in your family so I guess those were negative, yeah.

a. Did it change your feelings about you being adopted? So would you say that is really a changing point in your views on being adopted?

I think I was pretty set— but that being said, like I said it like chips away at your sense of self, it really, it does make you think more, and maybe that’s a positive thing, I don’t know because it was so out in the open there was no way to mask it and pretend that nothing ever happened and I don’t actually have a history so that was I guess in a way a good thing, it was not really a choice I had, I had to think about it I had to like really critically think about it, I had to question it and understand it. It required me to really think about it, but I think it hasn’t changed my ideas about it I just think it made them more apparent because I’ve always felt like I belonged in my family and my mom has always been really good about making sure I knew that I belonged in the family and there was never like a break in that. She had this phrase when I was a kid that she always told me and it was like, “You didn’t grow in my belly, but you grew in my heart.” So I was never introduced as “oh this is your adopted cousin,” like I know some people who were introduced as Oh this is my adopted sister and for me it was just this is my sister or this is my mom. And My mom would always tell me I am your real parent. I’m always here, and you know you have a birth family, and a first family but I am your real family so that was never a question.

I. If the incident was in a school setting: school?

I mean like the kids would always ask questions and stuff and they’d always be confused and they didn’t really get it and kids are kids so they ask invasive questions, umm by the teachers not so much, but that being said, there was never any representation of my family in any education or any like- you know you’d draw your family tree and it would be like oh you know- that would always bring up stuff and my mom would discuss that with me. And umm…. so my mom’s a single mom, so there isn’t any dad in the picture, so also there was no representation of that for me either, so a single mother with a kid who’s adopted? Like that would never show up so that was interesting because they would be like “so what about your mom, and
what about your dad,” you know. Also things like when filling out the common app, the only option for your father was “unknown,” which was like weird. There was no like non-applicable, it was either like unknown or deceased were the two options. Like what do I put for that? Leaving it unknown was uncomfortable. It leaves it with no option.

What do you think could have been done differently?

b. If no: “That’s alright!” and continue with the questions.

6. What do you think teachers/others within the school system should be taught about adopted kids?

I think there should be more representation of other families and how other families form, umm I think that they should be attuned to what the kids are saying about other families and saying about oh what kind of conversations are the adoptees being forced to have in and outside of the classroom, I mean I think you could discuss it. I think it should be discussed, but I also don’t know how one would go about it especially if the teacher is not adopted themselves. Umm I think discussion is really important and I think also not making adoption as simple as some people think it is. So like being from china, I was abandoned when I was a baby, in a busy area hoping to be found and put up for adoption. But I remember saying that to one of my friends and the mother was like “nonono that doesn’t happen…” and I was young so I didn’t really understand what it meant but still she was like “No that happens to no one, no one is left, your parents always make a plan for you,” like but that’s not the truth and the truth is no one made a plan for me, and like I think that people need to see that it’s okay and that it comes in different ways and there are many different reasons and it’s not straightforward. I have no clue whether they didn’t have the money, they didn’t want a girl child, which is honestly probably the higher probability, with the one child policy, but like just to bring out the fact that it’s not black and white, like I don’t even know if I was born in a hospital- so it’s really like- to negate other’s story- because it was very weird for me for someone to be like “oh that didn’t happen” like you don’t know that, it came from another parent too and... so I think like making sure that it’s like a conversation in which all the possibilities are discussed.

7. If you were to educate teachers or administrators more about the experience of adopted kids in the classroom, what do you think would be the one most important thing you would tell them?

To be aware of what’s going on and what they might be going through. To be aware of the other students and how they might be behaving. I mean I don’t think this is one of the most important things to remember but... reactive attachment disorder. That does happen and it is very prevalent among adopted kids and it’s not all behavioral issues. People like to act like these children don’t have any past or they don’t come with anything like they’re like a blank slate when they come to you and
they have like all sorts of like reasons why they behave the way they behave, and reactive attachment disorder is one of them. Children may behave poorly, there may be all sorts of issues in the home based on the child, and also like my mom said when she adopted me, she didn’t think I had been outside more than like a half dozen times in my life. I had processing delays, and there’s all sorts of learning disabilities that come with it and like umm some kids spend a lot of time on their back in a crib and they don’t get picked up much. Things like- I probably didn’t get out much so all of this stuff was overwhelming to me. Like I also didn’t have a lot to eat- I think I was 15lbs at 1-year-old, like I was really small, they fed me like 2 bottles a day and a small bowl of rice. I just think remembering that these kids have a past and they have things that make them who they are and make the situations they are in. I think that’s really important. I think just understanding that like not everyone is the same. You have to really take into account that not everyone is the same and even with domestic adoptions, they’re totally different than international adoption and there are different barriers for people domestically. And I was saying that it was always brought up because my mom looked different than me, but I wonder what it’s like for kids who are not transracial and it’s never brought up and never talked about. I think it’s so important that you talk about it and it kind of sucked it had to be brought up all the time, but it at the same time it let me really start to think about it. I know people that it never got brought up and people just assume that everyone’s related and it was swept under the carpet and I don’t think that’s healthy either. so there’s like different barriers for transracial adoptions. I think race plays a huge role in your upbringing and I know I grew up in a predominately white area and that was like hard for me and I know my mom was very good about trying to understand, but some people don’t understand the implications and don’t want to deal with it.

Anything else I should take into consideration?

“Thank you so much for helping me out! Do you have anything else that you would like to share or any questions for me? (If yes: listen, answer; if no: continue) If you have any further questions or concerns feel free to contact me at any point.”

*End Recording*

**Interview 4:**

*Begin Recording*

“Hi, I’m Emory. Thank you so much for volunteering to be interviewed for my thesis research! I will be asking you some questions. Just as it said in the consent form you just signed, you may stop answering any question at any time if you get uncomfortable, and you may choose to stop answering questions for the time being or completely if you want to. These questions have the potential to bring up tough memories so please let me know if you ever feel uncomfortable.”
1. How old are you/where are you from?
I am 19 years old. I am from New Hampshire
2. How old were you when you were adopted?
2 Days old
3. How old were you when you learned that you were adopted? (i.e. Have you always known or did you find out at some point?)
I was like 4- because my parents were always super open about it, because they read lots of books that said like you want to tell your kids “we’re your parents, but we’re not your biological parents” because they didn’t want me to wake up one day when I was 12 and find out I was adopted.
4. Do/did you celebrate the day you were adopted? Do you do anything special or how did you celebrate it as you were growing up?
I never did, no. My parents celebrate my birthday, but my adoption day was, I mean the 25th of June. My parents got a call and had to buy things in like 24 hours.
5. Can you think of an incident (positive or negative) that sticks out to you from your youth that has to do with the fact that you were adopted?
Punnett squares. So freshman year science class, which was bio, we were doing Punnett squares and he was like “we’re gonna find out where you get your hair color, where you get your eye color” and I was like well- I’m the only one in the class who was adopted, so I raised my hand and I was like “oh I can’t do this” and he was like “what do you mean you can’t do this? You just tell what your parents have...” and I was like “I know how Punnett squares work, but I’m adopted, and I don’t know.” and he was like “oh, I never thought of that before!” like it’s something that the education system doesn’t really think about and so that was a more negative one. A more positive, funny one, was umm one of my favorite lines ever is when I was probably 6 or 7, and my dad went into school, he’s a high school teacher, and um there was a student there who saw me because I was sick or something and he was like “well, we know who’s not adopted” because I look just like my dad. And my dad was like “well, surprise! She is.” So I look just like my dad and my grandma which is weird. It’s bizarre.
a. How did it make you feel? Did it change your feelings about you being adopted? So would you say that is really a changing point in your views on being adopted?
I was very negative about my adoption until I was like 15 maybe? Just because like its easy when you’re young to not think about what it must have been like to have been pregnant at 15, 17, 19, and 20 which is what- my mom had 3 kids before me, and she was pregnant with me when she was 20. So for me, I didn’t process that until I was actually 15 and I was like “oh my god.” like can you imagine what it would be like to have 3 kids, you dropped out of high school, you have no... and my biological mom was also adopted. SO I had a really negative view, and that made me feel super singled out because everyone else is like “oh no I know how I have my red
hair!” and I’m like “well I’m supposed to be half Mexican” so I felt super singled out.

I. If the incident was in a school setting: school?

What do you think could have been done differently?

I mean I think just awareness is the first step. Like because it didn’t even cross his mind that there could be some adopted kids in the classroom that couldn’t do it. So my dad has always been super aware since he has adopted children- two adopted kids- not to ask certain questions, or if he has to ask those questions, to word them in a way that’s not going to make someone feel singled out. So I would say awareness first, and then implementation. So like IF a kid can’t do a Punnett square, have an alternative activity for them to do or have them work with someone so that I’m not sitting alone in the front of the classroom because that just makes you feel weird and different.

b. If no: “That’s alright!” and continue with the questions.

6. What do you think teachers/others within the school system should be taught about adopted kids?

Well adoption is super common- and you feel like you’re the only one, but you’re not. I think it’s especially important with early school teachers- 2nd-5th grade to teach that there are people with moms and dads that aren’t their biological moms and dads or moms and moms- you know we have this view of the world that “Bio mom, bio dad, baby.” and you know that’s just not the truth. So we just need to be aware that, you know, some kids are adopted, some kids have two moms, some kids have two dads, and start that early- so that when you’re in high school you’re not like “I’m the only one.” So just start it 2nd-5th grade, let’s talk about our families and how families are unique just like people. I think that’s really important.

7. If you were to educate teachers or administrators more about the experience of adopted kids in the classroom, what do you think would be the one most important thing you would tell them?

That life doesn’t revolve around who you are. Like I used to think- I hated my birthday every year because it’s my biological mom’s birthday as well. We were born 21 years apart on the same day. So I used to hate that, and it would just remind me of like, I am adopted and that’s it and that’s all I am. So I think it’s important to educate the educators that, yes, I am adopted, but I’m also like daughter, friend, you know? Like it doesn’t have to be a negative label, and for a lot of people it is. For some people it isn’t and that’s awesome- like I wish I had that mentality when I was like 15, but for a lot of people, they see it as negative. And educators need to know that it’s not a negative thing, and some people feel that way. I always saw it as “I was given up” and given away, as opposed to, “I was taken in.” So promote the positives! There are so many positives about it. Like I very likely would not have gotten to college. So promote the positive.
Anything else I should take into consideration?

“Thank you so much for helping me out! Do you have anything else that you would like to share or any questions for me? (If yes: listen, answer; if no: continue) If you have any further questions or concerns feel free to contact me at any point.”

*End Recording*

Interview 5:

*Begin Recording*

“Hi, I’m Emory. Thank you so much for volunteering to be interviewed for my thesis research! I will be asking you some questions. Just as it said in the consent form you just signed, you may stop answering any question at any time if you get uncomfortable, and you may choose to stop answering questions for the time being or completely if you want to. These questions have the potential to bring up tough memories so please let me know if you ever feel uncomfortable.”

Thesis Interview Questions:

These questions are a loose script of what I will follow. If the conversation goes somewhere else on its own, I will let it naturally flow.

1. How old are you/where are you from?

I am 22 years old and I am originally from Fiji, but I grew up half my life in Norton MA and the other half in Providence, RI.

2. How old were you when you were adopted?

Technically I was around 8 months when my adoption officially went through but I was my mother’s the moment I was born. She was informed when I was born from a friend in Fiji and she then started the process of adoption.

3. How old were you when you learned that you were adopted? (i.e. Have you always known or did you find out at some point?)

I have always known about my adoption. It is quite noticeable that my mother and I look quite different. My mom also adopted me alone, as a single parent. She’s always been quite transparent about my adoption.

4. Do/did you celebrate the day you were adopted?

We used to celebrate not only the day I was adopted but also celebrated adoption day. My momma and I would go to sears and get our pictures taken for celebrating my adoption. It was really fun and I love doing it.

5. Can you think of an incident (positive or negative) that sticks out to you from your youth that has to do with the fact that you were adopted? If yes: Can you explain it? How did it make you feel? Did it change your feelings about you being adopted? Etc.

Pft when weren’t there incidents from my youth that was because of my adoption? I guess the first huge incident also was the first time I realized my skin was a different color of my mom’s. We were in Roche brother’s and I was sitting in the grocery cart when another mother and her child pulled up next to us. Suddenly the little boy in the other cart pointed at me and asked very loudly “MOMMY SHE’S BROWN!”
WHY IS SHE BROWN”. After this my mom and I went home because I was crying and couldn’t stop. I didn’t understand why the color of my skin was different from my mom’s. We talked a lot that night about different peoples and how everyone looks different.

Any in school setting?

Another incident in high school went like this:
Friend: are you angry at the woman who adopted you?
Me: .... what?
Friend: I mean she took you away from your family and home. So like aren't you mad at her?
Ahhh this situation made me so angry. We were in the library and I literally wanted to scream. Transnational adoptions are soo not explained well. The fact that she genuinely thought I was taken from my family was so upsetting.

Another situation was at a birthday party of mine with all my school friends and one girl asked my mom if she wished I was white like her. I was seven.

6. What do you think teachers/others within the school system should be taught about adopted kids?
I think they should have been taught that it was normal and that adoption doesn’t mean taking one child from another family. Children didn’t understand what adoption meant when I was in elementary school, hell they didn’t even get it in high school. Adoption isn’t talked about, or at least wasn’t talked about when I was in school.

7. If you were to educate teachers or administrators more about the experience of adopted kids in the classroom, what do you think would be the one most important thing you would tell them?
Adopted kids are just as loved as biological kids. It’s doesn’t take blood to make a family. Nurture vs nature would be an incredibly important part of this teaching.

“Thank you so much for helping me out! Do you have anything else that you would like to share or any questions for me? (If yes: listen, answer; if no: continue) If you have any further questions or concerns feel free to contact me at any point.”

*End Recording*
Too Different

Chapter 1: The Project

“Alright boys and girls! We’re going to count off 1-3 to determine the groups for our next project!” Mrs. Sullivan exclaimed to her fifth grade class as the students all groaned. Mrs. Sullivan was the favorite teacher among the students of Harmonyville Elementary School. Ever since entering the school in kindergarten, students would hope that they were assigned to her fifth grade classroom, because her students are always known as the “nicest and coolest” kids in school. None of the students knew how or why that happened, but her current class was about to find out.

“Why can’t we choose our own groups?” asked Zane, a red-headed soccer player from across the room.

“Because, Zane, this project is supposed to introduce you to new friends you don’t always talk to. Now let’s start counting!”

The class started counting off, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3. Once they were done counting off, Mrs. Sullivan asked them to get into their groups by number.

Zane found himself in a group with Abby, Lily, Maddie, Emma, John, Ray, and Chris. He knew John from the soccer team and his family was friends with Lily’s, but that was all he knew about his group.

“So what is this project about?” asked Maddie, an eager girl who always seemed happy.

“Great question, Maddie! This project is called ‘The Unity Project.’ We’re going to be getting to know each other. You will learn some interesting facts about each other that
make you different, and then find something among you that makes you all similar. Then you will present what you found to the class.” Mrs. Sullivan started passing out the worksheet that had the assignment on it. Each student was to go home that night and make a list of facts about themselves. They were allowed to be as transparent or vague as they felt comfortable. Abby, an outgoing girl who is very enthusiastic about school, raised her hand and Mrs. Sullivan called on her.

“What does transparent mean?” she asked, and Mrs. Sullivan responded, “Transparent means easy to perceive or detect! When the paper says ‘transparent and vague,’ that means you can think of things that mean a lot to you and be very open and honest with your group, or you can be a little more modest. Only share whatever you are comfortable sharing!”

“I don’t really understand the point of this project,” Abby whispered to Maddie who was sitting right beside her.

“I’m not sure either, Abby,” Maddie whispered back as she turned and faced the rest of her group. “but I think this will be a fun project!” she exclaimed. Everyone else in the group agreed.

Chapter 2: The Differences

The next day, the students were able to get into their groups and brainstorm ideas.

Maddie was still very excited about the project, and the other students in her group were excited too.
Once they all got together, John, a tall boy with light brown hair who loved basketball, spoke up first. “I live with my grandparents!” he said, “Most people live with their parents, but I don’t. That’s something different about me.”

Chris spoke up next. Chris was a little older than his classmates, since he started kindergarten late. He was also a very tall boy, with dark hair and brown eyes. All the girls had a secret crush on him because he was very popular. “I have two moms!”

Some kids in the group looked a little confused. “So you mean like a mom and a step-mom? That’s what I have too!” said Maddie. “No Maddie, that’s because your parents are divorced. My parents are still married, but I just have two moms instead of a mom and a dad!”

There was an audible “Ooooh” amongst the group.

“Does all of this have to be related to our families?” Zane asked. “Not necessarily!” chimed Lily, “But my family is two different races! Native American and African American.”

“Umm… I have red hair?” Zane offered. It was a true difference, as Zane was the only student in the group with red hair.

Mrs. Sullivan had overheard this part of the conversation and made a mental note to herself that Zane wasn’t comfortable being transparent with his peers. She knew that Zane also had an interesting family story, as he was adopted into his family when he was 4 years old.

“I’ve moved 5 times!” Ray mentioned.
“Why do you move so much?” asked Emma. Up until now, Emma hadn’t talked much. She thought her family was too normal to talk about, since she had a mom and a dad who were married with a younger sister and a dog.

“My mom is in the military, so when she gets stationed at different bases, that’s where we have to move. What about you Emma? What’s something different about you?”

Emma was stumped. “I… I don’t know…” she stammered. “My family isn’t cool and interesting like the rest of yours!”

“It doesn’t have to be something about your family Emma.” Mrs. Sullivan stepped in, reassuring Emma. “Think about something that makes you special!”

“Hmmm..” Emma thought out-loud, “Well I am a level 10 gymnast!”

A sea of ‘ooh’s’ went through the group. “Emma, that’s awesome!” exclaimed Zane. Emma smiled. She felt proud that she was able to find a fact that the rest of her group thought was fascinating.

“Abby and Lily still haven’t talked!” mentioned Maddie.

“I’ve been thinking about what to say!” Abby said. “But I think I figured it out.” Everyone looked towards Abby, as she started talking. “Well, I was born out of the country, and me and my mom are best friends.” Abby said. She realized that not many 5th graders hung out with their moms, but it was something important to her.

“What country were you born in?” asked Ray. Since he had moved all over due to being the son of a soldier, he had been to many countries. “Russia!” Abby responded. “My mom is Russian, and then we moved here after I was born.”

“I’m part Native American!” added Lily.

“You are?” asked Emma excitedly.
“Yeah!” responded Lily, “I don’t often tell people because they don’t believe me.”

“Wow. We’re all so different you guys.” stated John. “I think we’re too different. How are we ever going to find something that we all have in common?”

Chapter 3: The Interest

Mrs. Sullivan walked up to the front of the class and rang the bell to get everyone’s attention.

“I was walking around and listening to all of the great conversations you were all having, and I think you are all off to a great start for this project. Now it’s time to switch gears and think about math for a while!” Half of the class groaned, since math was not their favorite subject.

At the end of the day right before dismissal, the students in Mrs. Sullivan’s class got back into their groups and decided that they were all going to ask permission to stay after school tomorrow to work on the group project. Mrs. Sullivan thought it was a great idea, and encouraged the students to talk to their families about it.

The next morning, all of the groups were able to get together to discuss their plans for the project.

“My moms said I can stay!” said Chris excitedly.

“So did my Grandma!”

“My mom did too!”
“Mine too!”

Suddenly, the whole group realized that they were all able to stay after school for the project.

“John and I have a soccer game at 5, so we have to leave then!” Zane interjected.

“We should go to the game!” suggested Ray.

All of the group members agreed. After they planned the project, they were going to watch Zane and John’s soccer game. The games were played at the field next to the school, so they would just walk outside and meet their parents at the game.

As the school day continued, the group members anxiously waited for the day to be over so they could meet up again. They were all really starting to like this project! After what felt like the longest day ever, the final bell rang and the groups rushed to get together. They picked a nice spot in the back of the classroom, and kept talking about their differences. Some of them had favorite foods or animals that were different, others were the same.

They kept talking about things like favorite color, favorite movies, favorite game, and so on. So far, they had found nothing that they all had in common.

Noticing that the students were getting frustrated, Mrs. Sullivan came over to cheer them up. “Sometimes our differences seem impossible to get past,” she said, “but we have to keep looking for things that bring us together.”

“What’s something that brings people together?” Ray asked the rest of the group.
“The World Cup!” shouted Zane. Soccer was on his mind since his game was in 30 minutes.

“The Super Bowl?” questioned Chris.

“Yeah!” the students all enthusiastically agreed.

“But I don’t really watch sports,” Lily said, thinking about how much she loves to listen to music in her room at home.

“Well what do you like, Lily?” asked Ray.

“I love music, and I love to sing!” Lily exclaimed wholeheartedly.

“I love music too!” said Abby. “I play the saxophone!”

“Woah that’s so cool, Abby! I play the piano.” Chris added.

All of the students in the group started talking about their love for music as Mrs. Sullivan walked away. She was very proud of her students for finding something that brought them all together through the many differences they had.

By the time they discussed all of the things about music they enjoyed, it was time for Zane and John’s soccer game. The group all attended the soccer game until their parents came to pick them up, cheering on John and Zane as they won their game against Harmonyville’s rival team, Melancholy Meadows.

Chapter 4: The Name

The rest of the week went by like a regular week in Mrs. Sullivan’s class. The groups for the project had 20 minutes each day to plan what information they were going to present to the class. Mrs. Sullivan encouraged them to be creative and come up with fun and new ways to present to the class. The presentations were going to be a week from Friday, and
the entire class seemed very excited about the differences and similarities they had found about each other.

On Friday afternoon, Mrs. Sullivan stopped class a little early. “I have something very exciting to tell you all!” she exclaimed. “Harmonyville Elementary is going to be hosting the first annual talent show! All of you are invited to sign up and show the school your talent! The talent show will be next Friday.”

All of the students were thrilled and started talking to each other about what talents they wanted to show off.

“I have a great idea!” Maddie whispered to Abby. “We should start a band since we all love music!”

Since the students were so animated about the talent show, Mrs. Sullivan let them talk about it with each other for the last 10 minutes of the day.

“Guys!” Abby yelled to her group. “Maddie had a great idea! We should make a band for the talent show!”

“Can I play the drums?” asked Zane. Everyone agreed that was a good idea. The team wanted to have drums, guitar, piano, saxophone, and vocalists in the band. Lily and Maddie would be the main singers. Ray would be the guitarist, Abby would play the saxophone, Chris would be the pianist, and Emma and John wanted to be the backup dancers.

“This is going to be great!” Emma shouted.
“Shhh!” The rest of the group quieted her. “You can’t tell anyone—it’s going to be a surprise!” whispered Maddie. “We’re going to surprise everyone in the school!”

“Now we have to come up with a band name!” Ray said in a hushed voice.

“What about Zane and the Back Ups?” Zane proposed.

The rest of the group groaned and laughed at Zane’s suggestion.

“How about The Future?” asked Maddie.

“Umm I don’t think so,” said John. “What do you guys think of Unity Squad since we were all united by music?”

“I like the idea of unity!” Chris chipped in, “What about Union Link?”

“Guys! I got it! How about United Harmony?” Lily said excitedly. She had been quiet the entire time, thinking of names.

“Yes!” agreed Abby enthusiastically. The rest of the group agreed too. United Harmony was officially the name of the band.

**Chapter 5: The Plan**

That weekend, the members of United Harmony went home and talked to their families about their idea. Emma’s parents suggested that the band members get together on Sunday, and the other families agreed. The talent show was only a week away, and this band needed practice if they were going to perform in front of the entire school. Zane’s mom suggested that the band could practice at their house since the drum set was difficult to move. Since Harmonyville was a small town, everyone’s houses were with 10 minutes from each other. This made transportation and carpooling very easy for the bandmates.
On Sunday, everyone arrived at Zane’s house and they went down into the basement to practice. Zane’s parents came down to wish everyone good luck and they brought down sandwiches. Zane’s parents were both very tan with dark hair and blue eyes. The kids stared at them, and then back at Zane’s red hair.

After his parents went back upstairs, Abby asked, “Why do you look so different from your parents?”
Zane’s face suddenly turned bright red.
“I’m adopted.” he said.
“That’s so cool!” exclaimed Emma.
“My cousin is adopted!” said Chris, “Why didn’t you tell us when we were talking about our families?”
“It’s not important.” Zane explained, “I’m just as a part of my family as anyone else and it makes things complicated.”
“Yeah,” said Maddie, “family stuff can be hard to talk about.”
The rest of the group agreed.

The group set up their instruments and began to play.
“We’re terrible!” groaned Ray, who was used to being praised for his talent on the guitar.
“This is going to be a disaster.”
Each band member was very talented, but they were not listening to each other. They needed to work together if the music was going to sound good.
“Cheer up!” chirped Maddie, “We just need to practice more!”
United Harmony kept practicing.

Four hours later, they sounded much better and the kids were getting more excited for the talent show.

“Maybe we should do this as our presentation for class too?” asked Chris, “Mrs. Sullivan did say to get creative. What’s more creative than singing a song for the class?”

“But we don’t want to spoil it before the talent show!” suggested Lily. Chris realized that it was a good point, and the kids decided to present to the class without the music.

United Harmony practiced three more times that week in preparation for the talent show.

By the end of the third practice, they sounded really good and put on a mini performance for their families. At the end of the song, the families cheered. They congratulated United Harmony and talked about how proud they were of their children.

Chapter 6: The Show

“We’re ready for this you guys.” Jon said, as he gave the group a pep talk.

“We’ve practiced so much, but I’m still nervous!” cried Maddie.

“It’ll be okay, we’re going to surprise everybody.” Chris reassured her.

The time had come. United Harmony was making their big debut at Harmonyville’s First Annual Talent Show, and they were going to be the closing act. The acts were organized by grade, so it started with the kindergarteners and worked its way up to the fifth grade. There were singers, dancers, comedians, magicians and jugglers. United Harmony was getting more and more nervous as the acts continued. Finally, they were announced.
“And last but not least. For the time ever - United Harmony!”

The crowd cheered.

The members of United Harmony jumbled onto the stage and got into position. The band started playing, and Lily and Maddie, the main singers, froze. They stared at each other and their faces turned red. The band stopped and the entire gymnasium was quiet.

Suddenly, Lily’s little sister cheered from the audience, “You can do it!” she said.

The rest of the audience began to cheer. United Harmony huddled together and encouraged Lily and Maddie. This was it. This was their moment.

“1, 2, 3, 4!” Maddie chanted into the microphone.

The band begin to play, and after the introduction, the girls started to sing. As the song continued, the group got more and more comfortable in front of the audience and soon the audience was clapping along to the music.

At the end of the song, there was a roaring applause from the audience. The group stood in a line at the front of the stage and bowed together as the crowd gave them a standing ovation.

“We did it!” yelled Ray over the cheers from their new fans.

United Harmony had done what they thought was impossible. Now it was the waiting game. The judges had to decide who the winner of the First Annual Harmonyville Talent Show was!
After deliberating, the judges took the stage as United Harmony waited nervously behind the curtains.

“In third place, with an amazing comedy act: Joe!” The crowd cheered, and United Harmony got more anxious.

“In second place, juggling 4 apples: Penelope!”

“And finally… in first place… UNITED HARMONY!”

The bandmates jumped and screamed with joy and ran onto the stage.

On Monday in class, Mrs. Sullivan congratulated the group on a job well done. She was so proud that they were able to overcome their differences and create such beautiful music. The members of the group were no longer just classmates who had to work on a group project. Throughout the process, they had become such great friends.
Appendix D: Unit of Study

This Unit of Study was created so that you, the educator, would be able to have some user-friendly alternatives for your students when deciding whether or not to do the typically well-loved lesson that may be difficult for some children.

In this book, you will find alternatives to five lessons that can be difficult for students who come from non-traditional households, especially students who are adopted. Under each lesson, there is a description of the original lesson as well as three to four alternative choices. Each alternative has a description underneath as well.

My hope for you is that you will be able to find lessons in this book that are more inclusive and accepting of different family types in order to incorporate each and every student you have into all of your lessons, regardless of the factors that make them different. These alternative lessons were developed after research on adopted children’s experience in schools, however, it is important to remember that these lessons will help all students, since inclusivity is such a vital part of the learning experiences for the students we teach today.
Lesson 1: Family Tree

The “Family Tree” lesson is one of the lessons typically done in elementary school that is often a difficult one for adoptees to complete. Since many adoptees are unsure of their biological family history, they don’t feel comfortable creating a family tree. For some children, looking into family history is extremely valuable and engaging, but if you have students in your classroom who are unsure about family history, such an activity can prove to be traumatizing. Structures of families in the United States, not just families brought together through adoption, are all very different. Because of this, students could be uncomfortable with a family tree lesson for many different reasons. It is impossible to name all of the reasons but extremely important to understand that there is an unlimited number of them.

Be sure to acknowledge and validate the thoughts and feelings of your particular students. Consider some of these alternative lessons that can help replace a family tree. Keep in mind the students you have in your class. If the entire class comes from a traditional and nuclear family, they might still enjoy these fun alternatives!

- Alternative lessons:
  - Family Orchard
    - **Objective:** Students will be able to expand the idea of ancestry to include all family types.
    - **Description:** A “Family Orchard” can be beneficial for all students, including ones who come from non-traditional backgrounds. In a family orchard, each person in your family has their own tree. While teaching this unit, you could stress the importance of
different types of trees and how every set of trees can be different. Each student can pick their own type of tree for their orchards, and they can also mix trees in their orchards if they choose to. Trees in this orchard are for anyone in the student’s life who they consider to be family.

- **Simple Procedure:** Have your students create visuals of their trees, in order to easily show their peers and present their work.

  - **Caring Tree**

  - **Objective:** Students will be able to understand that everyone who cares about us is essential to our lives, not just biological family.

  - **Description:** A “Caring Tree” is another option for students from non-traditional homes. This is a good idea for a classroom with many diverse backgrounds, especially if you, as the teacher, are unaware of all of the family structures within your classroom. A caring tree promotes grateful thoughts towards people in your students’ lives. The student is able to include any and all of the people in their life that care about them. This can incorporate family as well as friends, teachers, mentors, etc.

  - **Simple Procedure:** This is also a lesson where students create visuals of the caring tree. The visual will help them realize that everyone has plenty of people in their lives who care about them.
Important People Tree

- **Objective:** Students will be able to understand that there are so many important people who influence our lives.

- **Description:** Similar to the “Caring Tree,” the “Important People Tree” includes anyone that the student feels is important to them. Having someone who is important to you can promote motivation to do well and be successful in school. Many times, the things that important people do for us get taken for granted or overlooked. This lesson gives your students an opportunity to think about people that are important to them and think critically about why those people are important to them.

- **Simple Procedure:** The “Important People Tree” can be a visual that students create. Making it a visual will help them share their ideas with their peers.

Science lesson: Types of Trees

- **Objective:** Students will be able to understand the difference between deciduous and evergreen trees as well as the differences between family types.

- **Description:** A “Types of Trees” lesson is a great way to incorporate a family lesson with a science lesson. For this lesson, you are able to teach about the two different breeds of trees (i.e. deciduous and evergreen). The teacher can talk about the different types of deciduous and evergreen trees and how there are endless
types of trees, just like there are so many different types of families.

The most important part of this lesson is to inform students about the different ways that families can exist today. If possible, try to cover all types of families that are represented in your classroom, as well as ones that may not be represented that year. Never single out a child and ask them to explain their family to the class. If they choose to, let them, if not, let it be.

- **Simple Procedure:** This lesson does not have to include a visual. It can be a conversation, or it can be an activity where students draw different trees and different types of families and label them. It could also be a whole class project that grows from the students’ ideas.
Lesson 2: Baby Photo

Many times throughout elementary school, there are assignments that involve bringing a baby picture into the classroom. For many children, especially adopted and foster children, they might not have many (or any) pictures of themselves as a baby. Families in difficult situations might not have cameras to take photos or they could have lost all of their photos in a tragic event. For any and all of these reasons, as well as the innumerable reasons not mentioned, “Baby Photo” lessons can be difficult to implement in the classroom. When you have diverse types of families in your classroom, it makes it that much more difficult. Take a look at some of these alternative lessons that you can implement in your classroom to be more inclusive and sensitive to situations your students might be in!

• Alternative lessons:
  o **Favorite photo**
    • **Objective:** Students will be able to write a personal story, explaining their favorite photograph.
    • **Description:** A “favorite photo” project rather than a baby photo one is a great way to include everyone in your class, regardless of their family structure. Instead of bringing in a baby photo, a favorite photo is a great way to bring life from outside of the classroom in and to get your students talking about things they love to do when they’re not in school. This is a great opportunity to introduce personal writing into the classroom by having your students write about why the photo is their favorite and their
memories attached to the photo. This photo could be of them, their family, a place they love, or anything that is important to them. This lesson could be beneficial to families that don’t have any pictures or the ability to take pictures. The student could search the internet for photos of a place that is important to them or the teacher can take a photo of the child for everyone to be included in this lesson!

- **Simple Procedure:** Students will write about why this photo is their favorite, and learn how to persuade the reader.
  - **Baby Self Portrait**
    - **Objective:** Students will be able to draw a picture of themselves as a baby and write about what they think they were like as a baby.
    - **Description:** Although students may or may not have photos of themselves as a baby, there are often stories passed down about what a person looked like and acted like as a baby. Teachers can use a “Baby Self Portrait” lesson to tap into this part of a student’s life. This lesson would be a great way to incorporate students who learn with all different types of Gardner’s multiple intelligences as well as students who are English language learners or have learning disabilities.

      By incorporating art and encouraging students to draw what they think they looked like as a baby, it inspires the students to foster their creativity while they are thinking about the project.
Once your students draw their own “Baby Self Portrait,” they can be asked to write about what they would have been doing as a baby. Depending on the grade level and your students’ abilities, they can write a sentence, a paragraph or a story about themselves as a baby. You can also have the students share to the class verbally instead of writing down their thoughts.

- **Simple Procedure:** Have your students draw pictures of themselves as a baby on white paper. Once they’ve drawn the picture, have them write about something they think they would have been doing as a baby. Students may also explain verbally.

  - **Hero Biographies**
    - **Objective:** Students will be able to write their hero’s biography and/or report to the class orally about their hero.
    - **Description:** Another way to bring outside perspectives into the classroom if you have students that might have a difficulty with a baby picture is to talk about heroes. Heroes in a child’s life could be someone from history, a celebrity, an important figure, or a parent or a sibling. For this assignment, students will think about who their hero is. They will do some research on the person, and report about their hero’s history starting from when they were a baby. This is a great option for students, especially those in upper elementary to help them work on their research skills. Students
will be able to report to the class, either orally or written, about the
history of their hero.

- **Simple Procedure:** Teach your students the importance of research
  and interviews by having them interview and/or research their
  hero. Students will present their research to the class.
Lesson 3: “Story of My Life”

“Story of My Life” lessons can also be particularly difficult for adopted children and children in the foster care system. Since children can be adopted when they are at an older age and could have been in and out of the foster care system, it can be hard for them to create a timeline of their lives. These students may not know the information of their lives from before their adoption or they may not want to remember or think about deep-rooted negative experiences from earlier in life. By asking students to write stories of their lives, you are asking students with difficult histories to relive potentially traumatic experiences. This is something that is not often thought about when teaching elementary school students. There are many ways you can make a lesson related to lives or families without the likelihood of re-traumatizing the child. Continue reading to see a few of these!

- Alternative lessons:
  - **My Favorite Memory**
    - **Objective:** Students will be able to recall a positive memory from their life and write, draw, and/or share the memory.
    - **Description:** Although many students may have difficulties retracting memories from their lives, it can be helpful to spin it in a positive light. Having your students think of a favorite memory can help them remember good times and think positively about their lives. You can have your students write, draw, or share their favorite memories depending on the grade level you are teaching. By sharing these favorite memories, you can teach your students
how everyone has different life experiences and how we each value things differently. Even when highlighting the differences, you can further explain that everyone has a favorite memory and can talk to your students about the feelings they get when thinking about their favorite memories.

- **Simple Procedure:** Have students brainstorm about a favorite memory from their past. Depending on the grade-level, they can write, draw, or orally share their favorite memory to the class.

  o **Story of an Important Person**

    - **Objective:** Students will be able to identify an important person in their life, and interview them about a favorite memory or event.

    - A story of an important person is a way to bring in history and interpretations without focusing on the child themselves. Your students will be able to interview someone in their life about a favorite event or memory that they had experienced. This lesson would help your students learn how to get information from someone else by interviewing them. The assignment can include your students writing questions that they will ask the person they are interviewing. You can take this time to explain to students questions they might like to ask, and what is appropriate to ask someone while interviewing them. The students will then interview the person they chose (family member, friend, teacher, etc.) and report their findings to the class.
- **Simple Procedure:** Students will choose someone that is important to their life, and interview them. Your students will learn how to take notes during an interview, and report their findings.

  - **Accomplishment**

    - **Objective:** Students will be able to determine an accomplishment that they have achieved and write about why that accomplishment is important to them.

    - **Description:** Regardless of life experiences, every person has one thing they are proud of. Whether it be a sports trophy, a musical performance, a book they finished, or anything else, students are often proud of the work and the accomplishments they have made up until this point. Having your students focus on a moment that they are happy about can promote motivation among the children in your classroom to continue accomplishing their goals and being proud of their achievements. In this lesson, your students can write about the accomplishment they are most proud of and explain why they are proud of that moment. It is important to remind your students that an accomplishment can be as big as receiving an award or as small as lending a pencil to a classmate. Any act that you feel good about, no matter how big or small, is important to acknowledge.

    - **Simple Procedure:** The teacher will explain what an accomplishment is, and ask the students to think about something
they have accomplished in their lives. The students will be able to write about that accomplishment.

- **Where My Shoes Have Been**

  - **Objective:** Students will be able to effectively explain where their shoes have been.

  - **Description:** A life story, as previously mentioned, can be difficult for some of the students in your classroom to present. However, the life story of your shoes is not often as traumatic. There is a common ice-breaker that has been floating around called “Where my shoes have been.”

    During this ice-breaker, participants go around and talk about where their shoes have been. Making this ice-breaker into a lesson is really simple and meaningful! Students can use the anecdotes of their shoes to create a timeline, or to experiment with creative writing by personifying the shoes and telling the reader the shoe’s story. There are so many different types of writing you can get out of this lesson, so take the idea and run with it! You will soon see that the shoes take on a life of their own.

  - **Simple Procedure:** Depending on your grade level, your student can create a timeline of where their shoes have been, use personification to talk about how the shoes felt in each place, etc. Students will be able to have fun with this lesson while learning about topics they are required to know.
Lesson 4: Family history

“Life books” are books that are sometimes created for children who are adopted. Regardless of when their adoption occurred during their life, life books can help adopted people understand their history and learn about the life or lives they had before they were accepted into their forever home. While life books are amazing pieces of work for the people who have them, not every adopted person or person in the foster care system has one. This makes it difficult when doing in-school projects about family history.

Some adopted people deal with this by giving a history of their adoptive family, however, it is always difficult for a child to not know their family history. It is also extremely important to recognize that even though some of your students will have books or information about their family history, they will not always be comfortable sharing this with the class or even with you. Rather than doing a family history lesson or project, think about some of the following lessons if you have students with difficult backgrounds in your class!

- Alternative lessons:
  
  - *Origins of Your Last Name*
    
    - **Objective:** Students will be able to learn the origins of their last name in order to learn some interesting facts about their ancestors.
    
    - **Description:** By looking up the origins of your last name, you are able to find out information that even the elders in your family might not have known. This is a great activity for all students, especially the ones who come from non-traditional backgrounds, to do personal research about themselves. When students are able to
look up the origins of their family name, it helps them create an identity for themselves based on that name. If their last name comes from Italian descent or is South African, Chinese, Brazilian, etc. that tells a lot about the person’s family. Students can have fun learning about where their ancestors came from and are able to learn about possible “hidden meanings” of their last (or first) name.

- **Simple Procedure:** Students should be encouraged to research the roots of their last names, whether inside or outside of the classroom. They should be taught about origins and what you can learn from root words.

  - **Immigration Day**

    - **Objective:** Students will be able to choose a country they are interested in and research it.
    - **Description:** Being a nation of immigrants, or a “melting pot” if you will, the citizens of the United States of America come from hundreds of different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities. This means, that every student in your class has a unique history. The students might know exactly where their family comes from, or may be completely unaware of this fact.
    - For “Immigration Day,” students are able to pick a country that either relates to their family, or that they are interested in. Any country, including the U.S. is allowed to be represented in order to
incorporate everyone in your class. You can make Immigration Day as big or as little of a celebration as you want in your school or classroom. Students can bring in information, props, or even food from the country they decided to research on for immigration day. Please remember to be cognizant of any allergies or financial restraints in your classroom in order to decide what to do for your class’s immigration day!

- **Simple Procedure:** Students will research their country and create a poster showing the research. They will research important facts, culture, food, significant landmarks, etc. Once their posters are complete, they will present them to the class. You can open up the presentations to parents or other students as well.

  - **Compare and Contrast: Characters’ Histories**
    - **Objective:** Students will be able to understand that their background does not determine who or what they can become. They will learn that life is all about the choices we make, and that if they make good choices, they will live a good life.
    - **Description:** In order for your students to become aware of the different histories each person goes through, your students will be able to compare and contrast histories of characters in multiple books. By comparing and contrasting characters in each story, your students will be able to understand how each character is brought up differently and has a different backstory.
Depending on the books that you choose, the characters may have different histories with similar outcomes or similar histories with different outcomes. This lesson has the potential to teach your students that your background does not necessarily determine your outcome. Encourage your students that whatever their personal history is, they can become whoever they want to be as long as they have the motivation and the work ethic to get there.

- **Simple Procedure:** Once your class has read at least two books (either aloud, with partners, or independently), they are able to compare and contrast the characters in each book. This will help them learn that even if a story has a similar lesson, they characters can be very different or very similar with a few big differences.

  - “**Cinderella Family Tree**”

- **Objective:** Students will be able to create a family tree of their favorite character. They will learn about family trees and heritage without digging into their own backgrounds.

- **Description:** Another lesson that you can do with your students to replace a lesson that has to do with family history is a “Cinderella family tree.” This lesson can easily be changed to reflect any well-known character, such as any of the Disney princesses, any superhero, or any big hero or heroine from a popular movie or book. By doing family trees of characters, students will be able to look into the past of the character, rather than themselves. This
lesson is also especially beneficial for people with tough family backgrounds, as many of the princesses and superheros have difficult backstories. Students will be able to pick apart the lives of these characters to examine and try to understand them, which might help them reflect more positively on their own lives. This is a lesson that can be very beneficial to ELL students as well, since most widely spread books or movies are produced in many different languages.

- **Simple Procedure:** Give your students two-three choices of well-known characters from books and movies. The students will be able to choose one, and create a family tree of that character. They will learn how everyone’s background is different, but important.
Lesson 5: Mother’s/Father’s Day Projects

Imagine you are in elementary school. You are raised by same sex parents, a single parent, adoptive parents or foster parents. Maybe you don’t have a person who you can comfortably call mom or maybe you don’t have a person you consider a dad. Imagine again, that up until recently you had both parents, but one of them passed away, or had to move away for a job or has recently been incarcerated. For these students, and many others, Mother’s Day and/or Father’s Day can be particularly difficult holidays.

While it is important to appreciate your parents, the reality of the 21st century is that many students do not live in a traditional household with a mom and a dad. This has become more and more difficult as teachers and administrators to find alternative lessons to do on Mother’s Day and Father’s Day if there are students in your classroom that are unable or unwilling to celebrate the holiday. Continue reading for some fun alternative lessons that will be sure to include each one of your students!

- Alternative lessons:
  - Someone Who Loves Me
    - **Objective:** Students will be able to identify a person in their life who loves them, and create a card or a letter thanking that person.
    - **Description:** While it is very tempting to make cards or write letters for these holidays, sometimes it is best to steer away from writing these letters specifically to mothers or fathers. A “someone who loves me” lesson is a special way to appreciate someone in your life who cares about you. This can be a family member, friend, a teacher, or anyone else in the student’s life that he/she
feels love from. This lesson can be done around the holiday or on a random day of the year, because it is important to extend appreciation and thanks throughout the entire year instead of just during the holidays that are meant for it.

For this lesson, the students can talk about people who love them and write a letter/card of thanks. If the lesson is done around the holiday, students can choose to write the letter or card to their mothers or fathers or to anyone else in their lives.

- **Simple Procedure:** Have the students brainstorm people in their lives that love them. Then, have them create cards or write letters to those people, thanking them for their love and support.

  - **“Adult’s Day” Lesson**

    - **Objective:** Students will be able to understand that the adults in their lives are very important, and will create a card or write a letter to one of those people.

    - **Description:** An “Adult’s Day” is a fun way to incorporate all of the adults in a child’s life rather than just their mother or father. On Mother’s Day or Father’s Day, a teacher might choose to celebrate “Adult’s Day” instead.

      The child could create a list of adults who mean a lot to them or just choose to write a list of adjectives that describe a particular person. With those adjectives, the students can either write letters, cards, or poems (depending on the grade level) to the
person they want to thank on Adult’s Day. These writing pieces can either be kept in the classroom or brought home/to the adult they were written for.

The most important part of this lesson is to help your students realize that there are many adults in their lives that care about them, and that their title does not matter. This lesson can also lend itself to a conversation about respect and kindness. It is essential that children learn to respect each other as well as their elders and to be kind. By appreciating the adults in our lives who are respectful and kind, it is easier to teach your students how important respect and kindness is.

- **Simple Procedure:** Students will identify an adult in their life that they love and appreciate. They will then write a letter or create a card that shows that person how much the student appreciates them.

- **Random Acts of Kindness**
  - **Objective:** Students will be able to complete random acts of kindness, and learn the importance of these acts.
  - **Description:** A trend that has taken the world by storm in recent years is something known as “random acts of kindness.” This is an initiative that gained national attention through social media as well as news outlets across the country. By teaching students at young ages the benefits of random acts of kindness, we can raise a
generation of kinder and more accepting children. Random acts of kindness in your classroom does not need to be an entire lesson, but it can be a “challenge” for your students.

Spend a few minutes in your classroom talking about what random acts of kindness are, and then challenge your students to take action when they see an opportunity for one of these random acts.

- **Simple Procedure:** This lesson can be as short as a day, or it can be stretched out for a week or a month. You will challenge your students to complete random acts of kindness in their lives. Every so often, start the conversation again and ask the students to share what they have been doing as their random acts of kindness.

  - **Self-Love Day**
    - **Objective:** Students will be able to understand the importance of taking care of yourself and loving yourself.
    - **Description:** As an alternative to a Mother’s or Father’s Day project, a “Self-Love Day” can be really important for students. With the rising mental health epidemic, it is essential for everyone to remember how significant taking care of ourselves is. On or around Mother’s Day and/or Father’s Day, as well as throughout the school year, self-love days and projects can help your students to continue being motivated and confident in themselves. For this lesson, students will acknowledge positive aspects of themselves,
whether it be in the form of a poem, an art project, or a piece of writing. For this lesson in particular, it is important to give your students options of how they want to express self-love. Some students will be more comfortable writing about it, while others might want to make a poster about it. Let your students have some choice in this lesson, as it is supposed to be all about them. Self-acceptance is the first and one of the most important steps towards accepting and understanding others.

- **Simple Procedure:** Take a day every so often and talk to your students about the importance of loving, thanking, and appreciating ourselves. Let them express themselves in any form they choose. (Ideas include poems, writings, letters to themselves, art, music, etc.)