

Bringing Black History to Life: A DIY Idea

By Jim Emerman

A few months ago, I joined the San Francisco chapter of SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice), a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice. Through my work at Encore.org, and my own experience as a grandparent, I was especially interested in [SURJ Families](#), which works to connect SURJ members and the broader community with resources such as learning the skills to talk about race with our children and grandchildren, finding our different roles in exposing and dismantling the school to prison pipeline, supporting integrated public schools, and connecting in meaningful family-friendly ways to local and national SURJ campaigns.

In January, we participated in a youth teach-in for MLK Day. We read a story about a Latina girl inspiring her neighborhood to beautify a community with murals. After hearing the story, kids made their own mural on butcher paper and talked about what everyone needs to make their community beautiful.

Here's picture of my granddaughter reading the book, *Maybe Something Beautiful* by Isabel Campoy, to a group of kids at the MLK event.



For Black History Month, one of our members came up with the idea of a do-it-yourself project to teach our children about that Black excellence is everywhere we look, not just in the heros of the movement, but in everyday people excelling in ways that might not occur to us.

My contribution? Six posters of people that I met through my work on the Purpose Prize, run for [10 years](#) by Encore.org and now relaunched as the [AARP Purpose Prize](#), with the goal of highlighting how people in the second half of life can be change-makers, bringing their life experience and skills to solving problems in their communities. Through the Purpose Prize, I met these six people (and hundreds more) that I wanted my grandchildren to know about: [Jamal Joseph](#), [Barbara Young](#), [Inez Killingsworth](#), [Estella Mims Pyfrom](#), [Alexandreena Dixon](#), and [Rev. Richard Joyner](#).

To try this yourself, check out the "[Black Excellence is Everywhere You Look Facilitator Guide](#)" from SURJ Families; then try it out with your family, your child's or grandchild's school or any place else you can think of. You can see the posters my colleagues and I created and that we used at our community meeting here: [Black Excellence DIY Posters](#).