

## A Medley of Browns

*An activity of the Maria Hertogh series*

Maria Hertogh was a Dutch girl growing up in Indonesia when, one by one, things went wrong for her. Read the stories in this series at our website <http://more.whatsup.sg/> to see how complicated her life became as a teenager.

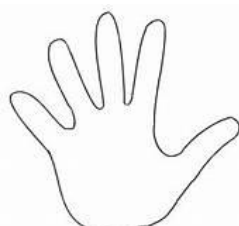
At that time, one obvious reason was World War II. There were other factors though — factors that we can now spot more easily as outsiders peeking into scenes that took place long ago. Over seventy years have gone by since her court case and the riots took place. Historians — and even her own children — are still piecing together the jigsaw puzzle of her life.

With hindsight, one factor that comes through clearly is that people's strong biases about race and religion had an impact. A novel way to reduce biases is by being happy about the diversity of peoples around us. That is what this activity does. More specifically, it is a celebration of skin tones in your class.

Work together as a class to construct a banner showcasing the skin tones seen in your class.

You will need: either a banner-sized roll of white poster paper or several sheets of flipchart/mahjong paper, poster paints, and felt markers.

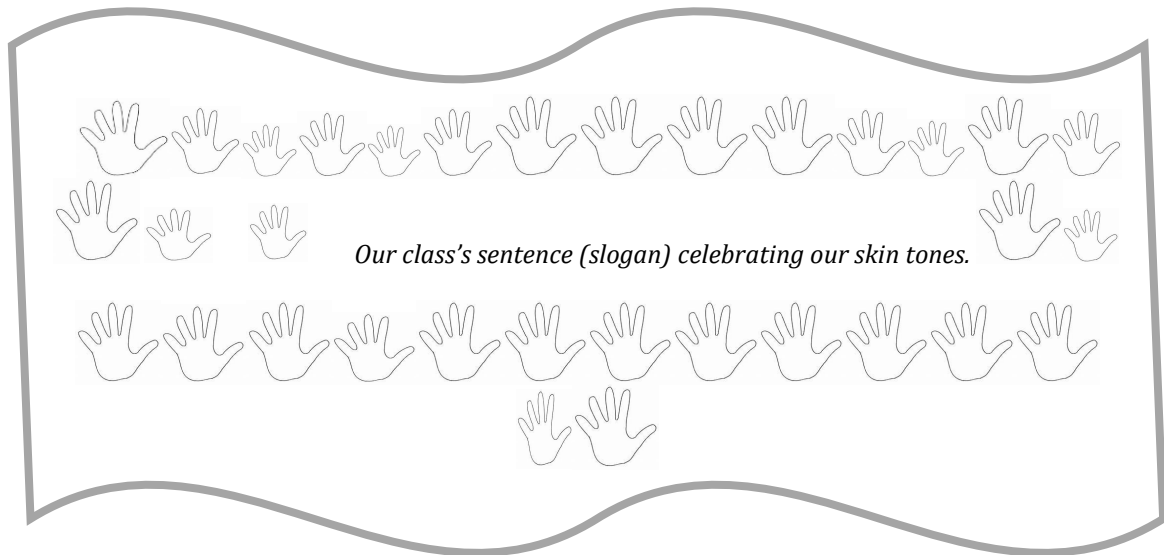
1. **ON YOUR OWN** — Study the colour of the back of your hand. Experiment by blending several poster-paint shades until the mix is the closest match to your hand. Keep track of what you added to the mix as you will need your formula later for your class's mural.

<p><i>The colour of my hand</i></p> 	<p><i>The colours I mixed to get this match:</i></p>
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Paint the hand outline  with the best match to your hand's skin colour.

2. **AS A CLASS** — Use either a roll of banner paper or join together five or six sheets of flip chart/mahjong paper to form a long banner. Set the banner on a flat surface such as the floor or a long table. Use little X marks all over the banner to indicate where the handprints should go. In the centre of the banner, write a meaningful sentence about skin colour.

3. **ON YOUR OWN** — Place your hand on the banner and trace your hand's outline onto the paper. Fill your hand's outline with the paint that matches your hand's skin colour.



4. **AS A CLASS** — When everyone has completed their handprints, hang the banner outside your classroom so that lots of people can see it.
5. **ON YOUR OWN** — Take stock of the different hand colours on the banner. Reflect on what this means to you. Responding to these questions might help you. You do not have to share your responses with anyone unless you really want to.

a) What was your first impression when you saw the banner filled with hand tones.

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b) Read this quote:

*“All human skin is generally one colour — brown. There is a wide range of browns. At the lightest extreme are tones that look almost white. At the darkest extreme, tones look almost black. Hence the terms ‘white people’, ‘black people’ in western countries.”*

Respond to the quote by sharing your thoughts about it.

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- c) “Colourism” is the term used when people treat others unfairly because of the colour of their skin. From their photos, we can see that the two women who quarreled over Maria had different skin tones: Adeline was very fair-skinned while Aminah was darker. Speculate. Could their appearances have influenced the way they were treated by strangers? Do you think there might have been colourism?

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- d) Each of us has a unique skin tone. In fact, we may even have several skin tones. For instance, hands may be darker than feet if you always have shoes on outdoors. Accept your special skin tone(s) by facing your feelings about skin colour. Is there anything you dislike about your skin? What do you like most about it?

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Answering these questions can help you to be comfortable with your own skin colour even as you celebrate the wide variety of human skin colours.