

**Curriculum Violence**  
Teach Without Harm

**Moms on a Mission**  
Fight Racism Alongside Families

**Lunch Shaming**  
Uncover a Broken System

# TEACHING TOLERANCE



ISSUE 64 | SPRING 2020  
TOLERANCE.ORG

*The*  
**New York**

TEACHERS ARE USING YOUNG READERS' EDITIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE BOOKS TO ILLUMINATE THE HISTORIES THAT TEXTBOOKS DON'T SHOW.



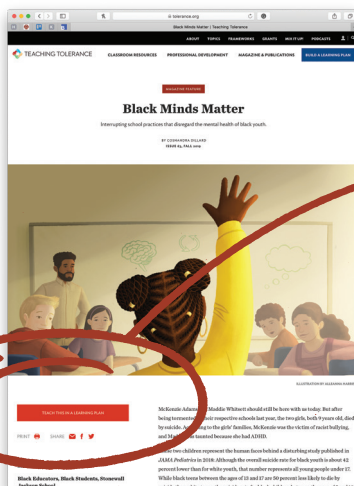
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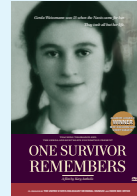
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*Grades 6-12*



### **ONE SURVIVOR REMEMBERS**

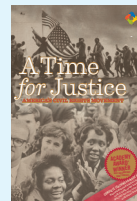
Gerda Weissmann Klein's account of surviving the Holocaust encourages thoughtful classroom discussion about a difficult-to-teach topic.  
*Grades 6-12*

**STREAMING ONLINE**



### **VIVA LA CAUSA**

An introduction to lessons about struggles for workers' rights—both past and present.  
*Grades 6-12*



### **A TIME FOR JUSTICE**

Follow the civil rights movement from Emmett Till to the passing of the Voting Rights Act.  
*Grades 6-12*



### **THE CHILDREN'S MARCH**

The heroic story of the young people in Birmingham, Alabama, who brought segregation to its knees.  
*Grades 6-12*



### **BULLIED**

A STUDENT, A SCHOOL AND A CASE THAT MADE HISTORY  
One student's ordeal at the hands of anti-gay bullies culminates in a message of hope.  
*Grades 6-12*



### **AN OUTRAGE**

A documentary film about lynching in the American South.  
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# TEACHING TOLERANCE

ISSUE 64 | SPRING 2020

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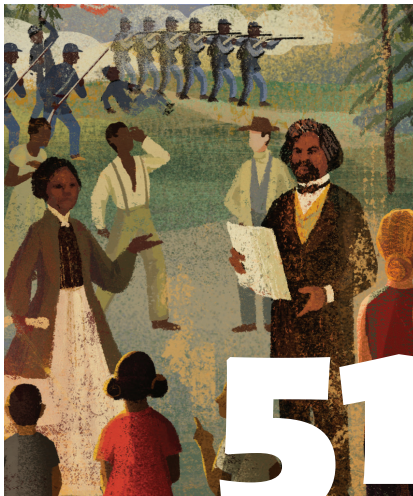
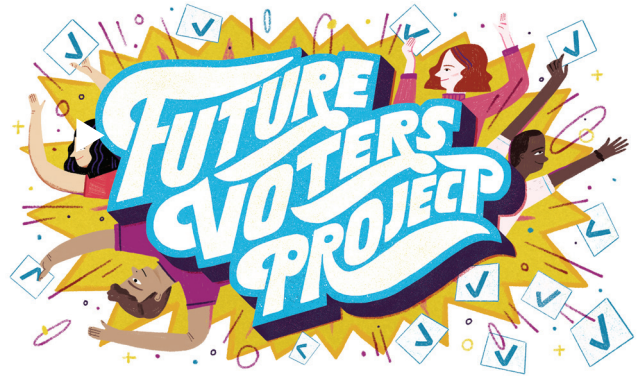
*Young readers' editions of bestselling books are taking over shelves in bookstores, libraries and classrooms.*

ILLUSTRATION BY **MICHAEL MARSICANO**



## New From TT!

Are you engaging students in voter registration activities this year? The Future Voters Project can help. [t-t.site/future-voters](http://t-t.site/future-voters)



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# TEACHING TOLERANCE

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**THE MISSION** OF TEACHING TOLERANCE IS TO HELP TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS EDUCATE CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO BE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN A DIVERSE DEMOCRACY.



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## Perspectives

**“School is often done to students instead of with them.”**

— JULIA TORRES



**DENVER TEACHER LIBRARIAN** Julia Torres noted this common school experience during the 2019 National Council of Teachers of English annual convention. This session, presented by members of NCTE’s Standing Committee Against Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English, was centered on antiracist education. And it made me think of my own child’s school experience.

As a Black parent, I have become increasingly anxious as my child has grown older. She’s only in third grade, but the adultification of Black children in school—on top of disproportionate discipline and significant disregard of their mental health needs—has made me vigilant in my attention to her school and classroom experiences and my engagement with her teachers.

I hope, more than anything else, that her educators do right by her. I hope that they truly see her. That they see her dreams and her potential—and that they work to support her in realizing them. That they treat her like a whole human being. I hope she comes away feeling that her school experience is one she got to co-create as opposed to something that was done to her.

Supporting educators to ensure this vision is the lived experience of every student is why I joined the Teaching Tolerance team more than six years ago. It’s why TT was established in the first place.

I’m writing this a week after Maureen Costello’s retirement as Teaching Tolerance director, following 10 years of her leadership. In all the changes that have occurred in the last decade—and those that are happening right now as Teaching Tolerance enters a new era—one steady current is clear to me: Our work is about doing right by *all* of our kids.

I’m thinking of the millions of students who are humiliated in the lunch line each day because they have lunch

debt, who have hot meals taken away from them in front of their school community and replaced with cold, less nutritious food. TT Senior Writer Cory Collins reports on the history of these practices in “Why Lunch Shaming Persists” and how doing right by students is a clear matter of will and priorities.

I’m thinking about the Black students in Las Vegas who were targeted for their race and threatened by white peers—and then had to figure out how to navigate a school environment in which they felt unsafe. In “Responding to Hate and Bias in the West,” TT Staff Writer Coshandra Dillard writes about how a group of parents is working to make sure such incidents never happen again—that school and district leaders do right by their kids.

I’m thinking of a kind of hate and bias that often goes unnamed and

unreported in the classroom: curriculum violence. Too many well-meaning pedagogical practices actually harm students. Education professor Stephanie P. Jones explains how this plays out and how educators can reflect on their practice to thoughtfully create lessons that build students up rather than tear them down.

I’m thinking of the Mississippi high school students who, after a bond issue to renovate their school failed to pass last year, went door to door asking their community to vote “yes” so they could have a functioning building. Like these students, too many of our children have to try to learn in facilities without heat and air conditioning, with caving walls and leaking roofs. As School Programs Coordinator Jey Ehrenhalt makes plain in “They Deserve Better,” every single student deserves better.

We know that we have a lot of work to do, but I’m not here to just talk about problems. There is so much good happening in our nation’s schools, so many educators who make it their business to teach students in a way that validates their lived experiences and engages them as partners in learning.

As you read this issue, I hope you’ll think about the ways you can do the same for the students in your care. I hope you’ll reflect on your lessons, your biases and your relationship to your profession to ensure that you’re doing right by *all* of your students.

—Monita K. Bell,  
TT Managing Editor



We’re grateful to our former director, Maureen Costello, for 10 years of creation, innovation and leadership. Happy retirement, Maureen!



**DO YOU HAVE A GREAT IDEA FOR A PROJECT? DON'T JUST THINK IT—DO IT!**



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## **SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATOR GRANTS**

Educators know how to build empathy, develop positive identities and promote critical thinking about injustice. Our grants fund creative classroom, school and district-level initiatives to make schools safe, just and equitable places for all students to learn.

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# FIRST BELL

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ILLUSTRATION BY ZACHARIAH OHORA

## Reader Reactions

In our Fall 2019 issue, members of the TT Advisory Board offered advice for social justice educators at the start of their journeys. To read “I Wish I Had Known,” visit [t-t.site/had-known](http://t-t.site/had-known).

This, from [@Tolerance\\_org](https://twitter.com/Tolerance_org), is the most important thing that I’ve read this week.

[@MISTERMINOR](https://twitter.com/MISTERMINOR)  
VIA TWITTER

I needed this so much. Thank you for your work and I will continue to do my part for the kids.

–CHA YANG  
VIA FACEBOOK

Thank you for sharing this. I’m going to read and re-read often.

[@AMD\\_Rocks](https://twitter.com/AMD_Rocks)  
VIA TWITTER

*Teaching Tolerance depends on your support and critical feedback to improve our work. We love hearing from you! Please let us know what you’re thinking.*

## WHEN THEY SEE US IN SCHOOLS

*When They See Us* is an invaluable classroom resource for teachers as PD for school stakeholders. ... Black and Brown boys may need to see *When They See Us* and have conversations with Black and Brown men who grapple with the many layered moments of invisibility projected in the film. Thank you for acknowledging that all

teachers need to check their motive for viewing WTSU in part or in whole in a classroom.

–DRJOYBJOHNSON2  
VIA TEACHING TOLERANCE  
MAGAZINE ONLINE

## LOVE FOR LIBRARIANS

Thanks for introducing more people to [@juliaerin80](https://twitter.com/juliaerin80). I’m a retired professor who’s learning a lot from Julia & other committed teachers in her

generation. They know that #BooksSaveLives, & they’re discovering new ways to spark a lifelong love of reading in their students. Yahoo!

–@JILLPIGGOTT  
VIA TWITTER

1. I stan  
2. My classroom library is a joke and I am committed to ruthlessly editing it for both content, relevance, student interest, accuracy & anything

else that comes to mind.  
 3. Thank you @Tolerance\_ org & @juliaerin80  
 -@LESLYERFOLMAR

VIA TWITTER

**NEW TEACHING HARD HISTORY RESOURCES**

Listening to 2nd season of @Tolerance\_ org podcast Teaching Hard History on Slavery & Native Americans and I'm hearing an extreme amount of equivocation. The language (inter-ethnic complicity) re: native participation in slave trade is disturbing. #ADOS

@GOODSENSEFARM

VIA TWITTER

I love how concrete the THH Framework is. I also appreciated being pointed toward related/relevant resources on the TT website—it's such a wealth of resources that I sometimes get overwhelmed, so the guidance was much appreciated!

-ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT

VIA TEACHING HARD HISTORY IN GRADES K-5 WEBINAR

I'm so excited that K-3 has finally been added to the Teaching Hard History Framework...I can't wait to share.

-@BLACKIS1969

VIA INSTAGRAM

**PRAISE FOR TT TRAINING**

Another great @Tolerance\_ org workshop in the books! Thanks for coming out @ValeriaBrownEdu and Hoyt to help us understand



the importance of teaching hard lessons to today's youth. #TeachingTolerance #FeelThePower

-@CTR4CHR

VIA TWITTER

**BLACK EDUCATORS IN CONFEDERATE SCHOOLS**

This is an important read. We need to listen—really listen—to our colleagues of color. #Equity

@MinnStateEquity

@Tolerance\_ org

-@SCC\_DR\_JOHNSON

VIA TWITTER

**BLACK MINDS MATTER**

I am a Secondary Level Special Education Teacher that works in a diverse, urban high school in Pennsylvania. On Twitter, I saw and later read the online article "Black Minds Matter" and it blew me away. As an African-American

public school teacher that returned to teach at my HS alma mater, it really struck a nerve from my personal HS experiences as well as what I currently see and hear happening in our schools throughout America.

-ROBIN ALOZIE

VIA EMAIL

I was thrilled to get your magazine in my mailbox today. I was also confused and devastated to see that someone had defaced it with permanent marker.

(They crossed out "Black" in "Black Minds Matter," and wrote "All.")

-ANONYMOUS

VIA EMAIL

**TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!**

Have an opinion about something you see in *Teaching Tolerance* magazine or on our website? Email us at editor@tolerance.org with the subject line "Letter to the Editor." Or mail a letter to 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104.



In response to our Fall 2019 cover story, "Black Minds Matter"

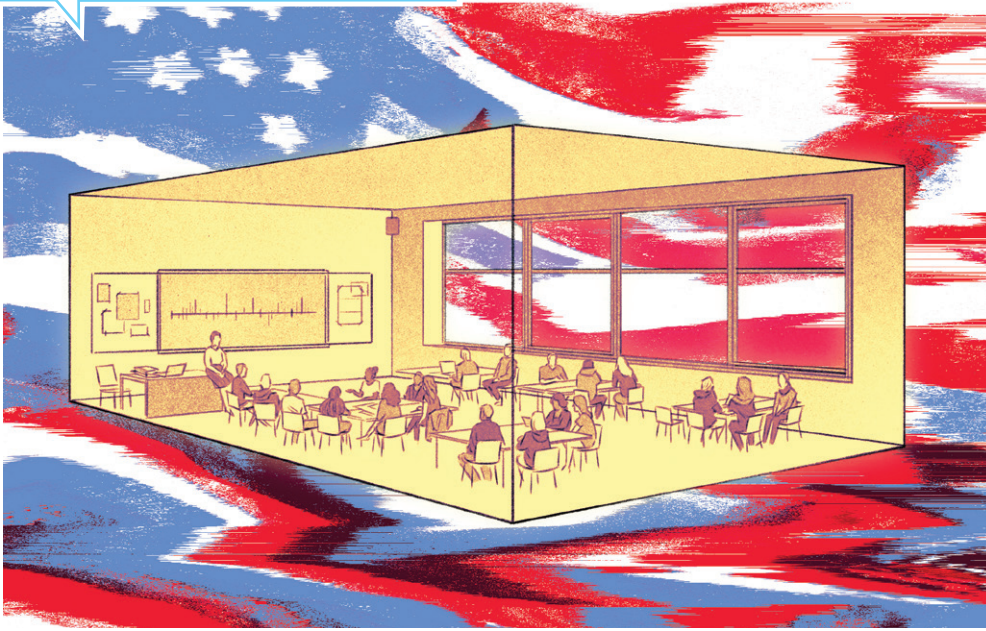


Thank you for this. Mental health is such a paramount issue and our schools and communities need to do more to help supporting our children.

@THEDRAGONPEARL VIA INSTAGRAM



## Ask Teaching Tolerance



**Q:** I'm a high school teacher dreading the spring when the political process will heat up. I'm concerned about how it will impact my students and our school climate. What should I do to prepare?

One thing to remember is that your students will most likely have concerns about this as well. Involve them in the process by asking about those concerns. Together, discuss how you might address partisanship when it manifests in your school or classroom. You can collaborate to devise a plan that will create an inclusive and supportive community. Consider how you'll hold yourselves accountable by checking in regularly to see how everything is going.

Another way to combat the effects of political polarization is to explicitly teach about it. This can be done in a way that is not

partisan. Start by helping students define what polarization is and what contributes to it. It's important for students to better understand how competing ideologies drive our political parties as they try to answer important questions like, "What is a good society, and how should we get it?" Finally, remember—and remind your students—that elections are an opportunity to help shape the future we want. Encourage students to consider their own ideas about what makes a good society and how we can achieve it. Doing so will help them recognize the power they hold as contributing members

of a diverse democracy. And the more engaged and informed students are about the issues that affect their lives, the harder it will be for them to fall back on partisan talking points.

**I'm a new teacher at an elementary school that does Pioneer Day, part of which requires students to dress up. I have concerns about the day itself and especially about students being asked to dress up. What should I do?**

Theme days, even those directly related to curriculum, can be problematic. When enacting historical narratives, it's important to ask: "Whose story is being

told?" Since history curricula often sideline or silence some experiences and perspectives, some students can feel left out. They might even be placed in a traumatic position, given the historical treatment of people of color. These activities also run the risk of cultural appropriation, since historical dress might be viewed as costume or as dress-up time by students.

You are probably not the only one at your school who sees a problem. We suggest clearly explaining your concerns to your colleagues and proposing changes. Consider how this event could tell a more complete story, become more inclusive, provide more critical engagement with the content and also meet your educational objectives.

Some possible changes might be having students research your town or community and then present their findings. Or they could take a virtual field trip to learn more about life during this time, especially learning how different groups of people were living. You and your team should invite students and their families to participate in the planning of this day so that all voices can be heard and an equitable activity can be enjoyed by all.

### ASK TEACHING TOLERANCE!

Need the kind of advice and expertise only Teaching Tolerance can provide? Email us at [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org) with "Ask TT" in the subject line.



ARTICLE 9.24.19 // GENDER &amp; SEXUAL IDENTITY

## Celebrating Banned Books Week Means Advocating for LGBTQ Texts

BY HENRY CODY MILLER

There is nothing controversial or problematic about being a member of the LGBTQ community. Rather, the problem is ideologies that perpetuate harm against LGBTQ people and frame their existence as something that must be erased. The celebration that is Banned Books Week offers an opportunity to name and challenge those ideologies: LGBTQ books are often banned because of systemic homo- and transphobia.

It's important to note that banning of books comes in multiple forms. For instance, the absence of LGBTQ books in classroom libraries is itself a type of ban, whether it's deliberate or not. It does not take an angry parent or administrator to silence entire identities. An educator's fear of backlash or ignorance of #OwnVoices texts both lead to the same result for LGBTQ students: a denial of their right to see themselves in the curriculum.

### And a reader replied...

I will never not support reading. And some of us know banned books can be the best ones.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE:

[t-t.site/banned-books](https://t-t.site/banned-books)

### ARTICLE SPOTLIGHT

Search for these headlines at [tolerance.org](https://tolerance.org).



**In Defense of Caring About Difference**  
BY CORY COLLINS



**How Inclusive is Your Teaching About the Environment?**  
BY ELIZABETH KLEINROCK



**Recovering and Teaching Local History**  
BY COSHANDRA DILLARD



**Supporting Nonbinary Educators in the Workplace**  
BY A. TOOLEY

### DID YOU KNOW?

*In the 2003-04 school year, 83 percent of public school teachers were white. In the 2015-16 school year, 80 percent of all public school teachers were white.*

– The National Center for Education Statistics



## Why I Teach



Sam Blanchard is a Ph.D. student in Urban Schooling at the University of California, Los Angeles.

# Standing Up and Speaking Out About Gender

“No, Nayla! Look at the picture! That’s not a boy! That’s a girl! That’s glitter!” Korey shouted at his partner as they were reading a book about a boy who likes sparkles. Nayla looked over at me, expecting me to jump in and support her in this conversation. I had been watching the interaction between the partners for a few minutes, knowing it would reach this point.

From a distance I met eyes with Nayla and gave her an eyebrow raise and an encouraging nod. I knew she had the language and skills to handle this on her own. She stared back for a moment, so I nodded again. Her eyes dropped and she took a deep breath. I

could tell she was thinking of what her next move would be. As she lifted her gaze to turn back to Korey, a subtle confidence strengthened her posture.

“Anyone can wear sparkles. We can’t assume someone’s gender because they are wearing sparkles. Anyone can be who they want to be. The book is calling him a he/him boy, so he’s a boy and that’s all. It’s not even our job to decide. It’s our job to be respectful.”

With that, Nayla grabbed the book and turned the page. She began reading in a way that signaled the discussion was over. Korey was still for a moment, and then shrugged his

shoulders and followed Nayla’s reading. When she finished the page, she glanced back at me. I was still watching. She smiled proudly. I smiled back. They continued to read with no further argument.

In my classroom, the discussions around gender and pronouns begin early and happen often throughout the year. As with many other topics, this is an area where I have received a lot of pushback from caretakers and school personnel. I have been told that third grade is “too young” to be discussing gender and that by teaching about pronouns and gender, I am setting my students up for a world of confusion.

## SHARE YOUR STORY

What motivates you to get up each morning and serve students in our nation’s schools? We want to hear from you. Send your 600-word submission for the “Why I Teach” column to [submissions@tolerance.org](mailto:submissions@tolerance.org).

The first time I can remember crying about my gender was in first grade. My pronouns are she/her/hers, but I am someone who is often misgendered and assumed to use he/him/his pronouns. At the beginning of each school year, as I am meeting new students and adults, I am often called “sir” or “mister.” For many of us, waiting to discuss gender is not an option. We are being misgendered now. We are being mistreated now. We are hurting now.

As a teacher, I feel it is important to create opportunities that empower student agency. I want the classroom to be a space where students feel supported in exploring the power of their voices. Likewise, I want students to practice respect and empower each other by listening openly and with empathy. When Nayla hesitated, then reacted with confidence, it was a small but pivotal moment of testing her potential. As I watched Korey listen, I knew he saw it, too.

When these conversations are normalized in the classroom, students are much more equipped with the confidence, language and skills to discuss and solve their own problems. Nayla thought for a moment to compose herself, but she had the words she needed to convey her ideas to Korey in a respectful way.

As I reflect on their interaction, I am proud. I am proud of Nayla for taking a moment and then finding the confidence to use her words and take action. I am proud of Korey for pausing and listening. I am proud of the two students for solving the problem on their own and then continuing to read and work together respectfully. Our students are ready and capable of having these conversations and understanding others with empathy.

No student is too young to learn to be inclusive and respectful of all people.



ARTICLE 10.1.19 // RACE & ETHNICITY

## A Crooked Seat at the Table: Black and Alone in an Honors Class

BY DR. KIARA LEE-HART

Picture it: You're in a class that will challenge your mind, expand your world and ultimately give you a competitive edge in college admissions. Your honors class is an opportunity—an opportunity that is not in the cards for many Black students. You know that Black, Native American and Latinx students are generally less likely to attend schools that even offer advanced classes. Opportunity gaps can limit your access to academic success from the start, resulting in racialized achievement gaps. These inequities present major obstacles for many students in search of a seat at the table.

Nevertheless, you're still here. You still made it to the table.

Making the grades, doing the work, you're making leaps and bounds, theoretically. But how far can you really go, sitting in a crooked chair?



### And a reader replied...

This gave me all the feels. Navigating this with sons. Tolerance.org, [thank you] for seeing + saying.

[READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE](#)

[t-t.site/crooked-seat](https://t-t.site/crooked-seat)



# I Live This Work

In her work as an educational consultant, Katrice Quitter supports educators, schools, districts and nonprofit institutions. She describes her work as helping people envision what diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging practices look like in action by making a one-degree shift in what we do each day. “Beyond putting it in our mission and vision statements,” she asks, “what does it look like as we create and maintain spaces that are equitable and inclusive for everyone?”

Teaching Tolerance sat down with Quitter to learn more.

## What you do wish folks better understood about diversity, equity and inclusion?

These terms are often used synonymously, but they are uniquely different and important. Because we have diversity, that doesn’t mean that we’re culturally responsive. Because we have diversity, that doesn’t mean that we’re equitable, nor does it mean that we’re inclusive. ...

A lot of times when it comes to culture, we think about things that are just visible. We think about observable behaviors such as holidays and food and music and how people dress. And one of the things that [Zaretta Hammond] talks about in her book [*Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*] is that culture is the way that our brains make sense of the world around us. When something at that very surface level isn’t static, it changes or shifts over time—it doesn’t really cause a large emotional impact on our trust. You know, most people can kind of adjust. ... But there’s a lot of things that are way below the surface, that fall into shallow or deep culture, and that



*Katrice Quitter is an educational consultant with the Hamilton County Educational Service Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.*

are going to influence the way in which I interact with people on a daily basis.

And this shows up often in schools, especially as we think about respect, perceived disrespect, relationships, beliefs about fairness, collectivism versus individualism, how people prefer to work and what they see as success. That really defines a lot of what we do in our environments. And if we don’t provide space of belonging for all of that—for a student, family or colleague—you feel

like a piece of you is erased, or you have to hide, or a piece of you is tucked away, that it doesn’t belong.

## How can educators better provide that space for belonging?

Be intentional and authentic in recognizing and celebrating the differences that exist in my environment. ...

Even thinking about how we communicate home to caregivers and families and just adjusting our language to be more inclusive in the

## Student Reads

Our free, online, searchable Student Text Library is packed with classroom-ready texts for K–12 educators. Each is aligned with TT’s topics and our social justice domains and accompanied by a set of text-dependent questions. Here are a few of our favorite texts for talking with students about identity.

### SWOOSH! (K–2)

Hani must decide whether she’s willing to remove her hijab to play in the big basketball game. With her teammates’ support, she stands up to injustice and makes an important decision.

[t-t.site/swoosh](http://t-t.site/swoosh)

### Beyond the Barbed Wire (3–5)

Helen Tsuchiya told folklorist Larry Long about her experience as a Japanese American child interned with her family during World War II.

[t-t.site/barbed-wire](http://t-t.site/barbed-wire)

### Commonwealth Club Address (6–8)

César Chávez delivered this speech on November 9, 1984. In it, he describes the horrible conditions for immigrants working on farms and advocates for change.

[t-t.site/commonwealth](http://t-t.site/commonwealth)

### Wade in the Water (9–12)

In this poem and its accompanying video, former U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith recounts her experience at a Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters’ performance.

[t-t.site/wade-water](http://t-t.site/wade-water)

communication that comes from school to home. Consider family structure, home language and how we are communicating. Not everyone has parents at home. We’ve got various family structures, so it could be grandparents, it could be foster care, it could be an older sibling. ...

Do we typically always offer engagement opportunities in the evening? And what does that mean? If I have families that work in the evening, that doesn’t mean that they don’t want to be a part of their child’s educational process. It means the time in which we typically do things doesn’t work for that family. So how can I be intentional about creating space for someone that might work second shift or third shift, not always expecting them to come to us? ...

This is my life. I live this work; my family and my friends know it. ... I’ve got two kids, and last time we had to update forms [at the doctor’s office], we had to give their names, their ages, and then it asked about race.

There were options listed. But my kids are multiracial, and they didn’t fit into any of the boxes on the form. And I asked the person up front, “Who do I need to talk to [for you] to get this form changed?” And she said, “Well, what’s wrong with it?”

Her quick response was to just “write in multiracial,” even though it wasn’t an option to choose from. If I didn’t know to ask about changing the form, I could have just listed one

or the other and moved on, but that doesn’t accurately represent my kids and their identity. ...

It’s simple things like that, that if it’s not your lived experience, you don’t know to look for those things. But when someone educates you or empowers you to think about diversity, equity and inclusion in a different way, you then walk into those situations and have the ability to not only be an ally, but to be an accomplice. ...

How do we empower folks to be an accomplice? How do we help people understand what it means to use their power and privilege to speak up on behalf of marginalized groups and why that might be uncomfortable? We need everyone to lean into discomfort. Initially, I described it as like building a muscle: It’s kind of like an equity personal trainer. The more you do it, the easier it gets. And then other people see you changing systems to be more equitable and inclusive. And they become inspired by the work that you’re doing and then want to join, too. They want to be a part of it.



*More than 4.8 billion school lunches were served to students in 2018.*

– The USDA Food and Nutrition Service

## FREE STUFF!

These web resources support and supplement anti-bias education—at no cost!

### Gender-Inclusive Puberty and Health Education

From Gender Spectrum, “Principles for Gender-Inclusive Puberty and Health Education” includes practical guidelines for developing a health education program that instructs and includes all of the students in your school community.

[t-t.site/gender-inclusive](http://t-t.site/gender-inclusive)

### Greater Good in Education

Developed and hosted by researchers at UCLA Berkeley, Greater Good in Education recommends “science-based practices for kinder, happier schools,” including best practices, lessons and reflection activities.

[t-t.site/ggie](http://t-t.site/ggie)

### The 1619 Project Curriculum

The companion to The 1619 Project, this K–12 curriculum from The Pulitzer Center offers reading guides, lesson plans and activities to bring the special issue of *The New York Times Magazine* into classrooms.

[t-t.site/1619-curriculum](http://t-t.site/1619-curriculum)

### The Disability History Museum

The education resources of the Disability History Museum include lessons that 6–12 educators can incorporate into a broader social studies curriculum. Of particular interest are essays by museum staff and others that can help students better understand this history.

[t-t.site/disability-history](http://t-t.site/disability-history)





## JUSTICE

## Digging Deep Into the Social Justice Standards

The Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards are the anchor standards and learning outcomes created to guide educators in curriculum development and to make schools more just, equitable and safe. Our standards are designed to be used alongside state and Common Core State Standards in all content areas to reduce prejudice and bias and advocate for collective action.

These standards are divided into four domains: Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action. This PD Café is the third in a series walking educators through the domains of the Social Justice Standards. Please see PD Café in the Spring and Fall 2019 issues of *Teaching Tolerance* for more information about the Identity and Diversity domains. Read on to learn more about our Justice domain—and how you might share it with students.

# Understanding Justice

## What Is Justice?

- The maintenance or administration of what is just, especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments
- The administration of law, especially the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity
- The quality of being just, impartial or fair
- The principle or ideal of just dealing or right action

*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

For younger students, you may simply explain that justice is, in many ways, a combination of fairness and opportunity: In a just society or group, people have the same rights and are not punished more because of who they are.



# Exploring Justice

In the story “Teaching Kindness Isn’t Enough,” Bret Turner wrote, “Moving ... toward real justice begins with building an identity-safe classroom: a place where everyone’s story is not only recognized but honored, studied and loved. This means moving beyond a curricular focus to make justice part of a class’s daily culture.” Students need to first understand their own identities and celebrate the diversity of those around them to be in a community where justice can exist.

When examining justice with students, it’s important for them to have concrete definitions of both justice and injustice so they can celebrate justice and also call out injustice when they see it. You can ask students to answer the following questions:

- What is justice?
- How do you know when you see or experience it?
- Do you know of people who have fought for justice?
- What are some ways that injustice can hurt people or groups?

Students can explore the answers to these questions using our teaching strategy “Save the Last Word For Me.”

For grades K–5, students can discuss the following questions after reading “The Story of Suzie King Taylor,” available in TT’s Student Text Library:

- Why did the children have to hide the books?
- How is not having access to books a form of injustice?
- How did the children use what they learned to fight for justice?

Students in grades 6–12 can discuss the following questions after reading an excerpt from Studs Terkel’s “Community in Action,” available in TT’s Student Text Library:

- What was unjust about how the family was treated during the Great Depression?
- How did the community demonstrate justice in its response?

Finally, students can think more deeply about injustice by discussing it together.

Write the following question in the center of pieces of chart paper: “What major events or systems have had a role in creating injustice in our world today?”

Divide students into pairs or small groups. Give each a piece of paper with the question in the middle and have them record their answers on it. Using the teaching strategy “Text Graffiti,” have students record their responses and respond to peers’ answers.

After a few minutes, students can choose an event or system and brainstorm solutions that would be more just. They can refer back to their discussion about what justice looks like.

After brainstorming solutions, come back together as a class. Students can share their ideas and discuss the following questions:

- Is there one right way to combat injustice?
- Does justice look the same for everyone?
- Does everyone have a responsibility to combat injustice, even if it doesn’t directly affect them?



# Justice Standards

## Anchor Standards 11–15 of the Social Justice Standards

11. Students will recognize stereotypes and relate to people as individuals rather than representatives of groups.
12. Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).
13. Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today.
14. Students will recognize that power and privilege influence relationships on interpersonal, intergroup and institutional levels and consider how they have been affected by those dynamics.
15. Students will identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world.

### Scenario #1

A class is discussing César Chávez and the American labor movement. Kelly mentions seeing on TV that most of the clothes sold in the United States are made in other countries, where workers aren't protected the way laborers are in the United States. She

notes that even though workers' conditions have improved in the U.S., that doesn't mean that we should ignore injustice elsewhere. She and several other students are inspired to go home and talk to their parents about purchasing clothes from companies that practice ethical manufacturing. They also plan to set up a clothes swap to help reduce wastefulness.

➔ Which of the five Justice anchor standards are demonstrated in Kelly's story?

### Scenario #2

Malik notices that many of their classmates with disabilities face challenges as they navigate the school and are often late to class as a result. Malik decides to look into building plans to determine if any accommodations are available for people with disabilities. They form a focus group of students and faculty to come up with effective solutions to the situation.

➔ Which of the five Justice anchor standards are demonstrated in Malik's story?

➔ How do Malik's observations demonstrate an understanding of justice beyond their own lived experience?

## Essential Questions

Pushing students to examine justice and injustice is critical. You can incorporate the Justice standards into your classroom practice when you write essential questions for your units of study. Below are two examples from different content areas.

### Third Grade Social Studies

J.12: How do the three branches of the U.S. government promote fairness? Are there examples of times when the government hasn't been just to all people?

**Sample Answer:** Students can begin by discussing how checks and balances among the three branches of the U.S. government are supposed to ensure fairness. For example, they may mention that these rules keep one person (or branch) from controlling the government, interpreting the Constitution or enacting laws. Students can discuss how, in theory, having three equal branches of government lets more voices be heard when the government makes the rules for our country and decides how to treat people. They can go further by discussing ways in which the U.S. government hasn't always been just to all people. For example, they may have learned that certain groups of people have not been allowed to vote at different times in history (and today) and therefore weren't (and aren't) represented in the executive or legislative branches. Students can consider how this lack of representation might affect which rules or laws are passed by the legislature and approved by the executive.

### Ninth Grade ELA

J.13: How do John Lewis' actions in *March* show an understanding

of injustice, and what actions did he and others take to raise awareness of injustices?

**Sample Answer:** Answers will vary. Students reading *March: Book One* may point to Lewis's participation in a group called the Nashville Student Movement. They can discuss how the group understood that Jim Crow laws and segregation impacted all communities by dividing people on racial lines and fueling hate, and Jim Crow impacted Black people specifically by denying them their humanity and basic services. Students should note that the group protested segregation by conducting nonviolent sit-ins at lunch counters that only served white people. They faced consequences like verbal abuse, physical violence and arrest. Students may cite the story's depiction of Nashville students planning the sit-ins, illustrating their understanding of injustice and tactics for combating it. Students can go further by discussing how the narrative of *March: Book One* points to the ways these actions inspired more activism—such as the boycott of all downtown Nashville stores—and how these actions sowed seeds of change, forcing leaders like Nashville Mayor Ben West to engage the issue and consider desegregation. Students with a firm understanding of Justice Standard 13 should be able to articulate how bias and injustice led to harmful actions by both individuals and government. In *March's* description of the lunch counter sit-ins, for example, students can cite details of individual abuse (verbal and physical) as well as the legalized segregation that allowed it to happen.

Now you try! Write an essential question based on one of the five Justice standards for your own grade level or content area.

You can't tell the story of the United States  
without talking about lynching.

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RECOMMENDED  
FOR GRADES

9-12

# AN OUTRAGE

A FILM BY HANNAH AYERS AND LANCE WARREN

**VIEWER'S GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE**

*Download the accompanying viewer's guide for activities and lessons that support teaching about this difficult subject matter.*

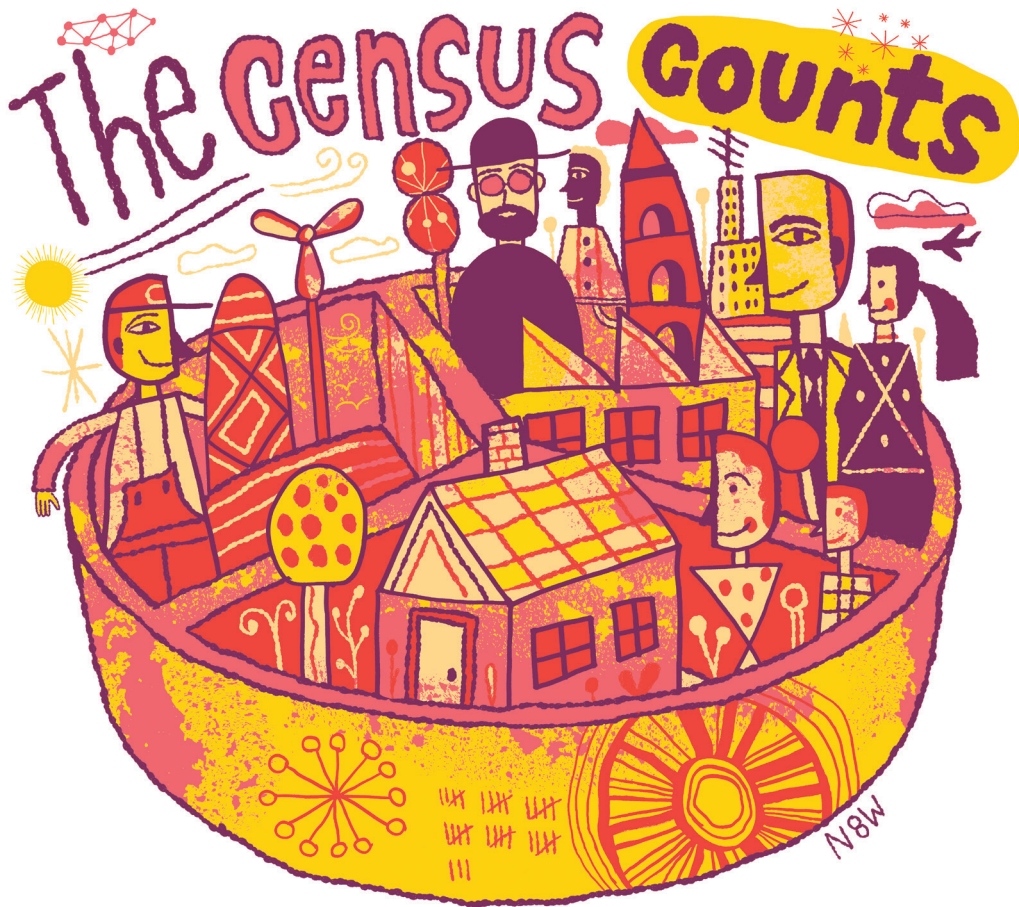
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OUR 33-MINUTE DOCUMENTARY, *AN OUTRAGE*,  
IS AVAILABLE TO SCHOOLS EXCLUSIVELY  
THROUGH TEACHING TOLERANCE.

For decades following the Civil War, racial terror reigned over the United States, claiming thousands of black lives. Lynching—an extralegal system of social control—left in its wake a pain that still lingers. Help your students understand how this terrible legacy affects individuals, communities and institutions today.

AVAILABLE FOR STREAMING ONLY AT [TOLERANCE.ORG/OUTRAGE-FILM](https://tolerance.org/outrage-film)





## What your school community needs to know about the 2020 Census.

BY MAUREEN COSTELLO ILLUSTRATION BY NATE WILLIAMS

**TEN YEARS AGO**, Americans who turned on the television in February to watch the Winter Olympics or check out the latest episode of *Lost* likely saw an ad urging them to “march to the mailbox” in the month of March. It was a message from the Census Bureau and part of a major media campaign that included hundreds of ads in 28 languages targeting every household in the United States.

I know about these ads because I was part of the team that produced them. I’d been hired by Scholastic, Inc. to direct the Census in Schools project, part of the massive communications effort that provided maps, lessons and take-home information about the census for use in schools in every state and territory.

I was excited about pointing students and teachers to the rich trove of data available to all of us via the Census Bureau. But the point of all the education was improving the accuracy of the census, increasing the number of people who responded right away by mail and, most importantly,

reducing the “differential undercount.” That was the official term for the fact that people from some marginalized and vulnerable groups—immigrants, people who don’t speak English, those living in poverty or experiencing homelessness, people in temporary housing and children—were historically undercounted or “hard to count.” The big push was to reach “hard to count” people, explain how they’d benefit from being counted, assure them the process was safe and encourage their participation.

The goal of every census is to ensure every person living in the country gets counted; this is true of the 2020 headcount as well—but a lot has changed in 10 years. While most households will still get the notice about the census in the mail, they’ll be able to skip the march to the mailbox and, instead, respond online or by phone. In 2010, the final mail response rate was 74 percent—one of the highest in decades. In 2020, by contrast, the Census Bureau is predicting that only 60.5 percent of households will “self-respond.” To

## What Can Educators Do?

**Give families a heads up and offer to help.** Early in the year, start letting families and students know to expect a letter in the mail. Volunteer to go over it with them when they get it.

**Get the whole school on board.** Alert families to the importance of the census on the school website, in emails and in messages from the principal. Teachers can find lessons online at [2020census.gov/educators](https://2020census.gov/educators). Activate the family phone tree to send the word out.

**Remind everyone** that not being counted will have the greatest impact on children, overcrowded schools, understaffed fire departments, and under-resourced hospitals and daycares.

**Give folks a reason to be counted:** to demonstrate community solidarity, to show strength in numbers, to express cultural or ethnic pride, to participate in civic life and to show that every person and every voice count.

**Organize a census information event for caregivers.** Bring in community representatives, obtain informational flyers from the Census Bureau and provide translators and childcare arrangements.

**Designate a person on staff to coordinate** and liaise with community groups who are also working on census response. Even if you don't have all the answers, you can direct families to people who do.

find and count the people who don't respond, the Census Bureau will send tens of thousands of enumerators into communities to start knocking on doors.

Getting an accurate and complete headcount in 2020 will be harder than ever because so many of those classified "hard to count" doubt whether it's safe to respond at all. Given our political climate, their fears are certainly understandable. But more than half the students in U.S. public schools belong to groups that risk being undercounted. The children you teach, the families you serve and the communities in which you work have a lot riding on an accurate census count. Educators can help by educating families, encouraging participation and dispelling rumors. Here's what you—and your school community—need to know.

### WHY IS THE CENSUS IMPORTANT?

The results determine how power and money are distributed for the next decade. The number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives is fixed at 435, but the way they're divided among the states depends on where

people live. Experts estimate that, if everyone were counted, states like Arizona, Florida, Texas and North Carolina would gain House seats—and Electoral College votes. Meanwhile, states like Illinois, New York, Alabama and Michigan stand to lose their clout in Washington. And it doesn't stop there: State and local districts also get redrawn based on census results.

Another reason to take the census seriously is that governments at all levels, as well as private businesses, make decisions based on census data. Businesses use the data to determine where to build new offices and facilities that attract jobs to communities. The federal government alone distributes over \$700 billion every year to support housing, education, transportation, infrastructure, health care and more, and it's allocated according to population. Communities where everyone is counted see more dollars for public services. ♦

*Costello is the former director of Teaching Tolerance, newly retired after leading the project for 10 years.*

## How Can Families Be Sure Participating in the Census Is Safe?

**Federal courts have decided there will be no citizenship question** on the 2020 Census. Everyone counts, regardless of resident status.

### Individual privacy is protected.

Individual names and addresses are secured for 72 years. The Census Bureau uses individual responses to produce statistical portraits of communities and the nation, but it doesn't share or publish individual information.

### Information is confidential.

By law, the Census Bureau cannot share personal information with ICE, law enforcement or agencies that provide government benefits.

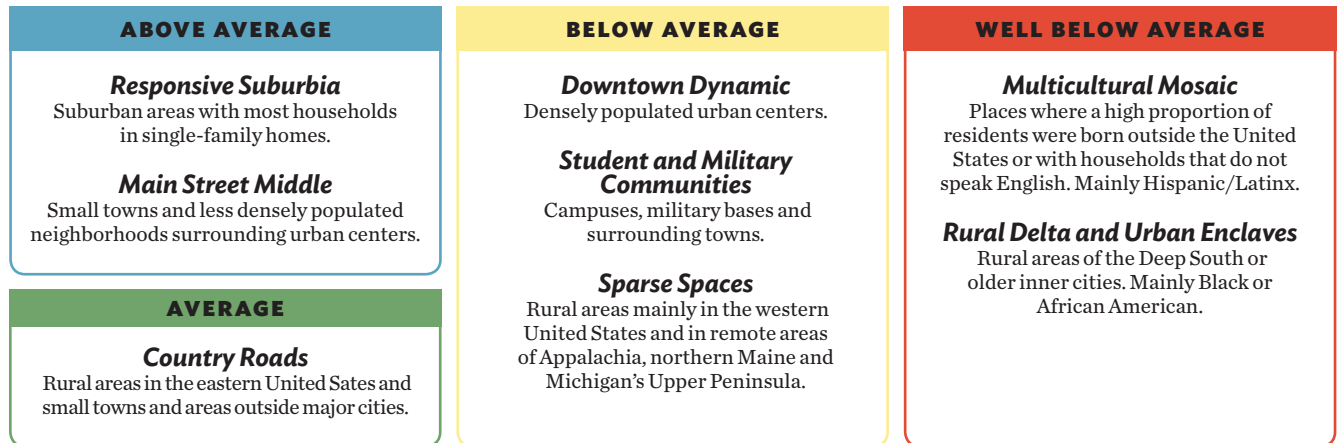
### Census workers take an oath for life to protect personal information.

Violating this law is a federal crime that includes a prison sentence of up to five years and a fine of up to \$250,000. There's no statute of limitations.



# Where Do Your Students Live?

The Census Bureau has identified the kinds of census tracts, or geographic demographics, that are most likely and least likely to respond. Here's how response rates for different tracts stack up:



# Who Is Most Likely to Be Undercounted This Year?

- 1

**Immigrants.** In the current environment, undocumented immigrants have good reason to be wary of letting the government know where they live. Even households where everyone has a green card may be wary of participating.
- 2

**People Who Distrust the Federal Government.** For any number of reasons, some people hold negative feelings toward the federal government and, as a result, do not want to participate in the census. This could include people of color or LGBTQ people who feel their identities have been targeted, or individuals who are disgusted by politics, Congress or the president.
- 3

**People Without Internet Access.** Asking people to respond online introduces a wild card into this year's count. Those without reliable access—often people in rural areas or those living in poverty—are less likely to hop online to fill out a form. Add to that people without a secure connection or digital non-natives wary of sharing personal information, and the online survey could become a real hurdle.
- 4

**Linguistically Isolated Families.** Families in which no one is fluent in English are less likely to be able or willing to participate and may not know that, while online or phone questions are available in 13 languages, the Census Bureau offers supplemental information in 59 languages other than English.
- 5

**Families Experiencing Homelessness or Transience.** With no permanent address, people who are living in shelters, in cars, with relatives or on the streets are unlikely to receive an invitation to participate in the census. Families who are “doubling up” may not want to reveal their circumstances to authorities.







# Why Lunch Shaming Persists

Lunch inequities have gone on for decades, but there's a clear solution.

BY CORY COLLINS ILLUSTRATION BY MELINDA BECK

**“HAVING GOOD FOOD IS NOT A PRIVILEGE,”** Betti Wiggins says. “It’s a civil right.”

As the officer of nutrition services for Houston Independent School District, Wiggins has transitioned the nation’s seventh largest school district away from private food vendors toward a self-operational system that provides free breakfast and lunch to every student. She did the same in Detroit.

Throughout her career, Wiggins has fought hunger. And if you ask her whether her food programs increase test scores or improve behavior, she says that’s a question for other administrators to answer.

“Here’s what I do know,” she says. “I have kids who line up every morning to get that breakfast.”

Wiggins also knows more students are eating school lunches now that the barrier of cost is gone. “So there’s a need out there,” she says.

And, of course, she’s right.

According to the USDA, roughly 2.7 million U.S. households with children were food insecure in 2018. In at least 220,000 of those households,

children missed meals, sometimes for days at a time.

Yet, many public schools remain places where children go hungry. When it comes to school lunch programs, many struggling families are left on the outside looking in, shut out by federal guidelines designed to ensure students have at least one healthy meal a day. It’s a system stacked against students experiencing poverty and students of color—and it always has been.

## A Recipe for Inequity

Access to these programs is limited by eligibility requirements. One way students qualify for free or reduced lunch is if their family is eligible for federal assistance, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This pathway to eligibility excludes undocumented students and documented immigrants who have been in the United States for fewer than five years. Though these students *can* qualify in other ways, their families may be wary of submitting paperwork or face language barriers in filling out forms.

Students can also qualify depending on their household income. The income qualification is based on the federal poverty line, a flat rate across the 48 contiguous states that fails to account for variable costs of living. This leaves many students—especially those living in high-cost cities—struggling to pay.

In the 2019-2020 school year, for example, a child in a single-parent home qualifies for free meals only if their parent or guardian makes less than \$22,000 a year. Two parents each making \$32,000 annually and supporting four children have to pay full price.

Despite obvious flaws, when problems in our nation’s school lunch programs make the news, it’s usually not because of these barriers of eligibility. It’s because of lunch shaming.

When students struggle to pay, they accrue debt. Too often, they are then left to fend off the system purportedly designed to protect them. Things shouldn’t work this way: Lunch shaming was supposed to go away on its own.

Five years ago, we addressed this issue in *Teaching Tolerance* magazine,

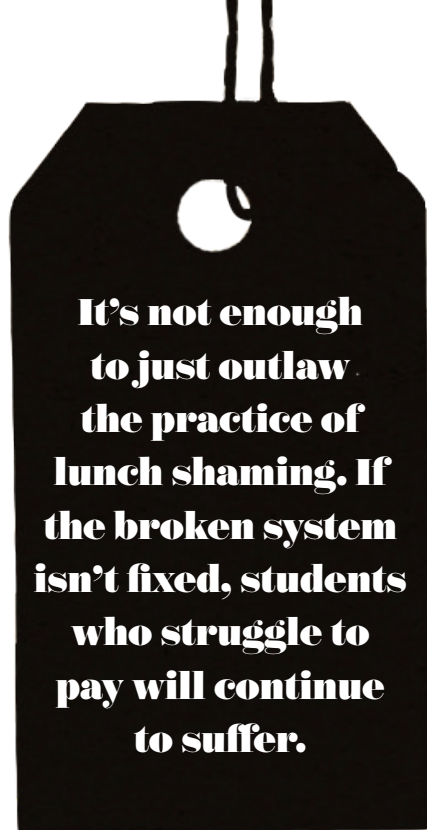
joining a chorus decrying these practices as harmful and traumatic. In the years since, about a quarter of U.S. states have passed some sort of anti-lunch shaming legislation. The USDA published guidance saying it was wrong for schools to deny meals, make children work for food or mark those unable to pay with stamps and stickers. But lunch shaming is a symptom of a broken system. And until its underlying cause is fixed, it continues to manifest.

In Maryland, a 6-year-old had her lunches thrown away in front of her and her peers and replaced with a cold sandwich after accruing a negative balance of \$1.60. In Pennsylvania, a school district wrote families to threaten that children with lunch debts could be placed in foster care. And just this October, a district in New Jersey approved a policy saying students with lunch debt could be banned from extracurricular activities like proms or field trips.

Practices like these are unlikely to stop anytime soon. According to a School Nutrition Association survey, three-fourths of school districts reported lunch debt at the end of the 2016-2017 school year. In 2017, the USDA required school administrators to create plans for collecting debt from students' families. Even in states with anti-lunch shaming laws, some districts have contracted with debt collectors to go after families with outstanding lunch debt.

The relentlessness with which districts are trying to collect money from students in their care points to an inconvenient truth: It's not enough to simply outlaw the practice of lunch shaming. If the broken system isn't fixed, students who struggle to pay will continue to suffer.

"I don't think there's a principal in the world who wants us to take a meal away from a student or expose their students to that kind of institutional bullying because they don't have money," Wiggins says. "I think it's the policies of the Child Nutrition Program that say,



"You are a not-for-profit business, so therefore you can't give anything away."

#### **An Imperfect Solution**

To ensure none of her students go hungry—and none of their families are harassed over lunch debt—Wiggins utilized a USDA meal service option called the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). The program was designed to simplify the free and reduced lunch application process for communities experiencing poverty. For a school or district to qualify, 40 percent of students must automatically qualify for free meals as of April 1 the school year prior to CEP participation. Once a school or district opts in, all students can receive free breakfast and lunch.

Created in 2010, the CEP is the newest USDA provision public schools can utilize to offer free meals to students who otherwise wouldn't qualify. Wiggins used the program to implement free meals for all students in Houston ISD and did the same for students in Detroit Public Schools in her previous role. Several other big school districts—Boston, New York City and Chicago among them—have also signed on.

Wiggins says she wishes more schools would take the opportunity: The USDA reports that fewer than half of eligible districts take advantage of the program.

Even so, the CEP has seemingly supplanted its predecessor—Provision 2—as the option child nutrition advocates recommend to public schools. Implemented in 1980, Provision 2 also allows schools to serve free meals to all students. However, problems with the program's affordability and adaptability seem to have contributed to its declined use. In California, for example, more than 1,600 schools used Provision 2 as recently as 2012, according to the state's department of education. By last year, that number dropped below 700. Meanwhile, the Food Research & Action Center reports that 2,833 California schools have adopted the CEP.

But the CEP has problems of its own. Despite the program's intent, in practice it sometimes shifts the individual inequities of free and reduced lunch programs to a schoolwide level.

Because eligibility relies on students' families receiving federal assistance, enrollment in the CEP can amplify some of the inequities already in the system. Qualifying income cutoffs, for example, are lower than those for reduced price lunch. A district serving a majority of students who fall just above these very low cutoffs can't opt in.

This perpetuates an access gap for those in cities and suburbs, where salaries may be slightly higher but are outpaced by the cost of living. While 45 percent of rural schools qualify for the CEP, only 19 percent of schools in urban areas do. This is despite the fact that, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, a higher percentage of urban households experience poverty than rural households.

The CEP eligibility requirements also threaten to exclude communities with high immigrant and refugee populations. Undocumented families and residents who have been in the United States for fewer than five years cannot apply for some assistance programs.



So even though a school or district may have a clear need, it might not have enough students enrolled in federal assistance programs to qualify. In these communities, if families are afraid or unable to submit forms for free or reduced lunch, then students go hungry.

But access isn't the only problem. Even for qualifying districts, the CEP can be cost-ineffective. The USDA doesn't reimburse schools for the full cost of the program; it bases payment on the percentage of students who qualify.

Even so, advocates like Wiggins say, the extra cost for schools is worth making sure each child is fed. After Hurricane Harvey, when Houston ISD became eligible for the CEP, she saw some kids join the lunch line for the first time. Before the school made food available to all, many of these students had been bringing in cheap snacks. They weren't getting free or reduced lunch, but their families still couldn't afford to pay \$2.50 per child per day.

While the CEP has been a lifesaver in some districts, patchwork policy fixes aren't enough to mend inequities that stretch back generations. Since the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the first permanent program of its kind, was created in 1946, the system has never served each child equally. Years of segregation meant students of color at underfunded schools were also underfed. By 1963, according to Susan Levine's *School Lunch Politics*, the NSLP reached only 26 percent of children of

color in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and Virginia.

In the 1960s and 1970s, civil rights activists worked hard to expand eligibility to more low-income students and students of color, only to see their work rolled back by Reagan-era budget cuts. Today, underfunded districts are wary of the effects proposed budget cuts will have on programs designed to ensure no student goes hungry.

The number of students eligible for free lunch faces its largest cut since 1981. The Trump administration plans to slice \$1.7 billion of child nutrition program spending over the next 10 years—the largest such cut since 1981. The USDA estimates that, under the proposed policy, approximately 497,000 students now enrolled in free lunch programs would have to pay a reduced price. Roughly 40,000 currently enrolled students would have to pay full price.

#### A Recipe for Greater Access

"The policies that we enact and the efforts that we fund with public dollars are an expression of our values as a state and nation," says Tia Shimada, the director of programs at California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA).

In October 2019, California passed a law that banned lunch shaming and required hot meals be provided to all students. It's a big win, but there's work left to be done.

The law led to more California schools adopting the CEP. Recognizing

the state's extremely high cost of living, CFPA is fighting for all students to have equitable access to school meals. Shimada also stresses the importance of combating anti-immigrant policies that hinder families' ability to participate.

It's vital, she says, that "leaders at the local, state, federal levels [enact] policies that equitably expand—and invest in—access to school meals."

For those who advocate for low-income students, this isn't a budget question. It isn't even an educational outcomes question. The only policy solution that addresses decades of a broken system is clear to those who have fought for years to fix it.

"As the adults in the room, we should never accept that some kids and their families go without the most basic of resources," Shimada says. "Offering meals free of charge to all kids is the best way to meet the needs of more students."

Wiggins, who studied dietetics agrees. She knows the system is sick. And changes in one district alone cannot heal decades of inequity in schools nationwide. But she controls what she can control. She serves who she can serve. And she's clear about what we need.

"Universal meals for all school-aged children is it," she says. "That's the par-amount issue." ♦

*Collins is the senior writer for Teaching Tolerance.*

## WHAT CAN EDUCATORS DO?

As educators and other advocates call for sweeping policy change to address the crises of lunch debt and child hunger, there are things individual educators can do, according to Tia Shimada.

Speak with your nutrition services department and district leaders. Let them know what's working well—and what's not working—for your students. Be ready to propose changes.

Subscribe to news alerts from advocacy organizations. They may have calls to action you can participate in, such as sending letters of support for legislation.

Ask your union or professional organization to make school meals a priority when negotiating with local, state or federal leaders about policy.

Ask students about their experiences with school meals. What changes would they like to see?



A portrait of Professor Tiya Miles, a Black woman with long dreadlocks, wearing glasses and a patterned scarf, standing outdoors with trees in the background. She is smiling slightly and has her hands clasped in front of her.

# Teaching America's Interwoven Histories

The shared history of African Americans and Indigenous Americans is rarely taught. TT talked to Professor Tiya Miles about why we can't understand American history without it.

BY MONITA K. BELL



**As Professor of History and Radcliffe Alumnae Professor at Harvard University,** Tiya Miles spends much of her time thinking, learning and teaching about how humanity's various histories come together and influence one another. Her American Book Award-winning book, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of Straits* (2017), is a prime example of such exploration, particularly as it concerns the intertwined histories of African Americans and Native nations to create the United States we know today. Miles, a 2011 MacArthur Foundation Fellow, shared more of these histories with *Teaching Tolerance*, and we're excited to share them with you.

**What led you to explore the intersections between African American and Indigenous American experiences, particularly Cherokee?**

I took my first African American studies course as an undergraduate. It was a literature survey that included slave narratives, and it completely opened my intellectual world. I will never forget the sense of sadness, exhilaration and conviction I felt after finishing Harriet Jacobs' narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. That reading experience led me down this scholarly path. I immersed myself in Afro-American studies in college even as I became pointedly aware through meeting my spouse, who is Aaniiih-Gros Ventre/Assiniboine, that the Black experience was not the only story or even the central story of subjugation and resilience in this country.

By the time I entered a doctoral program in American studies, I knew that I wanted to study Black life and Native life in tandem and with particular attention to women and gender. When the time came to develop a dissertation topic, I learned, to my deep disappointment, that much of African American and Native American intertwined history threaded through slavery, oppression and the beautiful-yet-painful efforts that individuals and communities made to heal from the past. I chose to study slavery in the Cherokee Nation in depth after engaging in a research process that revealed the breadth and complexity

of Cherokee-Black interactions and, importantly, a rich source base of documentary records that could help me to better understand this facet of Native American and African American historical life.

**Why is it important to consider these intersections when teaching and learning about American history in K-12 schools?**

We study history and teach history for the same reasons: to gather knowledge about the human condition, to encourage empathy and to shine a light on the "truths" (or as close as we can come to them) of the past for the sake of understanding, as well as guiding, our actions in the present and future. Teaching about Native American and African American intersections introduces our students to a fundamental set of realities: that history is multiple and not singular; that human action entails goodness and inclusion as well as exploitation and exclusion; that groups of people change themselves and one another through interaction; and that societies have faced great wrongs and struggled in complex ways to survive and re-establish moral ground.

**In particular, why is it important when it comes to teaching and learning about American slavery?**

Native Americans were important historical actors in this long chapter of American history—both as the targets of slaving for approximately

**“Teaching about Native American and African American intersections introduces our students to a fundamental set of realities.”**

200 years (and longer when mixed-race Afro-Native enslaved people who would be designated as “Negro” in planter records are included in this timeline) and as slaveholders of African-descended people for approximately 70 years.

Too often, the history of U.S. slavery is presented as change over time playing out across a binary set of racialized positions (white masters/Black slaves). The glaring omission in this limited paradigm is the crucial presence of Indigenous people, who were enslaved early in American colonial history, were enslaved by the tens of thousands, suffered great losses and harm, and fought against their subjugation. The Native story runs parallel to the African story, in some areas precedes it and often intersects with it. To omit this fact is to underserve our

students, who deserve to be introduced to the whole “truth” as best as we can discern and reconstruct it.

**One challenge educators may face is teaching about the two sides of Indigenous slavery and the fact that some Indigenous people were also enslavers. How do you recommend that educators help students make sense of this complexity?**

This is indeed a challenging task, especially given concerns that some educators may feel about pre-existing stereotypes of Native Americans (as “savage”) and about exposing historically oppressed and marginalized groups to further scrutiny. However, no population is exempt from the complexities of being human or the complexities of organizing societies that conceive and commit atrocities. It would be irresponsible, of course, to characterize all or most Native people as chattel slaveholders (when a small percentage of very influential people in a handful of Southern nations actually owned Blacks). It would be equally irresponsible to ignore the decisions that some indigenous individuals and governments made to buy and sell Black people as property and to legalize exclusion through slave codes and Black codes.

We tell this story responsibly by showing students as many sides of it as we can, by articulating the contexts of colonialism and racial hierarchy, and by encouraging empathetic as well as critical readings. Native American history (and African American history) can and should be treated with the same degree of nuance with which we (now, I hope) treat U.S. history. To deny the ability of any people to do terrible things, to harm others or to fail expressed ideals would be a denial of their membership in the human family.

**Your work also delves into various ways in which Black and Native communities came together in solidarity in the**



**past. What themes have you gleaned from those relationships, and what can young people learn from these themes?**

The dominant theme in these relationships is their unpredictable nature, and this is an aspect of Native-Black relations and also of historical relations writ large that I think students should understand. As people in the past grappled with change in often very difficult times, they struggled to make decisions, form relationships, shape social structures and solve problems. Within this complex picture, Native Americans and African Americans sometimes joined forces, identifying common values or threats. At other times, they disagreed, competed with and fought one another.

When these groups shared geographical and social space, all kinds of results followed: from the formation of devoted families to the birthing of new ideas and combined cultural

practices, to the organization of resistance movements, to the shaping of sharp animosities and hostilities. This history can reveal to students the dense complexity of the past as well as human interrelations. It can also show students that no groups are naturally aligned due to “common” characteristics like race or skin color. Alliances are forged, not given.

**What are some present-day implications of these Black-Native intersections that educators might explore in their classrooms?**

The most obvious present-day implication is the existence of the U.S. as a political powerhouse, a global force among nations. The U.S. exists only because of foundational expropriation of North American indigenous lands. The American colonies and American state established and cemented



economic and, hence, political strength as a direct result of legalized, systemized and culturally sanctioned slavery on this land—that is to say, the exploitation of Indigenous American and African-descended people’s mental, physical and reproductive labor.

Another contemporary implication that my students have found fascinating is the cultural exchange and borrowing that has led to a rich musical inheritance, particularly in the realms of hip-hop, jazz and roots music, as in the work of Muskogee poet and saxophonist Joy Harjo and African American folk singer Amythyst Kiah.

**For educators who are unsure of how to incorporate these intersecting histories into their curricula, where do you suggest they start?**

I would suggest starting with firsthand accounts and personal narratives. In my experience, the immediacy and vibrancy of these accounts grips the interest of students and invites questions about overlap, comparison, intersection and complexity. There are several excellent and accessible collections of WPA slave narratives to consult, both in print and digital formats. The collection *Black Indian Slave Narratives*, edited by Patrick Mingos (Blair), features narratives that reflect Black and Native intersections. A collection titled *The Oklahoma WPA Ex-Slave Narratives* edited by T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P. Baker (University of Oklahoma Press) also features relevant narratives. Similarly, the WPA Indian Pioneer Papers (published in thematic volumes and also available in library manuscript and microfilm collections) highlight Native experiences of removal and building new lives in Oklahoma that included interactions across lines of race, class, nationality and color. ♦

*Bell is the managing editor of Teaching Tolerance.*

*In the course of her research, Dr. Miles uncovered a number of unknown stories about what she calls “the mosaic of African American and Native American intersectional lives.” In her books **The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story and The Cherokee Rose**, Miles shares elements of that mosaic. She retells some of that history here for middle grades readers, with editorial support from TT Senior Editor Julia Delacroix.*

Diamond Hill was the name of a plantation founded by James Vann, a Cherokee businessman and political leader. The Black community at Diamond Hill was a diverse group, and it included a lot of people with different experiences and backgrounds. Here are brief histories of three people who lived and died at Diamond Hill.

James Vann was the owner of Diamond Hill. The son of a Cherokee woman and a Scottish trader, James inherited Cherokee citizenship from his mother and valuable property from his father. He controlled nearly 1,000 acres of land bordered by the Conasauga River in what is now north Georgia.

In 1804 and 1805, a lot of work happened on that land. A large two-story log home was built. Fields of wheat and corn were planted. Several herds of cattle were bred and cared for. A mill for grinding grain and a still for making whiskey were built. And a store was built and opened. But James didn’t do this work on Diamond Hill himself. He enslaved people to do the work for him.

Caty was an Afro-Cherokee woman enslaved at Diamond Hill. She had been born in the Cherokee Nation and spoke the Cherokee language. Caty’s parents had been enslaved in the Cherokee Nation, too. Because her childhood was so influenced by Cherokee culture, nearby missionaries said Caty was “like the Indians themselves.” Peggy Scott Vann, James’ wife and a Cherokee slaveholder on the plantation, thought of Caty as a close friend. She took care of Caty in the last days of her life, and she wanted to have Caty buried in a special place. But Peggy never freed her friend.

Isaac was also Afro-Cherokee and was also enslaved at Diamond Hill. He was an accomplished fiddler. Sometimes, when he was ordered to, he played at the Vanns’ parties. He was also good with languages—so good that the missionaries asked him to translate for Cherokees visiting the neighboring mission. He agreed, but he traded this work for reading instruction. Seeking to escape enslavement, Isaac ran away from Diamond Hill several times. The last time he was caught, James had him killed for running away.

In 1809, 583 Black people were enslaved in the Cherokee Nation. The Vann family enslaved 115 of them, about one out of every five.

Diamond Hill was the site of the largest Black community in what is now north Georgia. Enslaved Black people from nearby plantations and free Black people from the area often stayed there. In this place, mostly isolated from white Americans, Black people, Indigenous people and Afro-Native people went about their daily lives, raised families, suffered abuses and constantly looked for moments of dignity and chances for freedom.







# Let's Talk About It!

*TT's new and improved guide for facilitating critical conversations with students*

ILLUSTRATION BY SHAREE MILLER

**IN THE FALL** 1992 issue of *Teaching Tolerance* magazine, we published the feature story “Talk About It!”

Earlier that year, the Rodney King verdict and the ensuing L.A. riots made it clear that “we didn’t know what to say to each other,” we wrote in that second-ever issue. Educators, we said at the time, faced a new and urgent need: “to find ways to talk truthfully about things like bigotry, injustice and violence.”

More than 25 years later, the need is just as great. That’s part of the reason we’re releasing a new edition of *Let’s Talk!*, our guide to leading critical conversations with students.

Released in 2015, the original *Let’s Talk!* recommended ways K–12 educators could prepare for classroom conversations about critical topics and address student discomfort as the conversations unfold.

For our newest edition, we collected feedback from readers and users of the original and solicited advice from our Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board. In response to their suggestions, we expanded the guide. The new version helps K–12 educators lay the groundwork for conversations (on their own and with students), and it outlines classroom-ready strategies educators can use with students before, during and after critical conversations.

We’re pleased to share this excerpt from *Let’s Talk!*, which offers four recommendations for beginning such a discussion with your students.



## OPENING THE CONVERSATION

### 1. Be positive.

Your students take their cues about how to approach the conversation from you. When you engage critical topics with confidence, respect, and a genuine curiosity about your students' ideas and experiences, you encourage them to speak thoughtfully and truthfully and to value one another's contributions.

### 2. Establish norms.

Begin the discussion with a collaboration; setting norms together helps students build ownership in the conversation. It may reassure students to know that the discussion will have a clear structure. It also demonstrates your respect for student identities by including them in the shaping of the discussion. And they will likely have ideas that you haven't considered.

There are any number of ways you can work with students to establish norms, from whole-group brainstorming and small-group collaboration to journaling and sharing.

*You could lead students through a "Sounds/Looks/Feels" model.*

Ask students three questions:

#### What do we want our conversation to sound like?

Some norms will probably be obvious—no insults—but others should be more complex. Students may agree to limit their contributions until everyone's been heard or ask that everyone begin by restating the idea they're responding to.

A review of vocabulary can cut down on misunderstandings. Reminding students about people-first language,

for example, or about the difference between sex and gender can help ensure that everyone has the language they need to communicate clearly.

Here are a few stems that students can use to question or disagree with classmates.

- "What did you mean when you mentioned ... ?"
- "I agree and would add ..."
- "I agree when you say ... but disagree when you say ..."
- "I disagree when you say ... because ..."

#### What do we want our conversation to look like?

These suggestions will likely address respect. Students could suggest that desks be arranged in a circle, that listeners turn to the speaker and that phones, devices and computers be put away.

This is a good time to remind students once again of the difference between intent and impact. You can also address tokenism at this time, reminding them that no individual can speak for an entire group and that we shouldn't expect them to.

#### What do we want our conversation to feel like?

It may be more difficult for students to generate responses to this question, but answers could include that students expect to feel respected and believed.

If you've laid the groundwork for productive critical conversations, your students should have confidence that their identities and experiences will be valued. Remember that feeling safe and valued is not the same as feeling comfortable. Address this directly: Your discussion may at times

be uncomfortable, but discomfort is a necessary part of growth. ...

### 3. Establish goals.

Students should know why a critical conversation is taking place and what you expect them to gain from it. Talking through goals with your students also eases the class into the discussion. If you generally begin with an essential or compelling question, try involving students in its development. This offers an easy way to connect a critical discussion to the lesson, event or news that sparked it.

### 4. Offer a shared starting point.

However a critical topic finds its way to your classroom, remember that connections that seem obvious to you may not be clear to students. Instead of requiring them to be ready to jump into a critical conversation, provide a prompt to connect the discussion to their lives and to the curriculum.

#### *Text-response prompts*

Text-based prompts give students an opportunity to begin discussing a critical topic without immediately requiring that they share their own experiences. Choose a text—an image, a video, a song or a piece of writing—to share with students. Begin by letting them study the text, offering time for reflection or freewriting. Then ask students to respond.

Try asking these kinds of questions:

- Describe the text. What is happening? Who is taking action? What are they doing?
- Who in this text has power? How can you tell?
- Is there unfairness or injustice? How can you tell?
- What assumptions, misinformation or biases might be used to justify this injustice?





Find the full version of *Let's Talk!*  
Facilitating Critical Conversations  
With Students at [t-t.site/lets-talk](http://t-t.site/lets-talk).

- Who benefits from these assumptions, misinformation or biases? Who suffers from them?
- What about this text do you think will surprise most readers (viewers, listeners)? Did it surprise you? Why?
- What would justice or fairness look like in this text?
- How can you relate this text to a critical topic like gender bias, ableism, anti-immigrant sentiment, religious bias or anti-LGBTQ persecution?
- How can you relate this text to your own experience or community?

#### *Personal-response prompts*

Personal prompts, which open a discussion with questions, are particularly effective ways to build student interest in a critical topic. You might have students respond anonymously and then review their answers prior to the discussion. Or you could ask them to write as a way to start thinking through a topic before they'll be asked to share. One thing to keep in mind is that students with dominant cultural identities may struggle to articulate the ways that their identities have shaped their experience—this may be one of the few times they've ever been asked to do so. Consider including questions about multiple identities, providing model responses or simply reordering the questions below to ensure that all students are engaging with the critical discussion from the beginning.

Here are a few questions to try with secondary students:

- What are your earliest memories of race?
- What messages did you hear about your own race as you were growing up? What messages did you hear about other races? Where did these messages come from?
- How often have you thought about your race in the last 24 hours? In the last week?
- How does your race factor into the way you make everyday decisions? What about important life decisions? ...
- If you could change one thing about our school that's related to race, what would you recommend? How would you implement it?
- How would you compare the attitudes about race you see on our campus to those you see in our town? In our state? In our nation?

*These questions are adapted from materials by the Office of Student Diversity, Engagement and Success at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.*

And here are some questions for elementary students:

- How are the students in our school diverse?

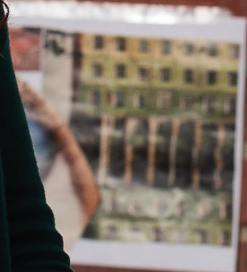
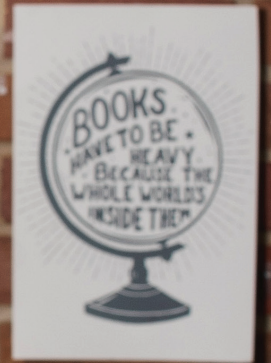
- Do you have a friend who is a different race than you?
- When you look at your cafeteria, do students group themselves in a certain way? Why do you think that happens?
- Think about the characters in your favorite movie, TV show or book. How are the characters like you? Different from you? Would you say the characters are diverse?

For very young students, consider having them mark a piece of paper with plus or minus signs to indicate their level of comfort or familiarity with a topic. For example, if your critical discussion has been prompted by a current event, you might ask students if they've heard about what happened, with "+" for yes and "-" for no. This will help you determine the level of background you'll need to provide.

*A quick word of caution: Although you are encouraging students to speak about their feelings, don't require them to share anything too personal. It isn't fair, for example, to require students to share about a time when they were the victims of discrimination and make them revisit that experience during class. Instead, try a sentence stem like, "One word that comes to mind when I hear the word 'immigration' is ..." or "One word to describe how I feel talking about race is ..." ♦*











# THEY DESERVE BETTER

Mississippi students were inspired by local civil rights icon Fannie Lou Hamer to fight for justice in their community today.

*Teaching Tolerance Educator Grantee  
Alexandra Melnick developed an  
exploration of Fannie Lou Hamer's life and  
work and left her students through it.*

BY JEY EHRENHALT PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROY ADKINS AND RICKEY LAWSON

# This was happening to a woman 20 minutes from here, and it's *still* going on today.

**AS 2019 DREW** to a close, Christopher Jackson was hitting the streets. He was out to get votes.

Along with his classmates at Leland High School, Jackson aimed to secure 60 percent of voters in a December bond issue election. The measure was intended to help renovate and repair their Leland, Mississippi, school. Months before, the bond had fallen shy of approval by just 14 votes.

Chris and his peers were motivated to pursue direct action in their community after investigating the work and writings of Fannie Lou Hamer, a civil rights icon and lifelong resident of their Delta region in northwest Mississippi. Alexandra Melnick, a Teaching Tolerance Educator Grantee and English teacher at Leland High School, developed the exploration and guided students through it.

**Common Roots With a Civil Rights Icon** Melnick's students studied Hamer's attempts to vote. They learned about the white jailors in Winona, Mississippi, who had Hamer beaten by other prisoners after her arrest for protesting segregation. They learned about the decades she spent community organizing, as well as the resulting firebombings and gunshots she survived in her home. They discussed her collaboration with Freedom Summer workers and her incendiary speech as a delegate of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

Students connect immediately with Hamer, Melnick says, because she fought for their community. When they listen to her speeches and read about her life, they understand where she's coming from—literally.

"She's particularly culturally relevant for my students," Melnick

explains, "because this is a very religious area and she's Southern Baptist. She uses a lot of Biblical allusions and renegotiates them in a way that is very female-empowered and [aligned with] liberation theology."

Students are not only drawn to the local roots they share with Hamer; they revere her as a true civil rights hero, says Melnick. For instance, when they took a trip with the school's African American Studies teacher, Shaun McDonough, to the Civil Rights Museum in Jackson, and students learned their tour guide had known Hamer personally, they were awestruck. "It was like saying, 'Oh my God, Beyoncé is here, or Lizzo,'" Melnick relays.

This reverence comes in large part from the depth of the students' exploration into Hamer's work. They examined the rhetoric of her speeches in detail. They studied the mood, tone and style of her words to understand how she effectively persuaded those who disagreed with her.

"She has this ... line where she asks, 'Is this America, home of the free, land of the brave?'" Melnick recalls. "That always gets such an emotional reaction out of my students because they have the same experiences, in the sense of asking, 'Is this really America, where [our school] is so underfunded?'"

## Inspired by the Past to Fight Injustice in the Present

Without basics such as functional heating and cooling and an adequate number of drinking fountains, teachers say providing students with the education they deserve presents a chronically uphill battle at Leland High.

"We don't have air conditioning in this room," explains the school's other English teacher, Jocelyn Jarrett. "So

in the summer, my classroom is 94 degrees. My students are at an average of a fifth or sixth grade reading level. They're state tested, so they can't graduate without passing my exam and they're trying to learn in a 94-degree classroom. A lot of these things are stacked up against the kids."

Chris Jackson says it's not difficult to connect the struggles of their high school, where more than 94 percent of students are Black, to the unjust conditions of segregation Hamer faced in her lifetime. "Sometimes we feel like the white people just don't want the school to be better," Chris explains, "and it shouldn't be like that. It shouldn't matter what color the school majority is."

Students individually studied a variety of Hamer's texts, while collectively investigating the overarching message in her rhetoric and connecting it to broader themes of identity and social change.

Down the hall in Shaun McDonough's African American Studies class, students examined the history of voting rights and the role of poll taxes and literacy tests in perpetuating voter suppression. McDonough tied this history to more contemporary forms of voter suppression like voter ID laws and limited hours at polling places.

Teachers made sure to engage intentionally and respectfully with this topic, as many students' families are already intimately familiar with these limitations. "The children have personal stories," Jarrett describes. "Oh, my grandma tried to vote and her name wasn't on the roll.' 'Well, my mother can't make it to the polls.'"

As students' experiences resonated with one another, their group discussions brought structural inequities to light. "They started understanding, 'Oh



man, this isn't OK," Jarrett says. "[The material] is so relevant that the students saw it themselves—these things holding them back that they hadn't seen before."

Students in Leland celebrate Hamer's story as one of resilience and success. At the same time, they have borne witness to segregation's unjust effects in their own lives and education. After the courts began enforcing school desegregation in the 1950s and '60s, "segregation academies" began cropping up across the Delta. Because these private schools founded by white families operated outside the jurisdiction of *Brown v. Board*, white parents could avoid sending their children to desegregated public schools. While these private schools are no longer legally segregated today, the reality isn't lost on Leland High students.

"They notice that the private schools around here have better facilities," McDonough says. "They notice that the majority of the kids who go to the private schools are white. I've heard them say, 'Our school wouldn't look like this if we were white.'"

Leland High served only white students until it was desegregated in 1970. Today, in an economically struggling community whose state legislature does not fully fund its public schools, it remains grossly underfunded. Melnick says even the roads outside the school are "clearly not satisfactory," and she advises visitors to avoid drinking the water, which runs brown.

"It's a huge moment when students are like, 'Oh wait—this is *still* happening now,'" she says. "This is *our* story. This was happening to a woman 20 minutes from here, and it's *still* going on today."

### Leland Students Know: "We Deserve Better"

Students at LHS followed September's election carefully, eager to find out whether their community would

support the necessary repairs for their school. When the measure fell short of approval by just 14 votes, they were crushed. For Jarrett, while the bond's rejection and its surrounding circumstances caused frustration, witnessing its effect on students has been even more demoralizing. She had to cancel that day's lesson plan because her students kept asking to talk about why the bond didn't pass.

"A lot of them felt it came down to who they were," Jarrett says, "going to these schools and their skin color and what they looked like. They said, 'Oh yeah, it's just because *we're* the ones that go here.' Hearing that out of a 14-year-old's mouth is absolutely devastating."

"Every time it comes up in the classroom, my 10th graders say, 'I'm not surprised. I didn't really see the classrooms changing anyway.' The [resignation] has already been beaten into them.

"But my ninth graders are still saying, 'We deserve better.'"

And there are signs of hope. After the bond's initial rejection, Leland students began mobilizing their community once again. They helped circulate a petition for a re-vote and doubled down on their efforts to engage community members about the importance of casting their vote.

After studying Fannie Lou Hamer, Jackson says, he believes the act of voting holds more

significance than the outcome of the election. During the last few months of 2019, he was out encouraging his neighbors to participate in the electoral process. "I think the community should come together more and discuss things," he says, "instead of being divided all the time."

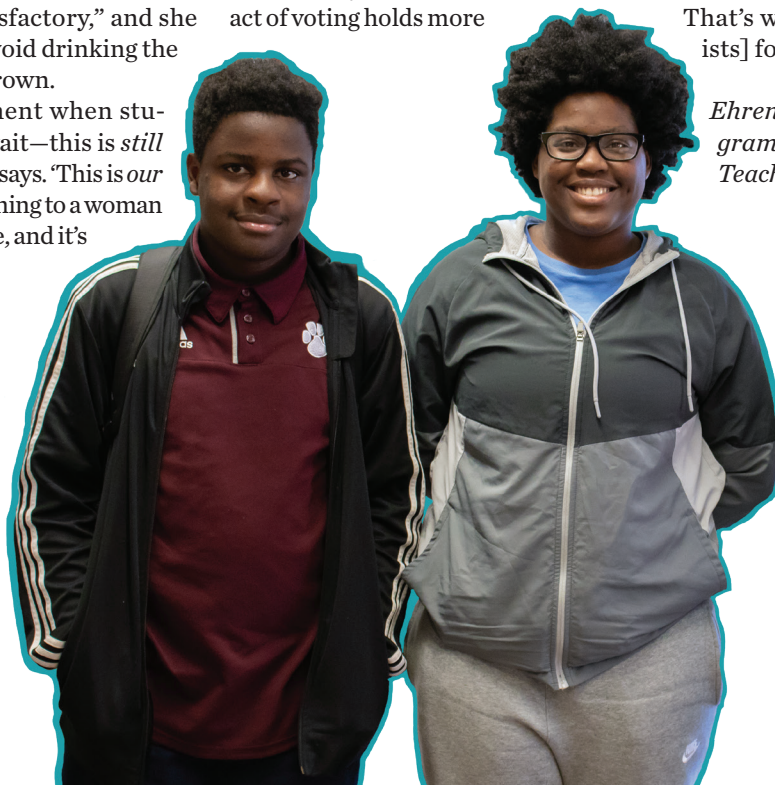
When the December election day finally rolled around, the town saw three-quarters of an inch of snow. The weather was a rarity for Mississippi, and a challenge for the high school, which local news reported had no working heat at the time. Even so, the report went on, residents of Leland "braved the rain and snow to come vote." The students reached their goal—on December 10, the bond issue passed with 63 percent of the vote.

"The BOND PASSED!" the district tweeted the next day. "Now we can do what we need to do for our students. Thanks from Leland School Districts." According to local news reports, work on the high school had already begun.

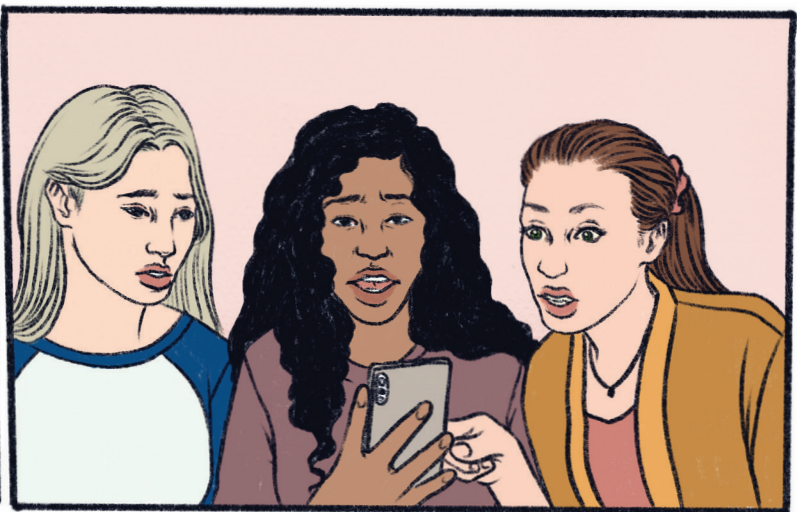
Months earlier, when the outcome of the election was still uncertain, Jackson had explained that the project had value independent of its outcome.

"Even if the vote doesn't go your way," he said, "you still gave your voice. That's the whole point of the process. It doesn't only matter if you won or not, just get your point across. That's what [Hamer and other activists] fought for." ♦

*Ehrenhalt is the school-based programming and grants manager at Teaching Tolerance.*



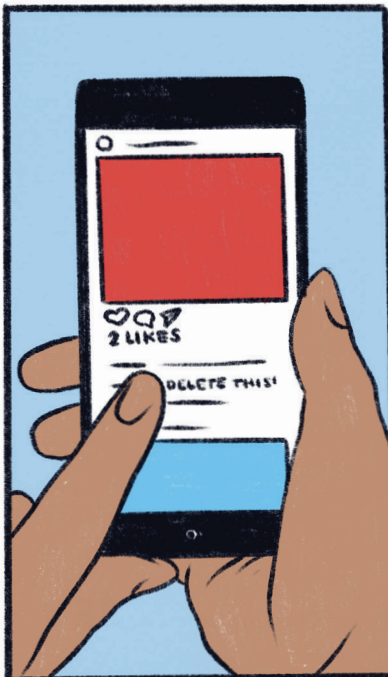
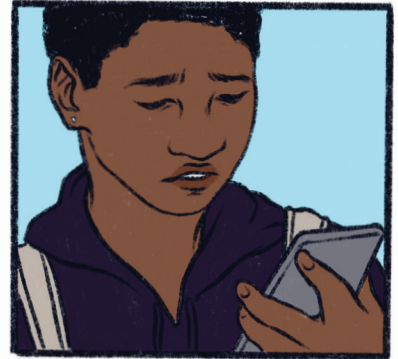
*Christopher Jackson and Imani Campbell were among the students who fought for a bond to renovate their school.*



# RESPONDING TO HATE AND BIAS IN THE WEST

A Las Vegas school made headlines when hate shook its campus. Now a group of parents is fighting to ensure children learn in a safer and more equitable environment.

BY **COSHANDRA DILLARD** ILLUSTRATION BY **RACHELLE BAKER**





**PARENTS IN A** northwestern Las Vegas community could not have imagined they'd spring into action to ensure the safety of their children one March morning. But it was a natural reaction to learning of racist Instagram posts that threatened physical violence against Black students at Arbor View High School. Some parents were aware of the posts on the evening of March 18. But to their surprise, the students responsible for the posts were still on campus around 10 a.m. the next day. Chaos ensued.

"When I got to school that morning, it was so sad. I was so sad for the students," says Akiko Cooks, mother of Corey Landrum, one of the targeted students. "Kids were literally running off the campus. Their parents were calling them, saying, 'Leave now.' Parents were flying on campus. You'd see people pulling into the parking lot, almost not parking, jumping out, running in and getting their kids."

The Instagram posts shook the community and spurred a mandate for a better school climate, led by parents.

All of the posts, which accompanied photos of nine randomly selected Black boys on campus, included language like the n-word, "wild monkeys" and "rodents," or they described violent acts against the targets.

"God just seeing these [n-words] inferioates [sic] me," one post reads, which was liked by at least two people. "I just wanna go Columbine pt 2 just but only kill the [expletive] [n-words]. I can smell the [expletive] melanin."

Cooks' then-15-year-old son couldn't discern whether it was a joke or a serious threat. He's still grappling with ways to express his feelings about the incident.

"I thought school was mostly a safe place, but [I] guess not," Corey says.

Parents, teachers and students across Clark County School District (CCSD), the fifth largest school district in the country, were stunned by the blatant racism shown toward a group of people.

"This is probably the first major incident that I've ever seen in Clark County where it was targeting such a specific group and really harshly," says one teacher, a former student in the district.

Two students responsible for the posts were arrested and charged as juveniles with making terroristic threats, conspiring to commit terroristic threats, breach of peace, cyberbullying and hate crimes. Police also cited a third student for cyberbullying.

One of the teens had access to firearms at his home—a detail that evoked fear in parents and magnified the seriousness of the threat. The teens were sentenced to nine months in a diversion program at a juvenile facility. This program, designed by the district attorney's office in response to the incident, addresses "bias and racism, as well as the school threats," according to Clark County's chief deputy district attorney.

But the sentencing and passage of time did not mean the ordeal was over. Parents, led by Cooks, set out to confront racism at the school, improve safety and heal the targeted students.

"They're trying to move forward and not allow this incident to shape their future, but I think it will anyway," Cooks says. "Because at some point, once they get older, they will experience some racism, and this will be a trauma trigger for them."

## **The Birth of No Racism in Schools #1865**

Ensuring that the students responsible for the threats are held accountable is one thing. Creating a space that prevents such a thing from happening is another. Following the incident, Arbor View administrators welcomed the Anti-Defamation League and the National Equity Project to address issues at the school, which has a Black population of about 15 percent; students of color represent just over half of the student body.

But this move puzzled some parents, as the district already has an Equity and Diversity Department that could be doing that work. Cooks, along with other Arbor View High School families, demanded more from administrators and called for accountability for that department. They also felt educators should do more to address and respond to hate. So they showed up at school board meetings and town hall meetings, and they organized.

Families whose children had graduated years prior were also present at gatherings to express concerns about enduring racism from staff and students.

"They didn't have students at Arbor View anymore, but they came to make a point," Cooks says of one town hall meeting. "They said, 'This has been going on. We've been telling you this. These kids have been flying Confederate flags. These teachers have been racist.'"

The parents' campaign became known as No Racism in Schools #1865. Jshauntae Marshall, another parent whose son was targeted in the Instagram posts, works with district administrators to ensure safety protocols are implemented and effective.

She's also pushing to close any disparities and implement equity and diversity trainings for staff.

Cooks focuses on awareness and communications.

"I really hope to reach teachers and educators," Cooks says, "because for me, [teachers are] either the first line of defense or the problem."

Members of No Racism in Schools attached the year 1865—the year U.S. slavery was abolished—to their effort because, to them, it represents the mentality they witness in society today. They sense regression to a more troubling time, but it's also a reminder that Black people have always been fighting—and will continue to fight—to ensure freedom and safety.

Seeking to go beyond the single incident, they came up with demands, including creating a crisis response team and improving mental health services. The district has worked through most of the demands so far.

The group also wants to instill pride in the Black community and motivate them to action. Through the campaign's Facebook page, Cooks shares upcoming events and articles and messages about Black history and Black achievement.

"Our message is very, very clear," Cooks says. "This is centered around Black students. But centering something around Black students does not alienate anyone else. It helps everyone. Uplifting a Black student does not kick anybody else down."

Racist incidents have not been exclusive to Arbor View. Parents learned that students in other CCSD schools had experienced similar problems. Subsequent incidents, such as an antisemitic note at one middle school and a racist video at another high school, gained media attention. It was so pervasive across the district that No

Racism in Schools #1865 wanted to tackle that, too.

### **It's Not Just Arbor View**

After revisiting old grievances other parents had shared at town halls and elsewhere—and sorting through districtwide data that showed racial disparities in suspension and expulsion rates—Arbor View parents understood that their school's recent hate incident was just a symptom of greater problems.

**"I want to show my son that you don't have to kowtow to anybody. All you've got to do is be righteous and do the work."**

According to Marshall's assessment of data she received from district officials, of the 377 schools in a district that serves over 325,000 students, 45 schools were at risk of experiencing a race-related incident primarily because there were racial tensions and alleged racial bias among staff.

No Racism in Schools #1865 quickly became a way to engage more broadly to correct problems around race in the entire district.

In partnership with the education journalism site *Nevada Voice*, the group encourages communities to speak about difference, bias and the district's

systemic issues through monthly town hall-style meetings.

The overt anti-Black racism in the Arbor View Instagram threats may be a shock to some—even those who live in Las Vegas. However, racial inequality and anti-Blackness were baked into the city's founding. While Nevada entered the United States as an anti-slavery territory in 1861, the territorial legislature created discriminatory laws that same year—banning Black people from marrying white people, from voting and from testifying in court against white people. Las Vegas was founded in 1905. By the 1920s, parts of Nevada, including Las Vegas, saw Ku Klux Klan demonstrations. And housing and job discrimination against people of color ramped up when construction on the Hoover Dam began in 1931. In "The Mississippi of the West?" author Michael S. Green explains that Black Las Vegans coined that phrase in the 1950s to reflect their experiences there. It's a phrase that both Cooks and Marshall have referenced.

The reality is that anti-Black racism in the United States has never been restricted to one geographical region. Although it's largely associated with the antebellum South, slavery was legal in all 13 of the original U.S. colonies. And places like New York, Pennsylvania and California have publicly paid homage to white supremacy with monuments, parks and schools named for Confederate figures.

It explains why, in 2019, Las Vegas parents observed groups of white high school students displaying Confederate flags on their vehicles. It also explains noose sightings under high school bleachers, students spouting the n-word on social media and complaints of implicit bias among teachers around the county.





*From left, Arbor View High School parents Consuela Nicole, Akiko Cooks and Jshauntae Marshall lead an effort to eradicate hate and bias from their school community after their sons were targeted in racist social media posts.*

**Empathy, Apathy and Lessons Learned**  
As CCSD transforms, parents of the targeted Black students have wrestled with a range of emotions. Cooks first felt fearful and then hurt, but later anger crept in. The thought of someone wanting to kill her son had her seething, but some community members advised her to temper that rage.

“A few times we were told, ‘You don’t want to seem angry. You don’t want to seem like an angry Black woman,’” Cooks recounts. “I said, ‘But I *am* an angry Black woman. [They] threatened to kill my child. I won’t subdue my anger for anybody else’s comfort.’”

It didn’t help that parents felt the district did not properly acknowledge that No Racism in Schools #1865, through their suggested solutions, were integral to the changes being made.

“As things are starting to roll out, I’m like, ‘No, you need to say that [we helped enact these changes] because we’re being painted as all these angry,

mad Black women who were villains,’” Cooks says.

The parents were also troubled that the threats evoked the Columbine, Colorado, shooting and that there wasn’t immediate mental health support for their sons.

The incident was a wake-up call, too: that racism can occur anywhere, and education and economic status don’t provide a shield.

“I’m not naïve to the fact that racism is alive and well and has a heartbeat in 2019, but I think I was just so much more surprised, and it hurt,” Cooks says.

It’s affected Jshauntae Marshall and her son so much that she’s considering relocating to the Deep South to reconnect with her ancestral roots. A student-athlete, her son withdrew from Arbor View after a verbal altercation with a friend of one of the students responsible for the Instagram posts.

Marshall was dismayed to learn that students had been quietly coping with

ongoing racism. She believes teachers weren’t culturally responsive; her son felt that’s just the way it is.

“He feels like there’s nothing that can be done about it, and he was numb to it—to what was going on—so much, and it was such a norm that he never came home and talked to me about it,” Marshall says. “So, it’s not something that was new that was going on at that school. ... The children just learned how to live with it.”

While the community as a whole continues to support the cause, No Racism in Schools #1865 members say active participation in their efforts has dwindled.

The apathy, Marshall says, is rooted in toeing a fine line as a person of color—and she understands why.

“I used to be the same way,” Marshall says. “I didn’t want to seem like I was too radical. I wanted to be sensitive to how [white people] would take me standing against racism. And that is a





*Jshauntae Marshall wears a "No Racism in Schools #1865" shirt during a press conference outside the Clark County Juvenile Justice center at the conclusion of a plea hearing for the students accused of making terroristic threats against her son and other Black students.*

typical issue among the upper-middle-class African American population.”

As far as standing against racism is concerned, Cooks says she is conflicted: She wants to hold accountable the students responsible for a hateful act, but also, as a mother, she feels empathy for youth socialized to hate.

“As a parent, I have to step away from emotion and just think logically on what I want to see happen to and for these two boys,” Cooks says. “They’re still children. ... What do you deserve as a child, as a 14- and a 15-year-old?”

Considering the racial inequities so often at play when it comes to punishment, Cooks reflects, “What I do know is that the law does not think about our boys like that. They don’t think like that for our children.”

### Looking Ahead

According to one of the educators we spoke with, the district’s woes will continue to linger until everyone—including administrators and educators—has a deeper conversation about race. It’s necessary for a school district

that is so diverse, with about 74 percent of its student population identifying as people of color.

“I think our district has to come to terms that we have some teachers and our leadership in the district who hold some very racist ideas about our kids or about what they do,” he says. “I think they feel like they don’t have to change.”

He added, “I want to be hopeful for Clark County. But I think we have a lot of work to do in order for me to really say I am going to be hopeful.”

Still, some in the district are optimistic. Anthony Marentic, who served as Arbor View’s assistant principal at the time, says the hate incident brought the community together because the school as a whole was affected, not just the Black students.

In the aftermath, he says, community members offered to help address the school’s ongoing problems around race.

“I was so happy with the support, that they came to the school [asking], ‘How can we help to stop this?’ And that was reassuring of just being a quality human being,” Marentic says.

Corey Landrum, Cooks’ son, says he feels safer now than when the incident happened, thanks to the work the district is doing per the urging of people like his mother.

“I feel that they have the problems that they need to fix, but me personally, I’ll just try to stay level-headed and try to move onward from that incident,” Corey says.

Parents like Cooks and Marshall demonstrate the importance of schools creating partnerships with families to tackle such issues. While the work can be disheartening and sometimes isolating, both women pledge to stay the course of doing what’s right: ensuring that schools are safe and that their children are free to be unapologetically Black.

“I want to show my son that you don’t have to kowtow to anybody,” Marshall says.

“All you’ve got to do is be righteous and do the work.” ♦

*Dillard is a staff writer for Teaching Tolerance.*





The New  
**YA**

**Young readers' editions can  
change the way we teach history.**

BY JULIA DELACROIX ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL MARSICANO



**THE CHILDREN TAKE** one of two poses: They smile at the camera, holding the book proudly, or they look down, absorbed in their reading. They are a range of ages and races and genders. They sit on couches or bedsides or in the back seat of a car. Several stand grinning beside the author.

Photos like these aren't exactly expected on the website of an esteemed historian. But if more historians follow the lead of Erica Armstrong Dunbar, the Charles and Mary Beard Professor of History at Rutgers University, that will change soon enough.

In 2017, Dunbar published *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge*. Readers were fascinated by the story of Judge, who was 22 years old when she escaped enslavement and remained a fugitive for the rest of her life. The book became a finalist for the National Book Award.

"What I knew almost immediately," Dunbar says, "was that I wanted to be able to translate this kind of history to younger readers." In January 2019, the Simon & Schuster imprint Aladdin published a young readers' edition adapted by Dunbar and Kathleen Van Cleve.

That release has special meaning for young readers.

"I've uploaded those photos because they've sent me photos, or their parents

have sent me photos, of them reading—actually reading the book—and being happy about it," Dunbar explains.

*Never Caught* has joined a growing slate of popular adaptations for young people, including Margot Lee Shetterly's young readers' edition of *Hidden Figures*, Patricia McCormack's adaptation of *I Am Malala*, and Tonya Bolden and Carol Anderson's *We Are Not Yet Equal*, a young adult (YA) version of Anderson's bestselling *White Rage*.

The summer of 2019 brought two new contributions: *A Queer History of the United States for Young People*, written by Michael Bronski and adapted by Richie Chevat, and *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People*, written by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and adapted by Debbie Reese and Jean Mendoza.

These 21st-century adaptations upset the tradition of "classics for children" that, for over 200 years, have started young readers on the path to the canon. These new books present cutting-edge scholarship in history, critical race studies, gender studies, queer studies and more. Accessible and developmentally appropriate, they insist that young readers deserve to critically engage with the world around them, and they model what that engagement might look like.

Perhaps that's why they're so popular among educators—and why they're

leading middle-grades and YA books out of the bookstore and into the social studies classroom.

### Beyond the Sidebar

Take Isabel Morales and her 11th grade U.S. history class. Her students have an assigned textbook. But they do most of their reading in two adaptations for young readers: *An Indigenous Peoples' History* and *We Are Not Yet Equal*.

"I think textbooks are making a better effort at integrating histories of all types of Americans," Morales says. "But I think in these [adapted] books, it's not a sidebar. It's not like, 'Oh, here are the contributions of these people.' It's like, 'No, we're centering experiences with Black and Native people.'"

Bayard Templeton, who teaches seventh grade U.S. history, has students read *Never Caught* for the same reason. "The three or four paragraphs in the textbook about the slave trade or about slavery can be good," he says, "but even in the best of textbooks, it'll always feel like a little bit of a side note to the larger narrative of the creation of America."

Students recognize the significance of the choice very quickly, he says, noting that "we might be reading a textbook that has George Washington on the cover, but we're [also] reading a different historical book that has Ona on the cover."



## Traditionally, adaptations have been designed

1807 *Tales From Shakespeare* | adapted by Charles & Mary Lamb

This early adaptation included retellings of Shakespeare's comedies as well as tragedies like *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

1889 *The Blue Fairy Book* | edited by Charles Lang

Among folk and fairy tales for children is an adaptation of the bestselling novel *Gulliver's Travels*, originally written for adult readers.



## The Process of Unlearning

In her preface to the young readers' edition of *Never Caught*, Dunbar addresses these dual—and dueling—narratives. “You are about to encounter a story of bravery and heroism that will make you think differently about everything you have learned regarding American history,” she begins.

It's not an empty promise.

Amanda Vickery, Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education and Race in Education at the University of North Texas, reads the adaptation of *Never Caught* with pre-service teachers in her social studies methods course. Even at the college level, she says, students “do a lot of unlearning.”

Morales agrees, using the same word—*unlearning*—to describe the work her high school students do. She says readings from *We Are Not Yet Equal* started students on a “process of reflecting.” They asked themselves, “What have we been taught about Black history?”

She shares their answer: “We've been taught that it's very sad; really sad and bad things happened to them.” Now, Morales says, students recognize the thinness of that narrative, pointing out, “Oh no, it's not just like Black people were subjects of history. ... They made history, and these are all the ways how.”

It's not an accident that trade adaptations spark these re-evaluations for

students. Tonya Bolden, co-author of *We Are Not Yet Equal*, is an award-winning YA novelist and nonfiction writer. Her goal, she says, is “telling the rest of history.” She offers the example of her 2017 YA novel *Crossing Ebenezer Creek*, which is centered around an understudied 1864 massacre of formerly enslaved people in Georgia.

“I think so often the narrative is bent backs, broken spirits, victim, victim, victim. And what I want to do ... is capture that humanity of enslaved people. Because if everyone was broken down and beaten and had all the love and hope beat out of them, people like me wouldn't be here.”

## The Work Historians Do

While a more complete account of history is clearly one appeal of adaptations, educators point out that they don't just tell different stories than the textbook does. They also tell stories differently. That may be another reason these books have found a foothold in social studies classrooms: They model the ways historians organize and research their ideas.

Morales says she chose texts to help organize her course around theories of

why events unfolded the way they did, rather than simply giving an account of what happened. She offers an example from *An Indigenous Peoples' History*: “The concept of settler colonialism is in there. [These books] are grounded in these concepts and give many examples of them.”

She adds, “The concepts are complex, and students can grapple with them.”

According to Joanna Green, a senior editor at Beacon Press who shepherded the adaptation of *An Indigenous*

*Peoples' History*, maintaining complexity is a critical part of the task. She

explains that there's no one-size-fits-all adaptation. Each book she edits in the ReVisioning History for Young People series might look different because each adaptation is designed to

best communicate the complex ideas of that particular text to younger readers. But there's one thing they all have in common.

“The value of these books is that they are so informed by academic scholarship,” she says.

Templeton says that's one thing he enjoyed about teaching *Never Caught*. Although the book reads more like a

“  
I think textbooks are making a better effort at integrating histories of all types of Americans. But I think in these [adapted] books, it's not a sidebar.  
”

## to introduce young readers to canonical stories and authors.

1912 *The Junior Classics* | edited by William Patten

This series served as a companion to—and shared an editor with—the popular Harvard Classics series for adults. Included in 10 volumes are retellings of Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott.

1941 *Classic Comics #1* | drawn by Malcolm Kildale

*The Three Musketeers* is the first novel adapted in this well read comic book series. It originally sold for 10 cents.

1989 *Around the World in 80 Days* | adapted by Marian Leighton

This young readers' adaptation was the first of the *Great Illustrated Classics* series, which would later adapt novels like *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

2016 *On the Road* | adapted by Melissa Medina and Fredrik Colting

Kerouac's novel is one of the first adapted by KinderGuides, which has since added titles including *Moby Dick* and *The Odyssey*.

## 2019-2020 YA Adaptations

*A Queer History of the United States for Young People*  
by Michael Bronski, adapted  
by Richie Chevat  
(Beacon Press, 2019)

*One Person, No Vote: How Not All Voters Are Treated Equally | A Young Adult Adaptation*  
by Carol Anderson, with Tonya Bolden  
(Bloomsbury, 2019)

*Dear America: The Story of an Undocumented Citizen | Young Readers' Edition*  
by Jose Antonio Vargas  
(HarperCollins, 2019)

*Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything American History Textbooks Get Wrong | Young Readers' Edition*  
by James W. Loewen, adapted by  
Rebecca Stefoff  
(The New Press, 2019)

*Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You | A Remix of the National Book Award-winning Stamped From the Beginning*  
by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi  
(Little, Brown, forthcoming 2020)

*Thank You for Voting | Young Readers' Edition*  
by Erin Geiger Smith  
(HarperCollins, forthcoming 2020)

biography or novel than a typical history text, students could still see the academic research behind the story.

“The kids picked up very quickly that she used a lot of, ‘and maybe then Ona did this,’ and ... ‘perhaps the chef was making George’s favorite meal that night,’” he explains. “I think there was an authenticity to that, as opposed to a textbook, which is so authoritative.”

Using what Dunbar calls “informed speculation,” *Never Caught* models historical thinking for young readers. This process of deduction, Dunbar says, is “a large part of any of the work that historians do, especially on enslaved people, on women, on those who did not leave behind the same kind of recorded evidence that appears in archives.”

Seeing that work made visible shaped his students’ approaches to history, Templeton says. “Kids were asking, ‘Well, did X *really* happen?’ ‘Was that what happened?’ ‘What do we know *for sure*?’”

### Something That Resonates

And it wasn’t just the talkative students asking those questions, he reports. While reading *Never Caught*, students who were quieter “when we were doing our usual approach to history” became “much more involved.” He says students “saw the courage and risk-taking that [Judge] exhibited. They were definitely fascinated. The idea that Ona was going to be given away as a wedding present, or the fact that George Washington was finding loopholes in the law to keep [the people he enslaved] in bondage, really offended and upset the kids. Giving them an authentic story truly resonated with them.”

Dunbar says that connection is key to helping students understand the past. “Everyone respects the courage and the bravery that’s easily seen through Ona’s

story,” she says, “and I think it’s those touchstones that allow any reader, from any walk of life, to connect.”

She explains that, when writing, she wanted the “strong narrative arc” of Judge’s history to serve as the foundation of the text, onto which she could then layer “the smells or the sounds of the streets of Philadelphia in the 1780s” and the “historical facts and details that help the reader put all of the pieces of American history together.”

But unified narratives aren’t the only way that adaptations build connection with young readers. No matter how they’re organized, the attentive writing that’s so common in these texts—and often so lacking in textbooks—can help young people lock into and better understand the history they’re reading.

“That’s basically what I try to do: tell a good story,” Bolden says. “I think that the elements of fiction and poetry have a place in nonfiction.”

They certainly have a place for Morales’ students. “They’re very, very, very interested,” she says. “They comment all the time, ‘Oh I didn’t know this.’ ‘I never learned this before.’ ‘This is so interesting.’ ‘This is so sad.’ ... I think it’s really opening their eyes about U.S. history.”

That’s exactly the response these adaptations are intended to evoke. So it’s unsurprising that, when Bolden describes her work, she sounds almost indistinguishable from the educators she says she serves as “backup” for.

The way we write history matters, she explains, “because we want to not just impart information, but we want to reach and touch our young people’s psyches and souls and spirits ... to write to the whole person.” ♦

*Delacroix is the senior editor for Teaching Tolerance.*





# ENDING CURRICULUM VIOLENCE

Yes, curriculum can be violent—whether you intend it or not. Here's what it looks like and how you can avoid it.

BY **STEPHANIE P. JONES** ILLUSTRATION BY **KEITH NEGLEY**

**IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**, my teacher made me pick cotton. She brought each student their own plant, and her goal was to make us understand how hard cotton is to pick. It has only been a couple of years since I began to tell this story in public. I kept it a secret for a couple of reasons. First, as a small child, I trusted my teacher and did not allow myself to believe that she would cause me or any other students harm. Second, after some years passed, I was ashamed that it had taken me this long to understand the impact of what happened.

I understand now that this experience is the reason why I later learned to hate family tree assignments, especially those that included pictures. How do you explain to your classmates and your teacher that your family is not missing, but the assignment will always be incomplete because you don't know their names or have pictures of them?

Michael Dumas, an assistant professor in the University of California, Berkeley's Graduate School of Education and African American Studies department, describes school as a particularly harmful place for Black students in the article "‘Losing an Arm’: Schooling as a Site of Black Suffering." He notes that this suffering is the kind that "we have been least willing or able to acknowledge or give voice to."

My story and many others like it are examples of school-based racial trauma—a type of physical or emotional injury uniquely impacting Black and Brown children in school spaces. As I reflected on my own experience, I wondered whether what happened to me is still occurring in schools. And, if so, what does this mean?

### Racial Trauma as Curriculum Violence

I started conducting research to find out. Every level of education has been affected by the presence of racial trauma. K-12, private, public, parochial and higher education institutions are reporting racist incidents that include the isolation, bullying, taunting, stalking, intimidation and physical assault of Black and Brown students. Although identifying these types of harm is important in capturing a realistic landscape of what school is like for many students, it leaves out what is often a more subtle aspect of racial trauma: curriculum violence.

Two Black scholars, Erhabor Ighodaro and Greg Wiggan, coined the

term curriculum violence in their 2010 work *Curriculum Violence: America's New Civil Rights Issue*. They defined it as a "deliberate manipulation of academic programming" which "compromises the intellectual or psychological well-being of learners."

Curriculum violence is indeed detrimental, but it does not have to be deliberate or purposeful. The notion that a curriculum writer's or teacher's intention matters misses the point: Intentionality is not a prerequisite for harmful teaching. Intentionality is also not a prerequisite for racism. As I define it in my work, curriculum violence occurs when educators and curriculum writers have constructed a set of lessons that damage or otherwise adversely affect students intellectually and emotionally.

harm but rather a type of emotional destruction legitimized as teaching. Picking cotton at my small school desk was the first exposure to what I would later understand as chattel slavery. The impact wasn't swift or instantaneous but slow, methodical and jarring.

When we reserve the word violent as a descriptor for physical violence only, we fail to recognize the many ways in which non-physical injury happens, is normalized and, in the case of destructive pedagogy, harms students' learning and how they see themselves in it. This kind of violence leaves an indelible mark on students and compromises their emotional and intellectual safety in the school setting. And it occurs all too often in history instruction.

What happened to me that day in school was not a type of violence involving physical harm but rather a type of emotional destruction legitimized as teaching.

It is important to understand why I use the word *violence*. Although the shame of not interrupting my teacher was not mine to own, this is what happens when curriculum based on good intentions becomes education with a damaging impact. The word violence suggests to most people a physical act of harm—where fist and face meet, where words can provide no comfort or relief. What happened to me that day in school was not a type of violence involving physical

I should also point out that curriculum violence does not exist only as a form of racial trauma. For example, leaving queer history out of the curriculum or teaching it in ways that are irresponsible is violent. It harms how LGBTQ students learn history and see themselves in it. My focus on curriculum violence in the context of racial trauma has everything to do with my personal experience and my desire to learn how that experience plays out for others.



When curriculum violence is repeated throughout a student’s school experience, these individual instances can contribute to a larger traumatic experience of school and a deep, false discord between the accurate historical narratives of groups of people and how their histories are being taught and absorbed in school. My work centers on how this plays out with Black and Brown students.

### Mapping Racial Trauma in Schools

I started finding stories similar to mine by using databases to search local and national newspapers. I initially selected four separate search parameters using the following combinations of words: “slavery & school; reenactment & slavery; racial slur & school; KKK & school.”

Through this search, I was able to locate hundreds of instances of racial trauma in schools across the United States. Too often, school districts and administrators characterize these incidents as isolated and not reflective of a school’s larger culture. However, dissecting hundreds of these incidents called that into question.

I decided to create a database, *Mapping Racial Trauma in Schools*, that would allow me to examine more closely how such harm appears in schools. The aim behind archiving and mapping these stories is to understand what the frequency, location and description of racial trauma can tell us about what is really happening in classrooms.

Four categories of racial trauma emerged:

- curriculum violence—classroom activities used to teach about difficult histories;
- digital racial trauma—racist images or video captured and shared through social media in school spaces;



- physical violence related to racial trauma—acts of violence from student to student or teacher to student; and
- verbal intimidation or threats between students or from teacher to student.

Curriculum violence warrants special attention because, while it is not as highly reported as other forms of racial trauma, it has an active presence in our schools. And, unlike the other categories, it has implications for every single classroom.

It is worth noting that published reports of curriculum violence aren’t the products of investigative journalism. They come to light because the victims’ families are using the news media to draw attention to the effects of the violence on their children. There’s the example of the South Carolina man whose fifth grade nephew came home crying after being assigned two scenarios: first, to pretend to be a KKK member and justify his treatment of Black people and, second, to imagine being a freed person and determine whether or not he was satisfied with his new life. In Georgia, a mom wanted her 10-year-old’s school and the public to understand the pain he suffered when, on “Civil War

Day,” a white student dressed as a plantation owner called him his “slave.”

How many similar incidents go unreported or disregarded?

### How Curriculum Violence Plays Out in Classrooms

Teaching Tolerance’s report *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* indicates that our failure to educate students on this subject means there is also a lapse in student understanding of racial inequality, past and present. Not only is slavery being mistaught; it’s also the only thing some students are learning about Black history at school. The transatlantic slave trade and its resulting horror within the American slavery system are often essentialized as all Black history itself.

Unsurprisingly, this mapping project has uncovered that most instances of curriculum violence occur during instruction about Black history. Some curricula even demand that students physically act out aspects of American slavery. I have observed that, when curriculum requires students to learn about specific moments of Black history, there is an alarming pattern of learning through staged reenactments—a practice not replicated to the

# Avoiding Curriculum Violence

To avoid inflicting curriculum violence on your students, it's key to adopt an antiracist framework and pedagogy. This adoption should include elements of self-reflection and interrogation. You could begin by contemplating these questions:

➤ What historical events or situations am I asking that students examine and experience?

➤ Are my lessons focused primarily on Black and Brown histories when faced with trauma, pain or death? Why?

Reflective practitioners can't rely on intention as an indicator of good teaching. Intentions are limited and speculative. It is necessary to ask these essential questions of your school and your curriculum:

➤ Is this type of racial trauma happening in my schools? In my classroom?

➤ Are students forced to learn their history in ways that are ideologically violent?

➤ Essentially, can we envision an education that is trauma-informed without being traumatic?

same extent with other histories, traumas or genocides. This is a common way that curriculum violence manifests.

For example, in 2016, students in an elementary school in New Jersey were tasked with drawing “wanted” posters of fugitives from slavery. Meanwhile, in May 2019, if students in a North Carolina classroom failed to answer questions about slavery correctly, they had their group’s “freedom card” revoked.

Reenactments and simulations do not help students to understand slavery. Instead, they distort students’ understanding of the past and the present. They promote a sanitized version of slavery that isolates the system and its legacy within a bracket of time with only a select few perpetrators and beneficiaries.

Scholar and sociologist Sadhana Bery challenges us to consider the impact of this particular form of curriculum violence. In “Multiculturalism, Teaching Slavery, and White Supremacy,” she argues that “[r]eenactment of slavery drowns the critical interrogation of slavery and its afterlife.” Students cannot engage meaningfully with history by pretending, for the limited time of a class period, that we can enter into and out of slavery without a critical examination of what that entry means.

When teachers ask students to learn about slavery by *practicing* being enslaved people or enslavers, students are not critically engaging with difficult histories. When we force students to participate in acts of curriculum violence, we do so at the risk of situating slavery as a past event with no current connection while also depriving students of its full social, historical and economic context. There is often no room to include stories of resistance, contribution and triumph when the curriculum is preoccupied with having

students simulate what literary and Black Studies scholar Christina Sharpe calls “the story that cannot be told.”

## Doing Right By Our Students

In order to reclaim our schools as sites of real learning and safety rather than suffering and racial trauma, it is necessary to help prepare teachers to critically examine what curriculum violence looks like within their discipline. Both prospective and current practitioners should continue to frame teaching as a reflective and reflexive practice by asking important questions of themselves and their curricula. Teachers should have continued support for professional development that is antiracist at its core and includes narratives of joy and resistance.

Most importantly, it is the wrong reaction for teachers to avoid teaching Black histories for fear of perpetuating curriculum violence. Remaining silent or choosing to omit certain elements of history has the same impact. We must *want* to do the right thing by our students, even if that means we have to struggle to learn more and seek feedback from students about the impact of our curricular choices. We should want to review and revise our existing lessons to ensure we’re not wreaking havoc on our students’ emotional and intellectual lives.

We do this so that we can begin the process of educational reparations—wherein we repair the harm that we have done to children by reconstructing curricula that have failed them. ♦

*Jones, the founder of Mapping Racial Trauma in Schools, is an assistant professor of education at Grinnell College. She is also a member of the Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board.*

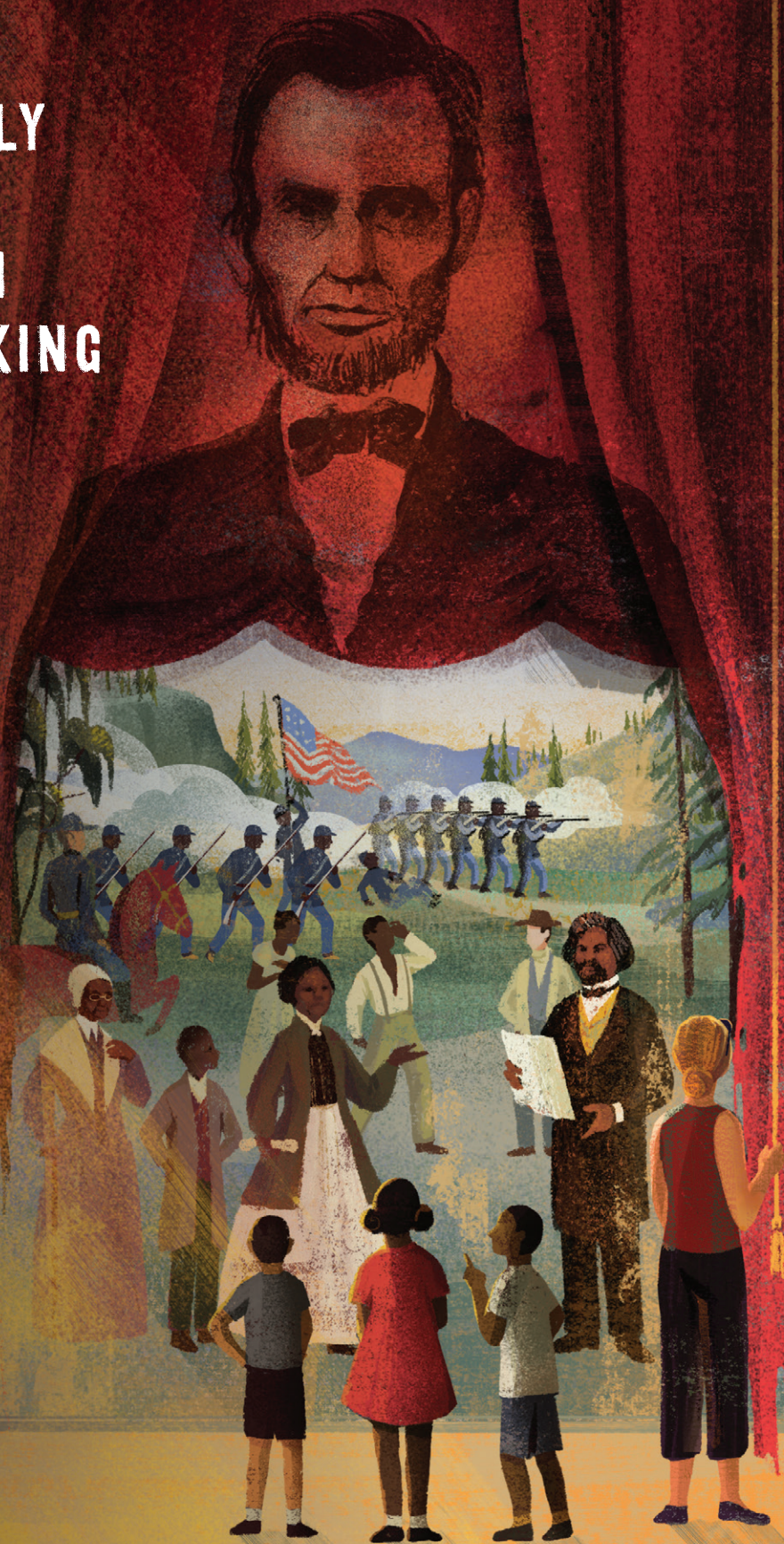


# HOW CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LESSONS TEACH CRITICAL THINKING

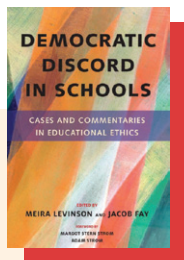
Rigor and cultural responsiveness are not mutually exclusive.

BY **CLINT SMITH**  
ILLUSTRATION BY **CORNELIA LI**

**IN THE FOLLOWING** excerpt from the 2019 collection *Democratic Discord in Schools: Cases and Commentaries in Educational Ethics*, Clint Smith responds to a case study titled “Bending Toward—or Away From—Racial Justice?” The study follows an instructional support specialist tasked with implementing a new, culturally responsive curriculum. The specialist faces challenges from families demonstrating white fragility and educators unwilling or unprepared to teach the new lessons.







**DEMOCRATIC DISCORD IN SCHOOLS: CASES AND COMMENTARIES IN EDUCATIONAL ETHICS** is edited by Meira Levinson and Jacob Fay. It includes eight normative case studies outlining dilemmas educators face. Each is followed by a set of commentaries written by students, educators, activists and others with stakes in the dilemma.



**WE DO NOT HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN RIGOROUS LESSON AND A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ONE. OUR CURRENT POLITICAL MOMENT, AND INDEED OUR NATION'S HISTORY, DEMANDS BOTH.**

### From “Holding Complicated Truths Together Enhances Rigor”

I was born and raised in a city that was filled with statues of White men on pedestals and Black children playing beneath them—where Black people played trumpets and trombones to drown out the Dixie song that still whistled in the wind. In New Orleans there are over one hundred schools, roads, and buildings named for Confederate soldiers and slave-owners. For decades, Black children have walked into buildings named after people who didn't want them to exist.

What name is there for this violence? What do you call it when the road you walk on is named for those who imagined you under the noose? What do you call it when the roof over your head is named after people who would have wanted the bricks to crush you?

When I was a child I did not have a language for this, and it was not until much later in my life, through the work of teachers and texts, both formal and informal, that I have developed an ability to speak to the way that our country creates myths about who we are and who we have been. As a high school teacher, part of what I attempted to do in my classroom was to ensure that my students were equipped with the tools and the language to accurately name the world around them. I did not want them to experience the sense of paralysis I felt in

knowing something was wrong, but not knowing how to name it as such. ...

Beyond providing the language for a young person to name the world around them, engaging with the histories we too often fail to name helps us better understand the contemporary landscape of inequality. One cannot begin to understand what happened to Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, without understanding the decades-long history of state-sanctioned housing segregation that created the conditions of the community in which he lived. One cannot begin to understand what happened at the White supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, without taking into account the ways in which the Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy warped the narrative of the Civil War into an ahistorical caricature of itself. One cannot begin to understand what happened to the nine victims of the Charleston church massacre without making sense of how, two hundred years ago, South Carolina was one of the single most important slave ports in the United States.

And yet, we find ourselves in a moment where our collective understanding of American history is wholly inadequate and purposefully inaccurate. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, only 8 percent of US high school seniors in 2018 were able to identify slavery as the central cause of the Civil War.\* ...

The percentage of students who misunderstand the role of slavery in shaping

\* “SPLC Report: US Education on American Slavery Sorely Lacking, Southern Poverty Law Center,” January 31, 2018, [t-t.site/splc-thh](http://t-t.site/splc-thh)

\*\* “The Lincoln-Douglas Debates 4th Debate Part I: Mr. Lincoln’s Speech,” [TeachingAmericanHistory.org](http://TeachingAmericanHistory.org), Ashbrook Center at Ashland University, 2018, [t-t.site/lincoln-douglas](http://t-t.site/lincoln-douglas)





*From 1884 until May 2017, a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee stood five stories above downtown New Orleans.*

the trajectory of this country is actually a microcosm for a much larger, more pernicious phenomenon in American life. Which is to say, we are so committed, often unconsciously, to the idea of American exceptionalism, that we often suppress anything that would render our history, and thus our country, unexceptional. In our classrooms across the country, our textbooks soften the contours of America's most violent deeds and most malevolent people to present something more palatable, even if it is, as a result, dishonest. What is also true is that in the process of excavating unexplored truths, we simultaneously

must wrestle with what it means to hold virtue and violence at once.

In my primary and secondary education I was taught that Abraham Lincoln was the great emancipator. I was taught that by sheer force of will and by the moral might of his pen he freed the slaves and set America on a trajectory of freedom and equality. I was not taught that in 1858, during the famous Lincoln-Douglas debate, Lincoln stated the following:

**“I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races ... I am not nor**

**ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races from living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be a position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.”**”

\*\*\* See, for example, Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization After Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011)



While Lincoln believed slavery was immoral, this passage illuminates how he also believed—at the same time—that Black people were neither equal to nor capable of living alongside their White counterparts. The fact that students are rarely invited to grapple with this dimension of Lincoln’s thought reflects the larger phenomenon in the pedagogy of American history in which those who are presented as opposing slavery, abolitionist or otherwise, are then assumed to have also believed in racial equality. But we know clearly that this was not the case. Lincoln seriously considered multiple plans for Blacks to recolonize in Central and South America both before and after emancipation.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> The truth, as Lincoln makes evident, is that it is fully possible for one to believe that Black people should not be held in forced bondage, and also fully possible that one still believes Black people to be inferior. It’s important to be clear about both beliefs, so that we are precise in our account of what the various actors in American history stood for and what they did not.

To be clear, there is much to admire about Lincoln. He possessed a laudable capacity to evolve in his political thinking, he led the nation through its most uncertain time and won a war

that preserved the Union, and he did indeed act courageously in signing the Emancipation Proclamation. But that does not mean we should ignore the more unsavory aspects of his legacy. It is essential that we help students learn how to hold these complex truths as one in order to more fully understand the origins of our country, how those ideals wove their way into foundational policies we have always leaned on—and how these origins shape what our country is today.

Any culturally responsive history curriculum must hold these complicated dualities at once. The United States is a country of great opportunity, but we must wrestle with how certain opportunities are contingent on different facets of one’s identity. The United States has provided economic mobility for millions of people, but we must wrestle with the history of violence and exploitation that helped to generate its economic foundation. The United States has freed millions around the world from despots and genocide, and we must wrestle with this same country’s pervasive history of barbarous imperialism. These are all parts of what make this country what it is. Teachers attempting to bring American history into the classroom should not

singularly focus on a false narrative of American exceptionalism, just as they should not singularly focus on its violence without accounting for its virtues.

Toward the end of the case, [one teacher] states, “If I have to choose between teaching a lesson that’s rigorous, and teaching one that’s culturally responsive, I’m going to choose rigorous...” [Her] perspective is one shared by many educators—those who believe a pedagogy meant to interrogate dominant modes of thinking about and seeing the world is one that is mutually exclusive from intellectual rigor. This could not be further from the truth. If anything, asking students to complicate their beliefs, and hold together a complex set of facts that don’t fit neatly into a specific ideological position, demands a level of cognitive dexterity that is often missing in our social studies curricula. We do not have to choose between a rigorous lesson and a culturally responsive one. Our current political moment, and indeed our nation’s history, demands both. ♦

*Smith is a Ph.D. candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and author of the poetry collection Counting Descent (Write Bloody Publishing, 2016).*





# WHAT WHITE COLLEAGUES NEED TO UNDERSTAND

*White supremacy doesn't stop at the teachers' lounge door.*

BY CLARICE BRAZAS AND CHARLIE MCGEEHAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HANNAH YOON



**AS EDUCATORS DOING** antiracism work, we often focus extensively on the impact that white supremacy has on students. But even though we recognize that white supremacy shapes all of our lives and work, we spend little time talking about its impact on educators.

For the past three years, we've worked as colleagues in our Philadelphia high school's humanities department and with teacher-led racial justice organizations. Clarice is a Black, biracial woman, and Charlie is a white man.

We know we all live in the same society of racism and white supremacy. We know white educators have the privilege to ignore these conditions and often do. And we know our collaboration is the exception, not the rule.

For this article, we interviewed eight educators of color across the country to hear about their work with white colleagues. We found disheartening trends. Educators of color report that they're expected to take on a disproportionate share of work supporting students and teaching about race and racism. This work, they say, is often made more difficult by the indifference—and sometimes resistance—of white colleagues. While all educators of color carry the burden of white supremacy, Black teachers have even more weight placed on them. To highlight their voices, we included six Black educators among the teachers of color we interviewed.

We know from our own experience that there are ways schools can lessen the burden on educators of color. And we heard from our interviewees about white educators who did their fair share to carry the load. But the first step to addressing inequities is to ensure we're all aware of them. Here's what we learned.

## WHAT'S EXPECTED FROM EDUCATORS OF COLOR

### **Educators of color are expected to support students of color.**

Several educators we spoke to said

they feel a moral imperative to do extra work. Marian Dingle, a Black woman in her 21st year of teaching elementary school in Georgia, told us about when one of her Black students was called the n-word by another student. As they heard about it, she and her Black colleagues dropped what they were doing to meet with this child throughout the day. Each educator shared the first time they were called the slur, stories they hadn't even shared with each other.

"I'm counseling a child about something that happened to me and something that happened to my parents and their parents, and their parents, and their parents," she explains. "That is something I need my white colleagues to understand."

It isn't just that many white educators don't see this emotional labor, interviewees told us. Sometimes they pass their own responsibilities onto colleagues of color. Angela Crawford is a Black woman who has been teaching in Philadelphia for 24 years. At Martin Luther King High School, she's a teacher, auntie, motivator and disciplinarian.

"A lot of these things I do on my own because I honestly do care about the well-being of my kids," she says. But because of the relationships she's built, colleagues often send students to her for support.

And that is a problem, Crawford says. Building these relationships takes work. When they assume educators of color will do this work for them rather than taking it on themselves, white educators increase the workload of their colleagues.

### **Educators of color are expected to take on antiracist work in their classrooms, schools and districts—while managing colleagues' white fragility.**

One refrain we heard again and again was that white educators, even those who see themselves as committed to equity, frequently consider

antiracist work something outside of their responsibility.

Adam Hosey, a Korean educator in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, told us of one white colleague who included race and racism in his curriculum but expected educators of color to do the heavy lifting. Once, the teacher planned to ask students of color to defend racial profiling. When Hosey told him, "You can't really do that," he asked Hosey to come up with a new lesson for him.

Educators also reported being expected to take on antiracist work beyond the classroom. Isabel\* teaches in North Carolina at a school where the majority of students and teachers are Latinx. Until this year, she was the only Latinx person on the leadership team. Isabel often finds herself the one who responds to racist comments about students by white colleagues or administrators. But when she raises concerns, she says, she sees "a lot of white tears. ... It immediately goes to the tears, then deflection, and then everything dies down."

The expectation that colleagues of color not only take responsibility for calling out racism but also that they comfort and accommodate white people when racism is called out is a common one. Educators we spoke with stressed the need for white colleagues to own their discomfort, find places to process their growth that don't rely on educators of color and avoid justifying hurtful comments. They also noted the need for white educators to take on some of this work themselves.

That did happen when Hosey worked with colleagues to start an equity team in his district. Two white colleagues were among the educators who joined him, including doing significant training outside of the school day. But in a district where educators are predominantly white, the equity team has five people of color—and just two white people.



“And that’s not for lack of trying,” Hosey says.

### **Educators of color are being driven out.**

Sometimes, we heard, when educators of color do take responsibility for antiracist work, they pay a price. Marian Dingle told us that when she decided to teach in a more proactively antiracist way, she noticed a shift with her school’s administrators. She had a stellar record, and she was being considered for a new position mentoring new educators. But suddenly, things changed. Her administrator accused her of not being a team player and questioned her competence.

“The real issue, which was uncovered through layers and layers of questioning,” Dingle says, “was that my administrator was uncomfortable with the way I was teaching.”

Writing last year for *Teaching Tolerance*, Jamilah Pitts, a Black assistant principal in New York City, cited the lack of support—and outright hostility—many educators of color face as a reason for the lopsided demographics of the teaching force.

White people make up about 60 percent of the general population and just under half of all K–12 students. But roughly 75 percent of school administrators and 80 percent of K–12 teachers are white. And until white educators do a better job supporting colleagues of color, those numbers seem unlikely to change.

“We can’t collectively decry the lack of teachers of color,” Pitts wrote, “without addressing the school cultures that silence, demonize and push them out.”

Isabel says she’s thought about leaving the profession. “It’s the awareness



*Charlie McGeehan and Clarice Brazas teach humanities at The U School in Philadelphia. They also facilitate antiracist work together in their school and in the region’s wider educational community.*

of how messed up the entire system is,” she says, “grounded on supremacy, oppression and all these behaviors that most people are not willing to admit.”

### **HOW WHITE COLLEAGUES CAN DO BETTER**

#### **White educators can work to manage white fragility in themselves and among colleagues.**

At her school in Boston, Alice Mitchell is among the educators of color on a majority white staff serving a student body that’s 95 percent children of color. During her first year, Mitchell said, there were “a lot of clashes” between the three Black teachers on her team and their white supervisor. The team organized a meeting and asked their supervisor to consider racial and power dynamics at work. The response they received was very different from what we heard from others.

“She was not defensive,” Mitchell remembers. “She didn’t go to white tears. She just nodded, accepted our feedback and was like, ‘OK, so what do I need to do to fix this?’”

After a rocky start, the supervisor chose to commit to learning, growing and discussing race. She used her role as an administrator to bring this work to the entire school, starting a Building Anti-Racist White Educators group to process the role of race and whiteness in their work.

#### **White colleagues can work to ensure that labor is evenly distributed in their schools.**

Mitchell’s example shows how individual support—especially from a leader—can expand into institutional change. Beyond our school, we both further antiracist training and materials for educators. Clarice has worked to develop antiracist training that she and others have facilitated through our school district and at conferences. Charlie is a founding member of Building Anti-Racist White Educators, an organization committed to encouraging white educators to talk to their peers about racism and white supremacy.

White educators should also reflect on and address their own behavior while examining institutional policy

to ensure workloads are evenly shared. They can support colleagues of color by taking the time to build trusting and caring relationships with all students. And they can look for ways their school can ease the extra burden on educators of color.

Corey Martin, a Black high school teacher in Georgia, says, “You actually have to make a conscious effort to immerse yourself in what we do.”

At The U School, where we teach, we have an advisory structure that is designed to match each student with a caring adult for all four years of high school. We meet twice a day with this group, and it provides students a home base of sorts. This structure means that the responsibility of supporting our students is shared and ensures that

activities for students and teachers at every level.

\*\*\*

The summer before Clarice began working at the U School, she attended a book group on Lisa Delpit’s *Other People’s Children*. It was part of an antiracist summer reading series, and Charlie was the co-facilitator. After the book group, we met to discuss antiracist work in Philadelphia and ways Clarice, new to the city, could get plugged in.

Three years later, we continue to facilitate antiracist work around the region. We are friends and colleagues. Most importantly, our relationship is grounded in a shared commitment to antiracist action.

This work isn’t easy, but it is possible for all white educators—and they

“Racism puts enough burdens on educators of color; white colleagues can’t also expect them to end it.”

teachers of color are not required to do this work on their own time.

### **White colleagues must educate themselves about the issues that matter.**

Finally, white educators can commit to learning and teaching about race and racism. Racism puts enough burdens on educators of color; white colleagues can’t also expect them to end it. In our humanities department, which has two white and two Black educators, we share a commitment to creating a curriculum that is antiracist.

But for white educators who don’t work in departments like ours, there are plenty of curricular resources that can support this work. For example, both of us have worked to help curate the Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action curriculum, a set of texts and

must engage with colleagues of color by showing solidarity and taking action to resist white supremacy.

Keziah Ridgeway, a Black high school teacher in North Philadelphia, says she knows amazing white educators who do this work. As she puts it, “They actively embody being an antiracist and are making sure that they are putting their actions, money and time where their mouth is.” ♦

*Clarice Brazas is a founding member of the Melanated Educators Collective (MEC). Charlie McGeehan is a founding member of Building Anti-Racist White Educators (BARWE). Both work with the Caucus of Working Educators Racial Justice Committee and teach humanities at The U School in Philadelphia.*

## *Here are a few recommendations for white educators from our interviewees.*

### **1. Read, Read, Read**

Learn more about racism and white supremacy. Reading (or watching or listening) can answer questions and give you the space to work out your own racial identity.

### **2. Listen**

Be present with educators, students and families of color. Actively listen. What concerns do they have? Chances are they see issues inside the school that you don’t. Two interviewees suggested neighborhood walks.

### **3. Avoid Making Conversations About You**

If a colleague of color comes to you with a concern, ask yourself, “Am I using my privilege to amplify the concerns of educators of color in my building, or am I drowning them out?”

### **4. Connect**

Find or build a group of people for accountability. Focus on generating conversations with white colleagues, and make sure you are staying accountable to people of color. Charlie’s organization, BARWE, has free resources to get started. [t-t.site/barwe-group](http://t-t.site/barwe-group)

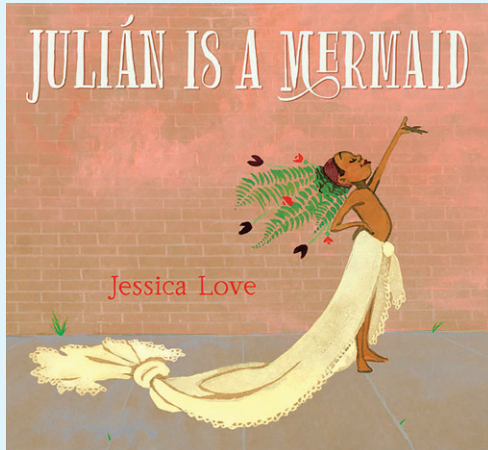
### **5. Use Your Power and Take Action**

Look for inequities: Are people being left out? Does your administrator treat people unfairly? If you notice something, speak up and take action. Lift some of the burden from your colleagues of color. If you’re an administrator, consider how you are directing school- and district-level professional development and policy.



# What We're Reading

Teaching Tolerance loves to read! Check out a few of our favorite diverse books for diverse readers and educators.



When Julián spots three mermaids on the subway home, he is in awe. He knows that he is a mermaid too—but he's not sure what his abuela will think when he dresses up like one. A magical story written and illustrated by Jessica Love, *Julián Is a Mermaid* provides children the opportunity to see how important it is to express who you truly are—and how wonderful it is when the people you love encourage you to accept yourself.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

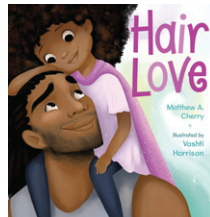
*“Warmth and love radiate from this colorful story of self-acceptance.”*

—Anya Malley



**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

*Don't Touch My Hair!*  
by Sharee Miller



*Hair Love* teaches self-love and exemplifies representation for Black people and Black culture. Matthew A. Cherry's book follows a little girl named Zuri as she works with her father to create a perfectly coifed hairstyle. In a time when Black youth are penalized for wearing their natural hair, this story shows an appreciation for the magic of grooming coarse or kinky hair, represented by Afros, locs, braids and a head wrap. The tenderness of Black fatherhood is also on display, offering plenty of heartwarming moments.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

*“A push against attempts to disparage those who dare to take pride in the way they look.”*

—Coshandra Dillard



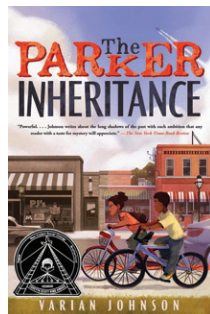
**MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL**

*Some Places More Than Others*  
by Renée Watson



**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

*The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*  
by Ebony Elizabeth Thomas



In a box of puzzles in the attic, Candice discovers a letter addressed to her grandmother. This letter answers one of her big questions—why her grandmother left town in shame—but new questions arise. Pooling their resources of deduction and book smarts, Candice and her neighbor Brandon resolve to find answers. In *The Parker Inheritance*, Varian Johnson's young protagonists embark on a mystery that will force their town to address its unjust past and the stain that segregation left behind.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

*“This clever puzzle stays with you as it presents a mystery to solve: What stories are still being hidden?”*

—Belle Briatico



*“In a time when Black and Brown girls are often overlooked in schools, Morris encourages us not only to support these girls but to lift them up and celebrate them for who they are.”*

—Rebecca Coven,  
Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board member

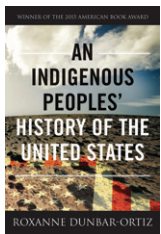


*“This book is excellent for educators looking to engage in more nuanced conversations and deeper thinking around race.”*

—Jonathan Tobin

*“A force of a book—equally educational as it is humorous, as personal as it is political.”*

—Henry Cody Miller,  
Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board member



*“This book is a much-needed reminder that our complex and violent history can be taught to students in a way that is both accurate and age appropriate.”*

—Christina Noyes

In *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States: For Young People*, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz provides for students historical examples that disrupt the dominant narrative and mythology surrounding the founding of the United States, which are too often still taught in classrooms. Written chronologically, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* takes readers on an accurate journey of colonization, where the real thread is the complex nations and peoples who have resisted to this day.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

One story is the perfect fit for a romantic comedy. Another one will have you on the edge of your seat, wondering if the main character will escape the grip of a terrifying ghost. All of the stories in *Unbroken: 13 Stories Starring Disabled Teens*, edited by Marieke Nijkamp, feature teens with disabilities as authentic central characters. Fully embodying their disabilities and personhood, they are the heroes and love interests, and, like all teens, they're learning how to harness their power.

**Note: Strong language and content advisory.**  
HIGH SCHOOL

“The opposite of ‘racist’ isn’t ‘not racist.’ It is ‘anti-racist.’” This idea is the beating heart of Ibram X. Kendi’s *How to Be an Antiracist*: Our decisions, actions and thought processes can either maintain racist systems or actively work to dismantle them. Both challenging and accessible, Kendi’s book weaves history, personal experiences and contextual analysis of policies to push readers to think critically about the role that race has played in

society and their lived experiences. His perspective is a necessary addition to the conversation about how to make the world more equitable and just.  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Jacob Tobia’s *Sissy: A Coming-of-Gender Story* follows the author throughout various stages in their education: elementary school, high school and college. Across the grade levels, Tobia illustrates the trauma caused by the strict enforcement of gender norms as well as the ways in which resistance and community take shape. Their memoir is an important read for providing genderqueer representation, which is still severely lacking in too many classroom and school libraries.  
HIGH SCHOOL

In her 2016 *Pushout*, Dr. Monique M. Morris pushes readers to consider how educational settings perpetuate racial and gender hierarchies. In her 2019 follow up, *Sing a Rhythm, Dance a Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls*, Morris puts forth a solutions-oriented approach to addressing how Black and Brown girls are impacted by school and disciplinary policies. Morris shares inspirational stories of educators across the country who are putting the needs and well-being of Black and Brown girls at the center so that readers may follow in their footsteps.  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



*“Readers are long overdue for a text that moves disabled voices from the margins and into the center.”*

—Val Brown





# What We're Watching

Dim the lights and get ready to learn with these TT-approved films!

When 14-year-old Ella hears news of a planned pipeline that would damage the waters near her hometown, she takes a kayak trip along the Great Bear Rainforest to the remote Island of Klemtu. The fictional *Kayak to Klemtu* focuses on the life of Ella's Uncle Bear and honors the experiences, stories, knowledge and traditions he shared, all while Ella discovers the importance of family, the environment and connecting with one's ancestral roots. The film's pace is mindful, reflecting the life of First Nations people, and it engages viewers to want to learn more about the people of Klemtu. (92 min.)

[Available on Vudu](#)  
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

"If we only go through the easy doors, we'll never get anywhere," the bridgeless troll Grunt tells Cedric in *The Bravest Knight*. This is part of Cedric's journey from a young not-yet-knight to knight and hero. As Cedric tells his husband and daughter stories of dragons, fairies and more, we learn about the power of understanding others and standing strong in the face of uncertainty. This retelling leads Cedric's daughter, Nia, to reflect on her own actions, be open to new perspectives and be confident in her own identity. *The Bravest Knight* helps kids to see a world that is

more accepting and welcoming to everyone. (12 min.)

[Available on Hulu](#)  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Voter suppression, in its many forms, has been present in U.S. politics for much of the nation's existence. Across history, groups have enacted policy that empowers some and restricts others from exercising their civic duty in order to maintain political power and influence. However, more and more U.S. citizens are just beginning to learn about how voter suppression affects their neighbors and sometimes themselves. **Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook**, narrated by Jeffrey Wright, introduces viewers to the foundations of the present attack on voting rights, along with examples of how voter suppression impacts lives and communities. (79 min.)

[Available on Amazon and iTunes](#)  
HIGH SCHOOL

*Frontline* offers "The Last Survivors" as their 11th episode of 2019. In this documentary, some of the last remaining survivors of the Holocaust recount their memories and the unimaginable trauma they experienced as children. Their disturbing experiences transfer to their current lives through sec-

ond-generation trauma, broken faith and survivor's guilt. Viewers are left with the understanding that these voices may be the last remaining links to the lived experience of the Holocaust. The time is now to learn from these haunting stories so that this horror will never be repeated. (55 min.)

[Available on PBS](#)  
HIGH SCHOOL

This past fall, conversations about American slavery and its legacy made news across the nation. Yet, many educators still feel ill-equipped to do the topic justice in their classrooms. TT's *Teaching Hard History Key Concept Videos* offer approachable yet substantive entries into this history—for educators and secondary students alike. Each of the 10 videos, rooted in a Key Concept foundational to the Teaching Hard History frameworks, features a scholar's in-depth discussion about the lives of enslaved people and slavery's centrality to the development of the United States. Each video is accompanied by text-dependent questions that teachers can use with students. Learn from historians like Ibram X. Kendi, Annette Gordon-Reed and more. (4-5 min.)

[Available on tolerance.org](#)  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL





# The America Project

BY MELISSA STUART ILLUSTRATION BY BLANCA GÓMEZ

**THIRD GRADE HAD JUST STARTED**, and Carmen was nervous. Carmen was born in Puerto Rico and had only been to the mainland once before, so life in Florida was a new and exciting adventure. She was glad that her mother was teaching at her new school.

Even though she missed her home on the island, Carmen enjoyed learning about the history of her new one. Social studies was her favorite class, and this week, they were learning the names of the states. Her teacher began each day with a song that named all 50 states in alphabetical order.

One morning as the class sang, Carmen noticed something that she hadn't noticed the day before. She turned to her elbow partner, Daniel. "Mrs. Miller forgot to say, 'Puerto Rico,'" she whispered.

When Carmen saw her mother that afternoon, she told her what had happened.

"Mrs. Miller doesn't say, 'Puerto Rico' when we are singing the song about the 50 states," she said. "I listened for the states that start with the letter P, and there was only Pennsylvania."

"It's great you noticed that, Carmen," her mother said. "It shows that you are really paying attention! But it is not a mistake. Puerto Rico is a territory, not a state."

Carmen didn't know what a "territory" was.

"So we're not Americans?" Carmen asked.

"We are," her mother explained, "because we live in the United States. And even though Puerto Rico is not a state, territories like Puerto Rico and Guam are still a part of the U.S. Since we were born in a territory, we're U.S. citizens."

Carmen thought she understood. "So we are Puerto Rican *and* American?" she asked. "What does that mean?"

Carmen's mother thought a second. "It means so many wonderful things. To me, it means pride in speaking both English *and* Spanish. It means listening to music like the bomba, which has beats and instruments from Taíno, African *and* Spanish traditions. It means making delicious food like sofrito with ajicito from seeds we brought from the island *and* garlic and onions we bought from the market here in Florida."





Carmen's mother hugged her tight. "And it means sharing all of those things," she said. "Sharing our culture with our friends is how we celebrate who we are."

The next morning Carmen's class sang the song about the 50 states, as usual. After the song, Mrs. Miller announced a new assignment called *The State Project*. Each student would choose a state to research and present to the class.

"I'm going to choose California," Daniel whispered to Carmen, "because that is where I was born." That gave Carmen an idea.

"Does anyone have any questions?" Mrs. Miller asked. Carmen raised her hand.

"Can I choose a territory instead?" she asked. "I'd love to tell the class about Puerto Rico, where I was born."

Mrs. Miller thought this was a wonderful idea. "That is a great idea, Carmen!" she said. "In fact, I think we need to change the name of this assignment. I'm looking forward to your presentation on Puerto Rico for *The America Project!*"

### Questions for Readers

RIGHT THERE (IN THE TEXT)

Where are Carmen and her family from?

THINK AND SEARCH (IN THE TEXT)

What does Carmen discover about Puerto Rico?

AUTHOR AND ME (IN MY HEAD)

Why do you think Carmen is surprised by her discovery?

ON MY OWN (IN MY HEAD)

In your own words, how would you describe what culture is?





Kay Ulanday Barrett is a poet, educator and activist. In their writing, they say, they hope to expand others' "ideas of what trans is, what disabled is, what being a person of color and a kid of migrants is."

ILLUSTRATION BY LISA QUINE



TEACHING TOLERANCE  
A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER





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