

WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES ARE SAYING . . .

I find myself in awe of what Dr. Cherry-Paul has skillfully crafted—a true masterclass and a work of art in the field of antiracist education. This book is not just a mere publication; it symbolizes a dedicated pledge to love, intersectionality, justice, and the crucial process of repair. It goes beyond being a standard resource; rather, it stands as a testament to the transformative power of education when approached with a commitment to creating an antiracist world.

—**Bettina L. Love**, *New York Times* bestselling author
*Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms
Black Children and How We Heal*

Rooted in the love and collective scholarship of Black women, Dr. Cherry-Paul's Six Critical Lenses are an essential (not additional) component of reading instruction in the classroom. *Antiracist Reading Revolution* meets the reader at their intersection of years of antiracist readings and equity trainings, and it extends a concrete framework for both adult and young learners to develop and apply their racial literacy and consciousness alongside one another. Beginning so beautifully with affirmation, the Antiracist Reading Framework summons every reader to continue practicing the critical and transformative conversations necessary for progress.

—**Sara K. Ahmed**, educator and author
*Being the Change: Lessons and Strategies to
Teach Social Comprehension*

Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul has listened to teachers, librarians, literacy coaches, curriculum developers, teacher educators, and researchers in children's literature and antiracist teaching! *Antiracist Reading Revolution* compels all to move beyond the book lists and into liberating pedagogy—an invitation to “think deeply and possibly differently” through children's literature and, in that process, better facilitate literature and life discussions with children.

—**Carla España**, assistant professor
Bilingual Education, Puerto Rican/Latinx, and
Latin American Studies
Department of Puerto Rican and Latinx Studies
Brooklyn College, CUNY

This book is an inspiration to make a commitment. A commitment to love. A commitment to construct a classroom that is deserving of and centers BIPOC students. A commitment to push ourselves beyond representation and to use our agency to create curriculum that brings us closer to creating a more antiracist classroom. Dr. Cherry-Paul challenges us to interrogate how our identities, biases, and assumptions influence our instructional decision making. The Antiracist Reading Framework provides applicable, transferable skills that can be implemented meaningfully in the classroom. With the tools Dr. Cherry-Paul provides, *Antiracist Reading Revolution* will not only create a change in ourselves and our students in the classroom, it will help create a more antiracist world beyond.

—**Angela Bae, senior program officer**
Cotsen Foundation for the ART of TEACHING

In this creative masterpiece, Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul centers the work of four incredible Black women scholars to create the Antiracist Reading Framework. This framework teaches educators how to select and engage youth in multicultural literature, while providing the practicality of meaningful prompts, reflection, and an actionable antiracist curriculum. *Antiracist Reading Revolution* is necessary and urgent for anyone who dreams of and seeks a better world.

—**Gholdy Muhammad, author**
Cultivating Genius and Unearthing Joy

Antiracist Reading Revolution is both a mentor and a needed companion to educators that includes an expansive foundation grounded in research, reflection, and action. Dr. Cherry-Paul's Antiracist Reading Framework provides a supportive guide that creates pathways for educators to collectively engage in necessary conversations and teach centering love and humanity within all parts of a younger reader's experience. Dr. Cherry-Paul's work will continue to thrive across time and spaces.

—**Tiana Silvas, educator**

Antiracist Reading Revolution peels back the often unquestioned layers of reading as a means for socialization and oppression. Dr. Cherry-Paul models the self-scrutiny and deliberate planning teachers must do to wield reading as an instrument for liberation. The accessible resources she provides guide teachers at any stage of their journey toward becoming antiracist educators.

—**Anna Gotangco Osborn, reading teacher**

In this powerful tool for individual and collective professional learning, Dr. Cherry-Paul demonstrates not only the self-work needed to begin—or delve deeper into—antiracist pedagogy, but also the ways to make that work actionable with students by implementing critical lenses woven together to form the Antiracist Reading Framework. Through dozens of examples applying the framework to recently published books, she provides clear pathways to teaching toward liberation.

—**Keisha Smith-Carrington**, supervisor of
humanities and co-author
*Read-Alouds with Heart: Literacy Lessons That
Build Community, Comprehension,
and Cultural Competence*

Antiracist Reading Revolution is a tremendous gift for teachers everywhere and an essential addition to every literacy educator's professional library. Dr. Cherry-Paul offers a comprehensive toolkit that synthesizes decades of research in culturally responsive and liberatory instructional practices. The beauty and power of this book is the way Dr. Cherry-Paul guides teachers throughout, modeling expertly along the way what it means to be an antiracist reading teacher and teacher of young readers. The text selections, rich scholarship, and practical and engaging framework will deepen new and experienced teachers' practices. Following Dr. Cherry-Paul's lead, may we all be dandelions, planting the seeds of change that our young people deserve.

—**Tricia Ebarvia**, author
*Get Free: Antibias Literacy Instruction for
Stronger Readers, Writers, and Thinkers*
Co-founder of the Institute for Racial
Equity in Literacy, #DisruptTexts, and #31DaysIBPOC

One of our oaths as educators is to teach children how to think, not what to think. *Antiracist Reading Revolution* teaches us—teachers and librarians—how to think about the texts we lovingly place in our students' hands, heads, and hearts. More importantly, it teaches us how to center the essential work of antiracism in the classroom and in the library. This book is the educators' educator's guide, teaching readers how to use any text in ways that center activism and advocacy, love and liberation.

—**Shana Frazin**, teacher librarian
Scarsdale Middle School

It is not enough to diversify our bookshelves. How can interactions with a broader selection of voices and perspectives positively influence students' literacy development and their growth as global citizens? In this timely guide, Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul supports and challenges teachers who are striving to dismantle historically racist pedagogies and build expansive, "identity-inspiring" learning opportunities with students. The book is rich with ancillary resources, practical strategies, and extensive ideas for teaching reading using critical, antiracist lenses.

—**Donalyn Miller, educator, reading advocate, and author**

Antiracist Reading Revolution is a powerful gift for educators and serves as a guide on how to take an antiracist teaching stance to create classrooms that center affirmation, joy, love, and liberation. This is a must-have book for all educators and schools to have in their professional library—and one I will be sharing in my work with my teachers.

—**Michelle Yang-Kaczmarek, K-8 literacy coordinator**

What does it mean to be an antiracist educator? In *Antiracist Reading Revolution*, Dr. Cherry-Paul skillfully and artfully leads educators through a framework that provides the necessary skills that work to build interpersonal relationships, establish affirmational environments, and present the important questions and language needed to teach and engage with literacy that is both loving and critical. The moves she shows teachers are not only grounded in the research but also practical and inspiring. Above all else, Dr. Cherry Paul teaches us how to bring an antiracist lens to all books that we read. This book will not only support educators in building stronger readers but it will also help us all be better humans.

—**Amanda Hartman, deputy director of
primary literacy, advancing literacy
Teachers College, Columbia University**

Antiracist Reading Revolution has the power and potential to create just that, a reading revolution. In this book, Dr. Cherry-Paul does more than make an argument for the need for books in classrooms that reflect and represent a diversity of human beings. She gives us the tools to use those books with our students in a way that will allow every single student to better enter into the world ready to view themselves and others in a positive way and to create positive change. This book is more than a road map for better reading instruction; it is a heart map for better living and better existing in the world.

—**Jess Lifshitz, fourth-grade ELA teacher**

This gift transcends the boundaries of traditional education, equipping educators with tools to foster liberation in the classroom that go beyond mere representation. It uplifts and empowers the souls of educators, igniting a powerful wave of change for a brighter and more beautiful tomorrow.

—Gary Gray, author
I'm From

This is such an important book for teachers! School is about education. Education is about creating critical thinkers. Critical thinkers need to have all the facts. The facts are that this is a culturally diverse world filled with people of all colors and cultures. All colors and cultures must be SEEN by children, and adults, in the classroom as fully functioning and contributing members of society. Test scores will sort themselves out just fine if Black and Brown children are SEEN in the classroom.

—Carole Lindstrom, author of books for young people

As an antiracist classroom elementary educator, I know the importance of my growth and having tools to improve my pedagogy. Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul's *Antiracist Reading Revolution: A Framework for Teaching Beyond Representation Toward Liberation* demands we self-interrogate the development of our racial identity in a racialized society and reflect on how that influences our instruction. The framework's six critical lenses of Affirmation, Awareness, Authorship, Atmosphere, Activism, and Accountability require thoughtful and purposeful creation of lessons on social justice that even our youngest learners deserve to receive. The tools and guiding lessons Cherry-Paul offers have strengthened how I teach all my students to recognize the humanity of others and be agents of change in our diverse world. I am even more intentional about selecting books that provide opportunities to teach students how to be racially literate, using specific language, and increasing their awareness of recognizing, analyzing, and discussing injustice, race, and racism. I believe it is essential that our current and future generations of learners be empowered thinkers and activists, and Cherry-Paul's framework is a powerful means to get us there.

—Kyrie Gilmore, NYC public school elementary educator

Sonja Cherry-Paul provides a powerful antiracist reading framework that compels educators to lead with love, seek and state the truth, and teach toward liberation. Guided by six critical lenses, the reader is inspired to imagine what is possible—especially important during a time where professional autonomy is increasingly challenged. Sonja lights a path for antiracist educators and we are emboldened to act—centering humanity, justice, and hope.

—Jane Hsu, principal

I have never met an educator who does not want to make their teaching match their values. But the reality of teaching today means teachers are inundated with mandates, theories, and student needs with very little offered in terms of practical, step-by-step lessons, explanations, and resources to meet the avalanche of demands and very real concerns. *Antiracist Reading Revolution* is the book I dreamt of but never thought possible. Cherry-Paul gives us clear definitions and explanations of foundational scholarship while also holding our hand and walking us through lessons we can teach our students tomorrow, all within a framework that keeps our teaching from feeling disjointed. This is a gift of a book for educators and their students.

—**M. Colleen Cruz**, educator and bestselling author
Writers Read Better: Nonfiction

Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul's *Antiracist Reading Revolution* is such a powerful book for all educators. Grounded in the latest culturally responsive research that centers the possibilities of Black and other children, Dr. Cherry-Paul has crafted a thorough handbook that provides educators with the *how* they are often searching to find. This robust text offers up resources and guidance for educators at all levels of their work with children; thus, with *Antiracist Reading Revolution*, there's no excuse not to do the work—immediately—that gets us closer toward truly equitable literacy practices. Dr. Cherry-Paul is leading the way. May we all follow!

—**Kimberly N. Parker**, cofounder #disrupttexts cofounder and author
Literacy Is Liberation: Working Toward Justice Through Culturally Relevant Teaching

ANTIRACIST READING REVOLUTION

*To Zoe for the question that I hope this book answers.
And to all of the young people I've been fortunate enough to learn from.
You have always been poised and ready to lead the revolution.*

SONJA CHERRY-PAUL

#1 New York Times Bestselling Author

**ANTIRACIST READING
REVOLUTION**

• A Framework
• for Teaching
• Beyond
• Representation
• Toward Liberation

Foreword by **YOLANDA SEALEY-RUIZ**
Art by **PORSCHÉ JOSEPH**

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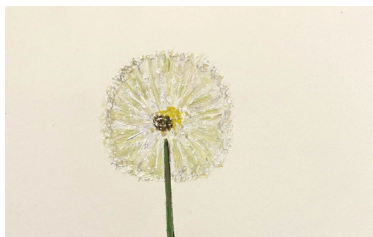
A Note on the Artwork

Like a dandelion seed, allow a gust of wind to carry you to fertile ground and take root, believing firmly that antiracist teaching is not about uniformity; it's about possibility.

Writing this book was an opportunity for me to communicate the beautiful complexity of the work of antiracism. I'm grateful to my friend and brilliant educator and thought-partner M. Colleen Cruz, who listened to my goals for this book. Understanding that antiracism is living, fluid work, she suggested I come up with an organic symbol that could be a metaphor for what I was trying to achieve. I thought about this for weeks, considered several options, but nothing seemed quite right.

One spring morning, I looked through my kitchen window and noticed the first dandelions of the season emerging in my backyard. I thought about the resilience of dandelions despite the efforts of many to destroy them. I visited my local library and bookstore to learn as much as I could about dandelions. I had no idea how important they are to the environment. Soil, grass, and many organisms including human beings benefit from dandelions. I learned that the word *dandelion* comes from the French phrase *dent de lion* (which translates in English as “lion’s teeth”) because of its teeth-like leaves. My research helped me to understand dandelions as strong, noble perennials concerned not only with their survival but also with helping other organisms around them to thrive. I knew I had found the perfect symbol to represent my ideas.

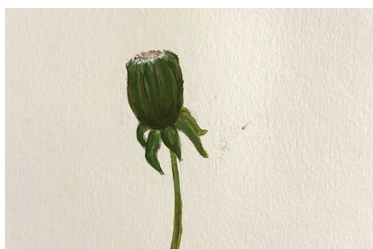
Across this book you'll see images of dandelions painted by the brilliant artist Porsche Joseph, who also designed the cover of this book. You'll learn facts about dandelions in each chapter and you'll discover why I've used them as a metaphor for antiracism. Each chapter begins with an image of a dandelion from the stages of its life lifecycle. Not only is the dandelion a metaphor for antiracism, but it is also a symbol of our growth, our progress, and our journey as antiracist educators.



- ▶ “Much as dandelions must resiliently shed their leaves as a part of their natural life cycle, educators must be willing to discard nonessential beliefs. This shedding process involves conscious and subconscious recognition that certain beliefs have outlived their purpose and must be buried and released to permit new growth.” ~ Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz



- ▶ *There’s no such thing as antiracist fairy dust, glittery sparkles we can blow into the air that can magically transform society. To be antiracist requires us to utilize our powers of ongoing commitment and action.*



- ▶ *Dandelions are the perfect metaphor for antiracist teaching. Like dandelions, the work of antiracism has been viewed negatively—as an invasive, unlikeable, useless weed. It is true that antiracism does not fit the standard; it is disruptive of it.*



- ▶ *Antiracist teaching, however, isn’t just about the books we make available to students, but about our stance as antiracist educators.*



- ▶ *A commitment to antiracist teaching requires us to be brave enough to ask: What are the unwritten rules determining what and how I teach? And it requires that we are willing to interrogate what we uncover.*



▶ *Antiracist reading instruction helps readers understand that every author's identity, experiences, and perspectives are imbued with race, which informs the ways in which they write and that every reader's identity, experiences, and perspectives are imbued with race, which informs the ways in which they read.*



▶ *As educators, we can acknowledge that facilitating conversations about race and racism can be uncomfortable. But we must also recognize that collectively, we remain stuck when we lean away from the discomfort rather than confront it and work to dismantle inequity in all of its forms.*



▶ *Activists amplify the voices of those who are marginalized and work alongside them to fight for change. In order for students to develop such understandings, educators must see themselves as activists whose work is about much more than teaching students to decode words.*



▶ *Antiracist teaching fertilizes the soil where children are planted and nurtures their souls, making it possible for them to thrive within schools and beyond them.*



▶ *Solidarity means we confront, challenge, and change ourselves, even and especially when the work is hard, fully understanding that the journey to justice is not simple or linear.*

.....

FOREWORD

.....

Sowing Seeds of Equity

Nurturing
Antiracist
Practices in
Reading
Instruction



“In embracing the wisdom embedded in this book, educators themselves can transform as teachers, breaking through the confines of the classroom, shaping how students read and perceive their community, their world, and their place within both.”

—Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, Ph.D.

Like dandelion seeds scattered by the gentle breath of possibility, young people possess an innate capacity to travel vast distances, guided by the winds of their dreams and aspirations. Dr. Sonja Cherry-Paul, in exploring the profound transformative power of literature, invites educators to be the wind that propels these seeds of potential forward movement; a goal of this book is to build their racial literacy and equip them with a justice-centered consciousness. “Be the wind that carries them forth,” she writes with poetic eloquence, a guiding principle that echoes through the pages of this groundbreaking book.

As I read Dr. Cherry-Paul’s book, *Antiracist Reading Revolution: A Framework for Teaching Beyond Representation Toward Liberation*, I imagined three of my favorite thinkers and writers—James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou—sitting for tea and discussing the great offering that is this book. All of them were giants in their craft and icons in the writing of the self and the seeing of others—particularly those who are pushed to the margin. I imagined them discussing how their own lives were representational dandelions; how they did their best to both create and ride on the seeds of change to bring forth love, joy, justice, and beauty, in the midst of struggle. I imagined them talking about this book as an excellent resource to help educators do what they sought to do in their own books—to see all people as flowers in human form who deserve nurturing so that their lives may flourish. Dr. Cherry-Paul understands that it is an honor to teach children and help them mold ideas about themselves and the world. As a seasoned educator of literacy, she knows very well that reading books is a privileged pathway to help children do this.

In this beautifully articulated and transformative book, Dr. Cherry-Paul has offered a vital tool for educators to recognize, validate, and amplify the voices of students who have been marginalized by school systems and culturally irrelevant and unresponsive curricula. Drawing from her wellspring of experience as a literacy educator, she is a thoughtful guide, illuminating the way with personal anecdotes and examples. The book offers the opportunity to explore the layers that shape one’s identity as a reader and, by extension, an educator. In the realm of education, where decoding and fluency are crucial, Dr. Cherry-Paul incites a paradigm shift, emphasizing the profound importance of connecting literature to students’ lives, dreams, and challenges. Reading, she asserts, extends beyond the decoding of words; it is a vital terrain that shapes a child’s educational journey and should offer a connection to their ancestral roots and guidance for their current experiences. She reminds us that literature must be used as a mirror reflecting the diverse tapestry of human experiences. Dr. Cherry-Paul passionately advocates for culturally relevant education, emphasizing the urgency of incorporating the life histories and current experiences of all students in the curriculum—a nonnegotiable aspect of humanizing pedagogy.

Dr. Cherry-Paul's examples are a true gift that highlight the importance for teachers to engage authentically with their students and foster a reading environment where both educators and students are visible. The book's unique approach to building a community of antiracist thinkers through the lens of literature is a powerful mechanism for honing the lenses of humanity. The blending of classic and contemporary research with personal scholarship enriches the book's narrative and generously offers multiple entry points for educators to engage the transformative work of building antiracist reading classrooms. In the spirit of scholar activism, this book is a compelling testament to the importance of creating and sustaining inclusive and empowering educational spaces.

The significance of culturally relevant education and building racial literacy emerges as guiding principles throughout the book. In a world where representation is important but liberation is paramount, the book becomes a testament to the necessity of curricula that mirror all students' life histories and unique experiences. It is not a choice but an imperative—a pedagogy that humanizes and empowers every child toward personal liberation within a collective struggle for freedom. Dr. Cherry-Paul reminds educators that this advocacy is an unyielding commitment they must uphold, and her book reinforces the transformative potential inherent in culturally relevant, antiracist teaching.

Dr. Cherry-Paul generously applies the six critical lenses of her **Antiracist Reading Framework** to an array of diverse books that offer teachers and students reflective pathways to understanding the many lessons within a text. The carefully curated books she includes serve as vehicles to navigate teachers and students along meaningful reflective pathways.

Additionally, she offers creative ideas on how to connect the book and characters to teachers' and students' lives while building their antiracist vision for reading. This book is so timely in how it empowers teachers to construct a meaningful library reflective of the current moment while also teaching the crucial skill of selecting books that resonate with students. Through Dr. Cherry-Paul's guidance, educators will not only build mirrors that reflect their students' diversity but also open windows and doors to a world of perspectives and experiences beyond their immediate surroundings. Dr. Cherry-Paul's meticulous application of the six critical lenses testifies to her commitment to reshaping the landscape of reading instruction. This book is not merely an exploration of diverse literature; it is a call to action, an encouragement for educators to connect these literary offerings to the worlds of their students and change the way reading is taught in the majority of classrooms across the nation. Her **Antiracist Reading Framework** will be a powerful tool for educators who are guided by a vision of inclusivity and justice. By applying these

critical lenses, educators become equipped to hold reflective discussions in their classrooms, lead students to explore narratives, and connect stories to their own lives. Dr. Cherry-Paul's approach is a multidimensional journey that builds bridges between the literature and the readers, creating spaces for profound self-reflection and growth across grade levels and teacher experience. It is also an immensely practical book. Dr. Cherry-Paul transcends theoretical discussions, providing reflection and accountability questions that help educators cross the terrain of antiracist teaching.

In embracing the wisdom embedded in this book, educators themselves can transform as teachers, breaking through the confines of the classroom, shaping how students read and perceive their community, their world, and their place within both. Much as dandelions must resiliently shed their leaves as a part of their natural life cycle, educators must be willing to discard nonessential beliefs. This shedding process involves conscious and subconscious recognition that certain beliefs have outlived their purpose and must be buried and released to permit new growth. Dr. Cherry-Paul accompanies readers into this cycle of renewal, in which they can confront their assumptions, biases, and preconceptions and dig through deeper layers to understand their origins and implications. As individuals shed old beliefs and embrace new perspectives, they can flourish in their personal growth and help their reading students do the same. The message in *Antiracist Reading Revolution: A Framework for Teaching Beyond Representation Toward Liberation* is clear: "Be a dandelion, embrace openness, flourish in change, and bring beauty to the lives of others." This book reclaims the reading classroom as the inviting space it was meant to be, supporting and nourishing new life.

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.....
INTRODUCTION
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There's No Such Thing As Antiracist Fairy Dust

When we commit to antiracist ideas, we commit to love. This commitment moves us from the arbitrary use of this word, often limited to a feeling. Instead, we begin to perceive love as an action.

During a virtual author's visit, Jason Reynolds and I met with a group of incredible young people. The entire evening was designed as a Q&A for students to ask us questions about *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* and *Stamped (For Kids): Racism, Antiracism, and You*. The brilliance of the students radiated across our Zoom screens. The first question of the night was from a young Black girl who asked, "When can we move beyond representation to liberation?" I was not ready for this beautiful, audacious question and fumbled my way into a response that was woefully insufficient. I wish I'd said, "You are right. Representation is not liberation. This alone is *not* how we get free."

This book is in essence my response to this young person's question. It offers a vision for antiracist teaching as well as tools to move beyond representation—from simply having books by and about BIPOC in classrooms—to liberation—where students learn to radically and unabashedly love themselves and their communities, as well as learn what it means to work for the good of the collective.

There's no such thing as antiracist fairy dust, glittery sparkles we can blow into the air that can magically transform society. To be antiracist requires us to utilize our powers of ongoing commitment and action. Scholar, educator, and author Dr. Angela Davis says, "In a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist, one has to be antiracist." Davis distinguishes between rhetoric that aims to be neutral and passive and a mindset that is intentional and active. With an intentional and active mind-set, antiracists understand that equity does not mean equality. Rather than striving for balance and sameness, there is acknowledgment of imbalance, recognition of the historical legacy of inequities and its enduring consequences, and a clear focus to redress this. This includes an understanding that pathways for repair must be intersectional; they must reject anti-Blackness, anti-immigrant, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, antisemitism, sexism, anti-Muslim hate, anti-Asian hate, xenophobia, ageism, and any discrimination and hate toward an individual or group of people. To be antiracist is to commit to a lived, liberated practice of continuous work toward the goal of equity, justice, and freedom. To be antiracist is to commit to love.

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Black students, however, have had to endure the absence of love throughout the history of schooling in the United States. In *Punished for Dreaming* (2023), Dr. Bettina Love spotlights the decades-long educational policies and practices that cause stark racial disproportionality in school suspension and dropout rates, arrest, and incarceration of Black children as well as the lifelong impact such absence of love has on Black people and

Black communities. The polarization of Black students and White students has been the sturdy foundation from which the institution of schooling has been built (Cherry-Paul, 2020). But even in the face of these data along with the ways the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has supposedly opened our eyes wider to such polarization, inequities, and racism, there have been few efforts to confront this with antiracist solutions. Today's learning loss narrative, for example, has been repackaged and emerges "from a long history of performance-based narratives and policies in education such as the achievement gap, A Nation at Risk, 'failing schools,' No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top" (Cherry-Paul, 2023).

So what does it mean for educators to be antiracist and to commit to love? Dr. Ghody Muhammad (2023) explains that "we have given attention, care, and nurturing to some children and neglected others" and calls on us to water the genius of students even and especially as we urgently work to dismantle educational environments that are dry from systemic racism and oppression (p. 19). A commitment to love is a commitment to redressing injustices that impact the lives of children and their communities. It is to nurture, feed, and protect. Young people are nourished when they are supported, encouraged, and have opportunities to activate their learning in meaningful ways. This book is for educators who fortify and fuel students who enter classrooms already brilliant—brimming with ideas, dreams, and possibilities. It is a charge for educators to connect with parents and caregivers who are their children's first teachers, the first to love them and to know their hearts. And this book is also for young people, like the person I met that night during that virtual author's visit, who are poised and ready to lead the revolution for love and liberation.

One only has to look across history to see that young people have led the revolution for justice and equality. In the 1950s and 1960s, youth empowerment transformed the nation. After learning about Black leaders such as Harriet Tubman, 15-year-old Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, months before Rosa Parks's notable arrest. Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Jefferson Thomas, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls La Nier, Minnijean Brown, Gloria Ray Karlmark, Thelma Mothershed, and Melba Pattillo Beals—also known as The Little Rock Nine—desegregated their high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. At just six years old, Ruby Bridges desegregated her all-White elementary school in New Orleans, Louisiana. North Carolina A&T State University students, Ezell Blair Jr., David Richmond, Franklin McCain, and Joseph McNeil became known as the Greensboro Four who launched a movement when they sat at a "Whites only" Woolworth's lunch counter. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale met in college and started the Black Panther Party to challenge police brutality, confront corrupt politicians, protect Black people, and

promote social change. Inspired by the Black Panther Party, 15-year-old David Sanchez launched the Young Chicanos for Community Action, which became the Brown Berets and gave way to the Chicano Movement. The work of young leaders of the past continues to inform movements today such as the Water Protectors of Standing Rock, Black Lives Matter, intersectional environmentalism, and the young people who lead within these movements. Movements where young people assert their humanity and are essentially fighting for and to be loved.

Students in classrooms right now are the young revolutionaries of today and tomorrow who deserve love and who are ready to plant the seeds of change.

The ascent to a democracy grounded in liberation begins by recognizing the brilliance, beauty, and full humanity of Black and Brown people who make up the global majority. Antiracist reading instruction brings about such recognition through purposeful, powerful acknowledgment of this. When cultivated, readers are able to resist persistent attempts to go backward or stand still in the work of equity and instead move forward in the fight for justice. Understanding the work and pitfalls that have come before is essential to informing where we are now, what antiracist teaching is, and how it can help us get where we need to go.

DISRUPTING A “HEROES AND HOLIDAYS” CURRICULUM

The push for including racially and culturally diverse texts in classrooms and antiracist teaching stems from the work of many revolutionaries, including those from the multicultural education movement. In 1989, Dr. James Banks, notable scholar of this movement, theorized about the approach most frequently used to teach beyond mainstream curriculum. He called it the Contributions Approach where a White, Eurocentric curriculum



Learn more about
teaching Black history
year-round.

and teaching focus remains intact and students learn only about the contributions made by famous Black and Brown people during specific days of the year. Ultimately, this is an additive and appendage approach that teaches students that people of color must be extraordinary to be worthy of inclusion. Students learn canned narratives that silence racism and oversimplify the realities of oppression. This stance is about perpetuating a belief in meritocracy, not antiracism. Rather than education being used as a tool for liberation, a Contributions Approach uses education as a tool to evade societal inequities and

instead socializes children into believing that if individuals just work hard, they can succeed. A further consequence of this stance is that students miss out on learning to understand the nuanced and complex lived realities of Black and Brown people and to see them in complete, dynamic ways.

This problematic teaching stance, also known as a Heroes and Holidays approach, continues today in classrooms across the United States. The most observable example of this is Black History Month, when many students learn about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks only during the month of February through reassuring narratives that obscure the realities of racism past and present. This is not to say that Black History Month does not have value in schools and should not be acknowledged. We must also teach about the histories and accomplishments of Black people all year.

Disrupting additive approaches toward curriculum and teaching has been decades in the making by education scholars, teachers, and caregivers concerned about BIPOC students' ability to thrive in an institution that was never built with them in mind. These activists recognize that the curriculum is our most radical tool. Curriculum is not simply a mechanism to teach content. It is a tool for teaching ways of thinking about whose histories, experiences, and ways of knowing and being in the world are valid and have value. For many Black and Brown students, the curriculum has been identity-silencing—perspectives that mirror their racial and cultural identities are included in superficial ways or not at all. There are numerous obstacles in the way of disrupting the Heroes and Holidays approach, specifically in reading instruction, including resistance, discomfort, and misunderstandings.

SYSTEMIC RESISTANCE

Whenever there have been efforts to make things more just in the United States, these efforts have been embroiled in struggle. In 2020, the nation seemed to finally be willing to reckon with the realities of racism as a result of a health and racial pandemic. COVID-19 disproportionately ravaged the lives of Black and Brown people. White rage and police brutality were on display when Ahmaud Arbury was murdered by White men while jogging, and Breonna Taylor and George Floyd were murdered by police officers. As a result of this reckoning, there were concerted efforts by many White Americans to buy and read all of the books that could help the country realize an antiracist future. Books that were written by and about people of color were in high demand in bookstores around the country.

But “a racist system always seeks to correct itself,” educator and author Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz reminds us. History teaches us that backlash, resistance, and organized

opposition designed to undermine racial-justice sentiments and policies have been a constant pattern. And by 2021, the sentiment in the country shifted from “buy all of the antiracist books” to “ban all of the antiracist books.” By 2022, more than 30 states had adopted misguided “anti-CRT” policies and legislation, which police what teachers can teach, display, or discuss in classrooms (CRT Forward Tracking Project Team, 2023). The ripple effects of this have been swift. As a result of political pressures, for example, African American studies curriculum for advanced placement courses has been stripped of content in Florida, with several other states working to review the course and possibly impose similar restrictions (Pendharker, 2023). The American Library Association has tracked a record number of book bans across the United States implemented by schools and public libraries that target books about race, racism, gender, and LGBTQIA+ identities (Pendharker, 2023). These policies and practices are designed to deny truths about inequities and oppression that make White people in positions of power uncomfortable. Book bannings designed to block students from accessing books that don’t fit into a White, heterosexual, cis-gender roadmap are harming teachers, students, and families across the country. Activists, communities, students, educators, and authors fight against these barriers, locally and nationally, that, if left unchallenged, perpetuate the Contributions Approach that the nation had grown comfortable with—the kind of teaching that silences and erases.

The acronym CRT is sometimes used to refer to critical race theory or culturally relevant teaching or culturally responsive teaching, depending on the context of what is being written or spoken about. They are each distinct, although there are common ideas about injustice across this scholarship. I suggest researching more about these concepts from legitimate sources as you move forward in your antiracist teaching journey.

Resources

- *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, by Gloria Ladson-Billings
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, by Geneva Gay
- *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*, edited by Django Paris and H. Samy Alim
- *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, edited by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas

Reflect

- Have there been times when there has been momentum for talking and teaching about race and racism in your school?
- Have these moments been reactive to local, national, or global events or proactive, grounded in beliefs about equity?
- In what ways are race and racism silenced in your school and curriculum?

TEACHER DISCOMFORT

In states where educators are not legally bound by oppressive policies and laws to cause teachers to turn away from an inclusive and antiracist stance in their classrooms, there can be other barriers. Such as teacher discomfort. More than 80% of educators in the nation are White (NCES, 2020), and echoed across the research is that many White teachers are uncomfortable talking and teaching about racism and other social injustices (Cherry-Paul, 2019). When teachers cling to their discomfort rather than interrogate it, teaching that silences identities and inequities is perpetuated. One way this occurs in reading instruction is an unyielding allegiance to canonical texts that erase or distort the identities and lived experiences of Black and Brown people. The #DisruptTexts movement led by four educators and women of color, Tricia Ebarvia, Lorena Germán, Dr. Kim Parker, and Julia Torres, has shifted the consciousness of many educators when it comes to the literary canon. They challenge educators to consider that “the traditional ‘canon’—at all grade levels—has excluded the voices and rich literary legacies of communities of color. This exclusion hurts all students, and especially students of color” (#DisruptTexts, n.d.). In addition to noting the harm such allegiances cause, they remind us that it is not only high school texts that are part of the traditional canon. Elementary and middle school reading curriculums are also implicated.

I remember working with sixth-grade educators who were mired to the practice of teaching whole-class novels. I suggested the ways this approach could disengage readers,



Read more about
#DisruptTexts here.

particularly when the texts always centered on White characters. One teacher declared, “I would rather die than give up *The Giver!*” This educator was not simply a devoted Lois Lowry fan. She had lost sight of the fact that as teachers of reading, we don’t teach books; we teach children. She had not thought about the ways reading one book with the whole class over multiple weeks took time away from students being able to read more books—and that reading volume is one of the key aspects of developing reading skill and autonomy. Halting students’ reading lives is not liberation. Yet this teacher was unwilling to interrogate her racial consciousness for the ways her practices were specifically hindering Black and Brown readers from feeling more connected to reading in their classroom as well as visible and validated in the world.

Reflect

- What books would make you think you would rather “die” than let go of them? Why?
- How can you adjust your thinking to honor the lived experiences of your students?
- What changes can you make in your reading curriculum and instruction that move you closer toward teaching for liberation?

MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT THE WORK OF ANTIRACIST TEACHING

Another obstacle to being firmly rooted in antiracist teaching is misunderstandings by teachers about what this actually entails. As a classroom teacher, I felt incredibly proud about having an abundance of powerful, racially, and culturally diverse books for students to read. Books literally surrounded my classroom. They were on displays, on countertops, on magnetic shelves. They were floating off the wall on invisible shelves. They were in bookcases and in baskets. I just had to have the latest Jacqueline Woodson picture book. I rushed to bookstores to find Margarita Engle’s newest gorgeous prose novel to add to the basket. The latest Kwame Alexander and Jason Reynolds books could always be found in my classroom. I was particularly proud of the books I’d curated for students to read in book clubs.

When I look back and reflect on my teaching in reading, I can see that for a time, I was simply focused on collecting books. I recognized that these authors are indeed among the greatest writers of young people’s lives. I wanted my students to have access to

incredible literature. And I understood the importance of readers seeing themselves reflected in the books they read, which is part of an antiracist approach shaped by the scholarship of multicultural educator and scholar Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop.

Dr. Bishop (1990) writes about the ways books can serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding-glass doors for readers. She intentionally focuses on the importance of Black and Brown children having access to books that serve as mirrors, reflecting their identities and their lives. While this metaphor has increasingly grown popular, Dr. Bishop's touchstone essay was published more than 30 years ago, which demonstrates how long it takes and how difficult it can be for scholarship that centers Black and Brown children to be applied in educational practices. Also, amid such popularity, I've noticed the way many people, specifically White educators, lead with windows. In conversations about books and teaching, I frequently hear the phrase "windows and mirrors," rather than educators leading with mirrors the way Dr. Bishop has done in her scholarship and in the title of her article. Dr. Bishop begins by theorizing about the experience of non-White readers who, she explains, when seeking access to books that reflect their lives, have "frequently found the search futile" and discusses the impact of Black and Brown children lacking mirrors. She writes,

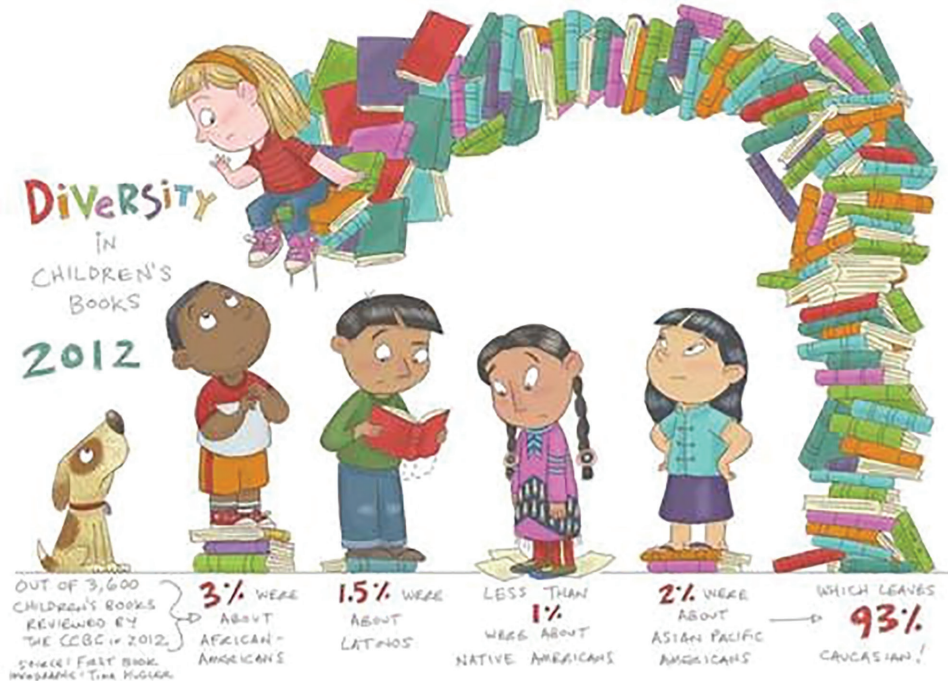
When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part. Our classrooms need to be places where all the children from all the cultures that make up the salad bowl of American society can find their mirrors.

And Dr. Bishop names clearly who the readers are who need windows.

Children from dominant social groups have always found their mirrors in books, but they, too, have suffered from the lack of availability of books about others. They need the books as windows onto reality, not just on imaginary worlds. They need books that will help them understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans. In this country, where racism is still one of the major unresolved social problems, books may be one of the few places where children who are socially isolated and insulated from the larger world may meet people unlike themselves. If they see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism.

The repositioning of “mirrors and windows” to “windows and mirrors” that I’m noticing in educational spaces and in publishing may not seem like such a big deal to some. But I see it as a mischaracterization of her work. This worries me because we’ve seen the way language and theories are so easily co-opted. And weaponized. Leading with windows seems to be an attempt to center Whiteness. To put an emphasis on the importance of White children reading about the “other.” This jeopardizes our focus on Black and Brown children seeing themselves in texts and the ways this continues today. Research on children’s literature reveals the longevity, persistence, and pervasiveness of this challenge. This research also demonstrates the misrepresentations, distortions, and misappropriations that too often occur in children’s literature and the need to add “curtains” to Dr. Bishop’s metaphor, as suggested by Dr. Debbie Reese, founder of American Indians in Children’s Literatures (AICL), in order to protect cultures. Dr. Reese (2020) explains,

One result of these long-standing misrepresentations and exploitations is this: For some time now, Native people have drawn curtains (in reality, and in the abstract) on what we do and what we share. As a scholar in children’s literature, I’ve been adding “curtains” to Rudine Sims Bishop’s metaphor of books as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. There are things people do not share with outsiders. (para. 71)



Kügler, Tina (2013).

Diversity in Children's Books 2015

Percentages of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2015 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison. ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp

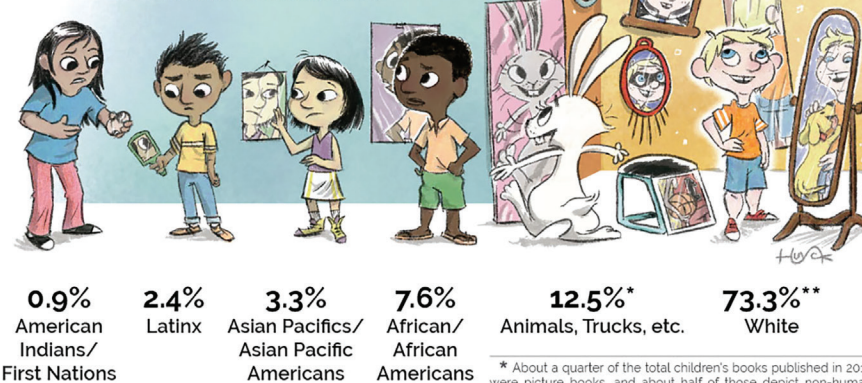


Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen & Molly Beth Griffin
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* About a quarter of the total children's books published in 2015 were picture books, and about half of those depict non-human characters, like animals & trucks

** The remainder depict white characters.

Huyck, David, Sarah Park Dahlen, and Molly Beth Griffin. (2016 September 14). Diversity in Children's Books 2015 infographic. sarahpark.com blog. Retrieved from <https://readingspark.wordpress.com/2016/09/14/picture-this-reflecting-diversity-in-childrens-book-publishing/>. Statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-about-poc-fnn/>. Released for noncommercial use under a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.

Consider the graphics shown on pages 10–14. A clear pattern emerges when we look across the data on diversity in children's books that shows the persistent challenge for Black and Brown children to access books that reflect them and their lives accurately and humanely. In response to this research, along with the importance of citing the scholarship of Black women accurately, I'm calling for a recentering of race in Dr. Bishop's metaphor and for intentionality around leading with mirrors. And that in this recentering, educators do more with racially and culturally diverse books and develop reading instruction that is identity-inspiring rather than identity-silencing. In identity-inspiring educational spaces, Black and Brown children can see themselves reflected in their full humanity in books and curriculum.

DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS 2018

Percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2018 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp

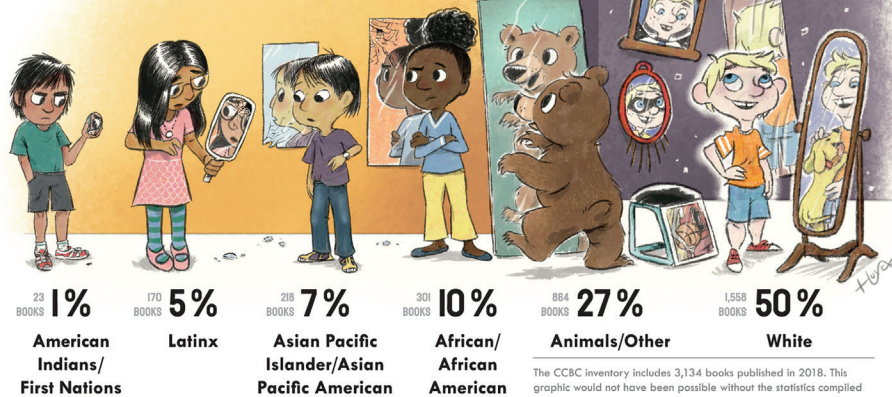


Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen

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The CCBC inventory includes 3,134 books published in 2018. This graphic would not have been possible without the statistics compiled by the CCBC, and the review and feedback we received from Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Horning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner. Many thanks.

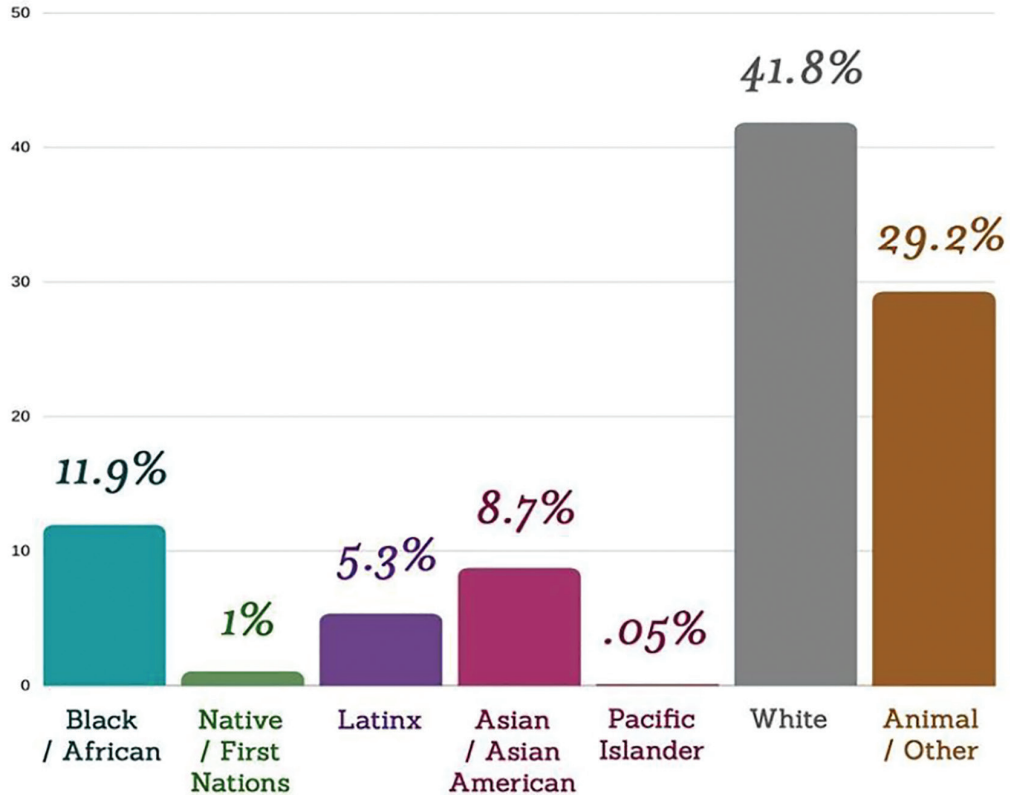
Huyck, David, and Sarah Park Dahlen. (2019 June 19). Diversity in Children's Books 2018. [sarahpark.com blog](http://sarahpark.com/blog). Created in consultation with Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Horning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner, with statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-byabout-poc-fnn/>. Retrieved from <https://readingspark.wordpress.com/2019/06/19/picture-this-diversity-in-childrens-books-2018-infographic/>.

When I look back on my teaching, I can recognize that part of my intention around the *collection approach* I was taking toward books in my classroom was ensuring that the students I taught saw themselves in the books they read. Because I understood deeply that representation matters. Representation is important, and yet, it's insufficient. We must do more. What we do with the books we make central in our teaching moves us forward. Antiracist teaching is what helps us and students to do more.

2019 by the Numbers:

MAIN CHARACTERS IN U.S. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

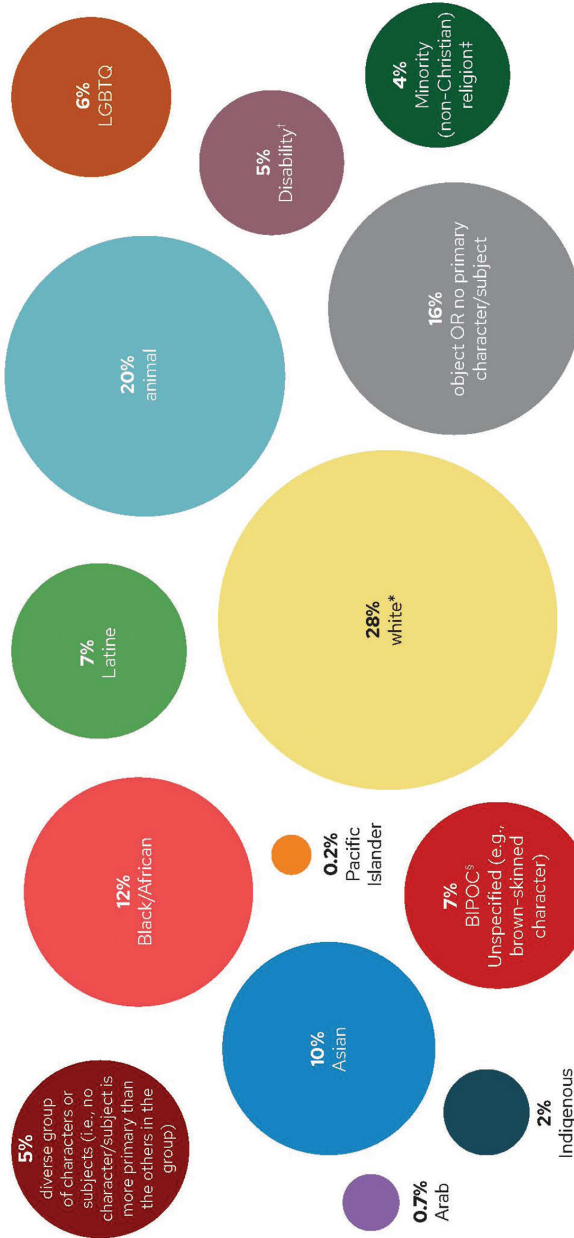
* statistics from the Cooperative Children's Book Center





2023 CCBC Diversity Statistics: PRIMARY CHARACTER/SUBJECT

Race/Ethnicity, Disability, LGBTQ, Religion



Last updated: 04/02/2024

* "White" is not counted for multiracial characters/subjects so as not to misrepresent a BIPOC§ individual as white.

† "Disability" includes physical, cognitive, neurological, and psychiatric disabilities.

‡ 12% Jewish, 1% Muslim, 0.3% other minority religion

§ Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

40% of 3,491 total books received have at least one BIPOC§ primary character (fiction) or human subject (nonfiction).
Individual books with multiple primary characters/subjects or primary characters/subjects with multiracial or intersectional identities will be counted in all applicable categories. Percentages are not mutually exclusive and cannot be combined to calculate a total of the whole.



©2024 Cooperative Children's Book Center
 Please see our media kit to access the most recent version of this image, and for additional information about our work documenting diversity. The most recent version of this image available can be used without permission as long as it is reproduced in its entirety.



Source: Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2024.

Reflect

- What does the word *diverse* mean to you?
- In what ways is the word *diverse* used as coded language in your school to mean “not White” when referring to students as well as books?
- How is this usage problematic? (See educator Chad Everett’s post: There is no diverse book: qrs.ly/lffrdtv)
- In what ways has a focus on “collecting” racially and culturally diverse books and curating “diverse” libraries contributed to avoidances around teaching about race and racism?
- Why is it important, even in predominantly White schools, to center Black and Brown students and provide books as mirrors?

A FOUNDATION OF LOVE, JOY, VALIDATION, AND HEALING

I believe that many teachers can locate themselves in one or more of these examples. In my work with educators across the nation, I can’t help but notice the ways the latter example—misunderstandings—is where reading instruction is stuck. As a classroom teacher for 20 years, there was a time when I mistakenly believed that just having racially and culturally diverse books in my classroom would be enough. That this alone meant I was a culturally relevant and antiracist educator. That my students would read these books and this alone would help them understand what it means to be antiracist. I was operating from an *antiracist fairy dust approach*, teaching as if I could just sprinkle a bit of it on top of my reading curriculum and teaching. But as I’ve shared, there is no such thing as antiracist fairy dust. The kind of teaching that is truly antiracist involves actively nurturing students with unyielding love and care, which includes helping them to directly confront what works to harm them and their communities.

Antiracist teaching fosters identity-inspiring experiences where students can show up fully as themselves and recognize the full humanity of all people.

Antiracist teaching fosters identity-inspiring experiences where students can show up fully as themselves and recognize the full humanity of all people. Antiracist teaching centers and acknowledges the lived experiences of those most impacted by racism: Black and Brown people. And because antiracism is about love, love is the founda-

tion from which all instruction emerges. Too often the work of antiracism is falsely positioned as divisive work that teaches students to hate. This is a harmful misconception by those especially who are least invested in and most resistant to addressing racism. For any curriculum or teaching to be antiracist, it must acknowledge the marginalization and oppression of Black and Brown people and other minoritized populations past and present and it must also love them.

Also and critically important, antiracist teaching must spotlight the important role of joy in the collective liberation of Black and Brown people. As the fifth pursuit in her powerful *Historically Responsive Teaching Framework*, Dr. Muhammad (2023) positions joy as the ultimate goal of teaching and learning. She asserts that educators must “understand how to connect beauty, aesthetics, wellness, wholeness, solutions to problems, and/or happiness to their curricular, instructional, and leadership practices” (p. 50). In doing so, we fully recognize the totality of the human experience, the brilliance, and audacious resilience of those who have been oppressed instead of positioning Black and Brown people as perpetual victims. Antiracist teaching helps teachers, students, and communities to align their words about equity and justice with their actions. Together, as we engage this work, we tap into the deepest part of our humanity. An antiracist reading revolution takes root when students are able to fellowship with each other in ways that are validating, loving, healing, and joyful.

APPLICATIONS OF THIS BOOK

It is critical to note the work before the work of antiracism. In *Get Free: Antibias Literacy Instruction for Stronger Readers, Writers, and Thinkers*, author and educator Tricia Ebarvia challenges educators to reflect prior to engaging in conversations about race and racism, writing, “If we are going to enter into conversations about race or racism, how much have we ourselves read and learned and reflected? How much have we examined our own racial identity or racialized experiences?” (Ebarvia, 2023, p. 159).

Ebarvia (2023) alerts educators of the dangers of skipping this work and details the work of creating conditions in classrooms for brave and safe discussions:

Asking students to engage in self-reflection related to any one of their identities—particularly regarding race, gender, social class, among others—without the safety net of a supportive community can do more harm than good. For some students, it can even be traumatic.
(p. 63)

Because historically it has not been commonplace to have conversations about race in K–8 schools, establishing community agreements can help nurture classroom environments where powerful and productive discussions can thrive. The place to begin is with self-reflection around your own racial and cultural identity and how this shapes your instructional practices. Dr. Erica Buchanan-Rivera (2002) says this “mirror work” for educators is essential in understanding “how we see the world through our ideologies and beliefs.” Such reflection can help us recognize problematic stances that must be interrogated and disrupted. We can then prepare our classrooms to be psychologically safe spaces for talking and teaching about race and racism in ways that mitigate harm to Black and Brown students.

Resources for Teachers, Parents, and Caregivers That Support Conversations About Race and Antiracism

Online Resources

- EmbraceRace—embracerace.org
- Facing History & Ourselves: Classroom Contract Teaching Strategy—qrs.ly/jtfrdua
- Learning for Justice: Let’s Talk—qrs.ly/nrfrdub
- Mindful Schools: Creating a Safe Container for Students With Community Agreements—qrs.ly/pcfrrduh

(Continued)

(Continued)

- National Museum of African American History and Culture: Race and Racial Identity—qrs.ly/nvfrduu
- Raising Race Conscious Children—www.raceconscious.org

Books

- *Get Free: Antibias Literacy Instruction for Stronger Readers, Writers, and Thinkers*, by Tricia Ebarvia
- *Identity-Affirming Classrooms: Spaces That Center Humanity*, by Erica Buchanan-Rivera
- *Raising Antiracist Children: A Practical Parenting Guide*, by Britt Hawthorne with Natasha Yglesias
- *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*, 2nd edition, by Glenn Singleton

As you engage with this book, you'll notice I use a dandelion metaphor to represent antiracist teaching and the interconnectedness of each of the chapters that are designed to support antiracist reading instruction. I provide opportunities for you to stop and reflect on teaching practices. I hope you will also use these prompts to enter into discussions with colleagues about ways this book may be affirming, challenging, and/or changing your ideas about antiracism and reading practices.

In this introduction, I've worked to provide a backdrop of where we are in this moment in education around reading instruction and curriculum that is inclusive and affirming of racially and culturally diverse students, what has brought us here, and the urgent need to move beyond where we seem to be stuck. The time is now for an antiracist reading revolution that moves our teaching beyond representation and toward liberation.

In Chapter 1, I draw upon scholarship that has consistently demonstrated the ideological, spiritual, and practical pathways to teaching with love, community, justice, and solidarity at the core to provide an **Antiracist Reading Framework** that empowers educators to engage an antiracist reading stance. Because teaching that is truly antiracist does not involve one-size-fits-all approaches, I offer characteristics of

antiracist teaching as well as critical lenses that emerge from research to demonstrate the kind of teaching, discussions, reflection, and actions both educators and students might take up around books that move us beyond a representation approach to one that is liberatory.

Chapters 2 to 6 are formed around five characteristics of antiracist teaching. I locate myself in this work by sharing experiences from my personal and professional life and invite you to consider yours as well. In each of these application chapters, I put ideas into action with six critical lenses and model with several books as a way of creating opportunities for you to see how antiracist teaching opens up opportunities for transformative reading and discussions in classrooms.

I conclude this book with an offering in Chapter 7: toolkits that can support the continued work of antiracism by teachers and students in reading.

Although I more specifically outline my vision of an antiracist reading classroom in Chapter 1, we can begin with a common understanding of what is typically occurring in reading classrooms, which can help you to imagine various ways to implement the ideas in this book. In reading classrooms, there are texts centered in curriculums that are read by all students. These short stories, picture books, novels, poems, informational texts, digital texts, and images can be designated for particular units focused on helping students learn to read and write in specific genres such as personal narrative, memoir, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. In reading classrooms, students have opportunities to read communally—in partnerships and in book clubs—as well as independently. Teachers are supporting readers in these various circumstances and configurations with mini lessons, small group instruction, and reading conferences. The popular saying “Every teacher is a teacher of reading” is used to remind educators across content areas about the importance of understanding how to teach reading in ways that support their content, such as social studies, science, math, art, music, and technology. So reading classrooms are inclusive of content areas as well.

Because I recognize educators as skilled professionals, I am confident that you will use your own knowledge of the curriculum to apply the strategies I’m offering in your work. Rather than creating fully developed lesson plans, I include prompts and pathways that can provide insight into the discussions you might facilitate and to support your teaching. I imagine using this book to understand more deeply what antiracist teaching entails in reading and the kind of teaching, learning, and community experiences that can occur across parts of the day, week, month, and year. There are several possibilities.

1. Implementing Read-Alouds

Consider reading a book aloud to students more than once. During the first read aloud, students can enjoy the story, getting to know the characters and setting. Subsequent readings provide opportunities for scaffolding students' comprehension and for them to apply critical lenses from the **Antiracist Reading Framework** that enable them to see more in the text and in the world. During subsequent readings, you'll want to plan for places to prompt students prior to reading aloud, so they are able to listen with a specific focus in mind. Then, stop strategically to provide time for students to respond to a prompt during a brief discussion with a peer. An intentional cycle of prompts and turn and talks is a powerful way to engage the six critical lenses.

2. Developing Mini Lessons

Across the year, you may want to spotlight one of the critical lenses of the **Antiracist Reading Framework** at a time, demonstrating how you and students might apply this lens as readers. For example, a mini lesson on ways readers' identities influence how they read may focus intentionally on *affirmation*. You might construct a mini lesson where you model thinking about your own personal and social identities, naming some of them, and then invite students to watch you as you read and think about how these identities influence your reading. And in this mini lesson, you can model thinking about the identities of the characters/people in a text in powerful, affirming ways.



Breathing New Life Into Book Clubs can support you in this work.

3. Coaching Into Reading Partnerships/Groups and Book Clubs

As students read in community with each other, the **Antiracist Reading Framework** critical lenses can support reading and discussion. In *Breathing New Life Into Book Clubs* (2019), Dana Johansen and I write that as educators, we want to ensure that students don't become the kind of readers where texts just wash over them. Further, we recognize that students need autonomy over what and how

they read. Achieving this balance can feel tricky for educators. Rather than telling students what to think or what to talk about, these lenses can inform students' thinking, foster deeper comprehension of the books they read and the world as text, and elevate their conversations. If discussions seem to fade and fizzle, students might lean into the six lenses to consider what they might add

to their conversation in ways that help them to understand the work of antiracism in a text and in their lives.

4. Supporting Independent Readers

Recent discussions around independent reading have focused primarily on the science of reading, specifically the teaching of reading skills such as phonics and decoding. It has been challenging to locate and connect the critical role of culturally relevant and antiracist teaching practices in discussions about the science of reading and, further, to see antiracism as an essential skill worthy of teaching within the context of reading. In response to this absence, Dr. H. Richard Milner IV (2020) invites educators to take part in what he calls a “disruptive movement,” where we address questions such as: Is there knowledge that all students should know? If so, what knowledge is that? And who determines that? How can we build knowledge in ways that disrupt and dismantle racist ideas, practices, and systems? In order for students to deepen their comprehension of and think critically about texts requires educators to ask these questions and interrogate what has been the dominant response. Milner provides a conceptual framework for the purpose of disrupting the ways Whiteness maintains hierarchies of injustice. Antiracist educators understand that all of the skills of reading need to come together to support comprehension—that comprehension is based on vocabulary and background knowledge as much as it is on phonics, decoding, and fluency. Further, educators understand the importance of seeking out books that foster a love of reading within their students. As we encourage students to explore a variety of texts and topics, we can invite students to use the critical lenses of the **Antiracist Reading Framework** to explore who builds knowledge, what counts as knowledge, and why knowledge is constructed. And challenge students to address these questions in ways that are inclusive and antiracist.

5. Creating Text Sets

The **Antiracist Reading Framework** can support educators in choosing books and creating text sets across genres and formats. These text sets can provide students with both a broader perspective and in-depth knowledge about identity and injustice. For example, to encourage students in learning more about the Civil Rights Movement, you might use the critical lenses to develop essential questions and guide your selection of picture books, interviews, images, newspaper articles, podcasts, websites, artwork, and songs that you invite students to explore.

6. Planning Curriculum and Units

You might use this book to help you plan curriculum and reimagine existing curricular units. This book can help you (re)consider the work you do around identity and ways you plan to thread that work across curriculum and the school year. You might use this book to support unit planning. For example, an environmental justice unit can be developed that begins by listening to and learning from local activists. You might use this book to develop a curriculum about musicians and artists who use their talents to speak out about the humanity and beauty of groups of people and the injustice they face. You might use this book to help students explore the work of BIPOC scientists, mathematicians, and engineers who are typically not centered in mainstream curriculum.

7. Facilitating Whole School and Community Reads

The work of antiracism must extend beyond what children learn and do in classrooms and schools. It must branch out into their communities and into the world. One powerful way to nurture home–school connections is when reading serves as a bridge that builds a community of readers. During the year, educators might select a book that every child reads and discusses at school and also at home with parents and caregivers. Using the critical lenses of the **Antiracist Reading Framework**, educators, students, and caregivers can engage in experiences that affirm their identities and help students to become more aware of ways inequities work systemically while considering ways a community can be more committed and accountable to each other.

When we commit to antiracist ideas, we commit to love. This commitment moves us from the arbitrary use of this word, often limited to a feeling. Instead, we begin to perceive love as an action. Strengthening our understanding of love as an action, bell hooks (2001) offers, “To truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients—care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication” (p. 5). In an antiracist reading classroom, reading helps us to dream, experience joy, engage in collective struggle, liberate our minds, and love. Let’s move forward together to realize our vision of an antiracist reading classroom rooted in love and liberation.

CHAPTER ONE

Be a Dandelion

A Metaphor and Vision for Antiracist Teaching



In a world that often fails to hold fast to a vision of teaching and learning for liberation, I urge educators to be like dandelions. Abundant. Unmovable. Resilient. Refuse to allow anyone to dismiss this work as weeds. Like a dandelion seed, allow a gust of wind to carry you to fertile ground and take root, believing firmly that antiracist teaching is not about uniformity; it's about possibility. There are seeds of hope we can plant everyday through intentional antiracist reading instruction practices.

When I was a kid, like many children, I loved picking dandelions during the fifth stage of their life, when their tiny florets turned into a mass of fluffy, cloud-like seeds. The once-single yellow flower transformed and became delicate, airy works of art. All it took was a gust of wind or a gentle puff of breath from my mouth to send transparent seeds traveling through the air. New dandelion seedlings would land in the soil, and in time, new plants would appear with the same transformative power and potential.

While my love for dandelions was a marker of my childhood, in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison (1970/1999), Pecola, the novel's protagonist, observes, "*Nobody loves the head of a dandelion. Maybe because they are so many, strong, and soon.*" Morrison uses dandelions symbolically to represent what we've been socialized into believing them to be. Imperfect. Unattractive. Useless. To some, dandelions represent weeds of resistance. I challenge you to see them instead as symbols of resilience.

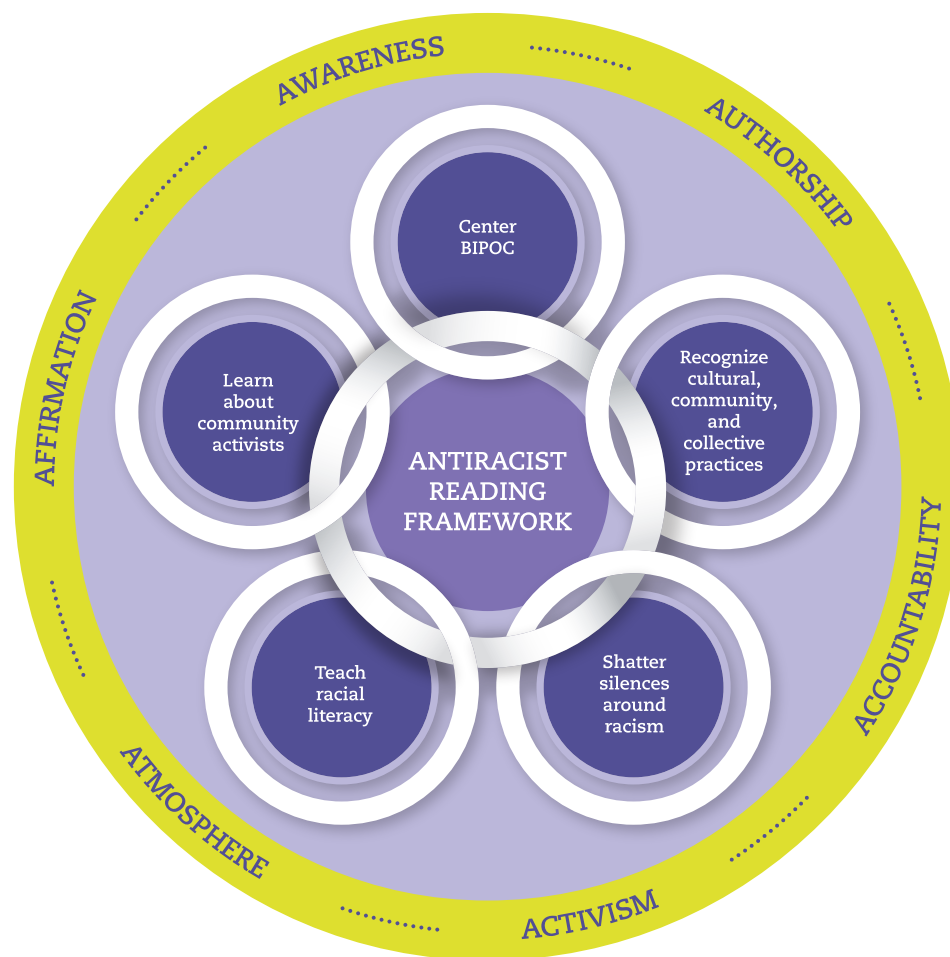
While ubiquitous in the natural environment, dandelions are often overlooked and disregarded. They are commonly considered an irritant to remove from the desired homogeneity of green backyard lawns, parks, and professional landscapes. But across cultures, time, and space, dandelions have benefited many. Several ancient cultures used dandelions for food, medicinal, and spiritual purposes. Today, they continue to be used in traditional medicine by some cultures, and experts note the dietary and health benefits that result from consuming dandelions. When we shift our perspective beyond the dominant construction, it is undeniable that dandelions are significant.

Dandelions are the perfect metaphor for antiracist teaching. Like dandelions, the work of antiracism has been viewed negatively—as an invasive, unlikeable, useless, weed. It is true that antiracism does not fit the standard; it is disruptive of it. Symbolically, dandelions represent hope, power, light, optimism, and healing. For these reasons and more, I believe the dandelion is a humble and admirable symbol to use for an **Antiracist Reading Framework** that I introduce in this chapter and for all that becomes possible when we operate from an antiracist teaching stance.

As you read this book, you'll see key characteristics of antiracist teaching highlighted throughout. While there may be a specific focus on one or more in a section, page, or chapter, know that a characteristic is never actually alone. Like a dandelion, one part cannot survive without the other. We cannot ever truly talk about any one of these characteristics separated from the whole. While I work to spotlight their distinctions and the books and teaching that can support cultivation of each, it is critical to always keep in mind the interconnectedness of these characteristics. Therefore, you will see the **Antiracist Reading Framework** in each of the following chapters with each antiracist teaching characteristic named even as one or more is being highlighted. This serves as a reminder of how all of the characteristics work together to create

liberatory outcomes for young people. As I provide an **Antiracist Reading Framework** to ground our understandings in this chapter, in chapters to come, I also demonstrate antiracist teaching practices with books that open up worlds of possibilities for young people. (See Figure 1.1.)

FIGURE 1.1 Antiracist Reading Framework



A VISION OF ANTIRACIST TEACHING IN READING

During a read-aloud of *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero, I observed a group of fifth graders dig into the kind of *Mind Work* they do whenever they read fiction. They discussed the characters of the text and named traits that described

them. They wondered where the story was taking place as they took in the setting. I interrupted them briefly. “In addition to this *Mind Work*, there’s *Heart Work* we always do as readers. But we’re not always thinking about this.” Several students looked at me quizzically. “Part of this *Heart Work* is thinking about our identities as we read. Parts of my identity are that I am Black. I am a Black woman. I am a Black woman and a teacher. I am a Black woman who is a teacher and a mother. I bring each of these identities to every text I read. As you read, try remaining alert to this *Heart Work*. Pay attention to how your identities influence your understanding of this text. *How do they help you to perceive more in a text, about characters and issues they face? And also, how might your identities limit your understanding? Notice parts of the text that make you think, might I be missing something?*”

Reflect

- How often do you reflect on your identities and share this reflection with students?
- How do you demonstrate ways your identities influence how you read and understand a text?
- How do you help young readers discover how their identities inform their interpretation of a text and to understand this as a powerful reading strategy?

I listened in carefully while students tried this work. They applied the scholarship of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990), discussing parts of the text that were mirrors for them (refer to the introduction for more on Dr. Bishop’s crucial work). Like speaking Spanish and English like the characters or, more broadly, having the ability to speak more than one language. Like enjoying spending time with their fathers, just like the main character, Daisy, does. Like being an immigrant like the character Papi or being part of a family of immigrants. Affirmations about identity were abundant. Students also shared parts of the text that were windows for them. Like not really realizing and recognizing the hard work of immigrants and the challenge of living in a country that isn’t always appreciative of the work and sacrifices immigrants make. Like not understanding the importance and joy of multilingualism.

We read a bit more before I paused again. “I’d like to discuss a word that may be unfamiliar to you. That word is *gentrification*. Gentrification is the process of making a neighborhood more appealing to people moving in who have more money than those who were already living there. As a result, rent prices increase and people from the community who can’t afford to live there anymore are pushed out. This mostly affects Black and Brown people in neighborhoods who are pushed out when White people with more resources move in. Talk with your partner about how the word *gentrification* helps you to understand this part of the story. And also, tell your partner if you’ve seen any signs of *gentrification* in your neighborhood or in neighborhoods you are familiar with.” I listened intently while students continued to apply Dr. Bishop’s metaphor:

Well this is a mirror for me because I have seen signs of this in my neighborhood. There used to be a bodega. We all went there. And now there’s Starbucks. That bodega is gone now.

Whenever a Whole Foods shows up it seems like the whole community changes.

They’re building luxury apartment buildings in my neighborhood. Already several of my friends have moved away.

I never knew about gentrification at all.

This experience with fifth-grade students illustrates my vision of the role and work of educators in moving beyond teaching approaches that are just about representation to teaching approaches that are about liberation. The classroom becomes fertile ground for students to more closely examine their identities and the world around them. Truth-seeking and truth-telling become students’ common, collective practice of community, solidarity, love, justice, and freedom. This work requires educators to do more with racially and culturally diverse books beyond simply collecting them.

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF ANTIRACIST TEACHING

While there is no one way to define antiracist curriculum or instruction, several characteristics emerge from the existing and growing body of scholarship on antiracism. I have identified five that can inform instruction and shape the educational experiences of students. Each of these characteristics works together as a whole to construct a vision of an antiracist reading classroom—the work of teachers and the work of students—that leads to liberation.

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF ANTIRACIST TEACHING

- **Center BIPOC in texts.** Antiracist educators select texts by and about BIPOC that reflect the fullness of their lives without exclusively locating their histories, experiences, and backgrounds in oppression.
- **Recognize cultural, community, and collective practices.** Antiracist educators highlight powerful ways of knowing and being in the world that are rooted in the knowledge of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse groups of people.
- **Shatter silences around racism.** Antiracist educators name racism, Whiteness, and White supremacy and help students recognize oppressive ideologies and how they function.
- **Teach racial literacy.** Antiracist educators provide opportunities for students to have critical and constructive conversations about race and racism where they develop their ability to apply language to examine racial and cultural identities; question ideas, assumptions, and the status quo; and work to resist racist ideas, practices, and policies.
- **Learn about community activists.** Antiracist educators provide opportunities for students to learn about, explore, and reference voices of color in their communities and activists in the world who are advancing the work of racial justice.

Although I discuss each of the characteristics individually and one at a time, it is important to note that they are not linear, but circuitous and interconnected. Looking at them individually can, I hope, provide a greater understanding of antiracist teaching as lived, liberatory practice.

CENTER BIPOC IN TEXTS

Antiracist educators work to affirm racially and culturally diverse people and communities lovingly and joyfully. One way to achieve this is through transparent, intentional text selection, understanding that otherwise, books and texts are powerful ways young people can be socialized into racist and inequitable ideas. In *Stamped (For Kids): Racism, Antiracism, and You* (Cherry-Paul et al., 2021), I ask young readers to look out for mainstream representations that too often provide limited, deficit, harmful perspectives of Black and Brown people. **Therefore, antiracist teaching seeks to powerfully reflect those who have been minoritized and marginalized in depth rather than in superficial breadth that can proliferate stereotypes.** Books and texts written by BIPOC creators who share the same racial and cultural identity as the people and characters they are writing about are more likely to present important, nuanced perspectives.

In response to noticings around identity and authorship, Corinne Duyvis started a grassroots effort using the social media hashtag #ownvoices to seek out texts where the author’s identities and lived experiences are reflected in the characters, settings, and themes of a story. In 2015, Duyvis tweeted the following in Figure 1.2.

FIGURE 1.2 Corinne Duyvis Tweet



Recently, there has been tension around the term *ownvoices*—which has blossomed beyond a hashtag into a movement. Because of the ways words and terms in the work of equity and antiracism are co-opted, misused, diluted, and commercialized, it is important to remain vigilant. It’s important to recognize how words that are about tweaking systems are more susceptible to being misconstrued and co-opted versus words that are about disrupting systems. Intentionality in their usage is critical when it comes to words and terms such as *ownvoices*, *diverse*, *BIPOC*, *POC*, and others. It is also crucial to call out those who misuse and capitalize on them.

As a Black educator whose parents were born in Georgia, whose father, aunts, and uncles grew up there and navigated segregation from childhood until young adulthood, I use the terms *BIPOC* and *ownvoices* in this book intentionally and with care. I recognize that tension around their usage is really about colonialism, imperialism, and centuries of White supremacy that have and continue to work to

(Continued)

(Continued)

erase, silence, invalidate, and marginalize identities. With this profound understanding, I use *ownvoices* to call attention to the collective struggle among groups of people and communities who've been marginalized while also working to spotlight their distinct, rich identities. I use *ownvoices* to call attention to structural and systemic racism while working to avoid minimizing the lived experiences of individuals and group identities. I use *ownvoices* to call attention to the ways we must continue to work together to collectively get free.

RECOGNIZE CULTURAL, COMMUNITY, AND COLLECTIVE PRACTICES

Antiracist educators recognize the importance of truly knowing their students—their personal identities, such as favorite TV shows, movies, sports, and music, and also their social identities, which include their racial, cultural, and linguistic identities as well as knowing the communities in which they live. Antiracist educators see this work of knowing as continuous, and it helps them to develop instruction and curriculum that are closer fits between students' home and school cultures. Dr. Kimberly Parker (2022) asserts, “We see the world through our own racialized, gendered, complicated lenses” and the importance of educators reframing our thinking. To accomplish this, she recommends we lean into the scholarship around “funds of knowledge” to develop multi-dimensional understandings of the children in teachers' care (pp. 53–54). **Therefore, antiracist teaching is grounded in historical and contemporary experiences and issues of people and community.** Rather than revering individualism and competition, books and texts that are centered in curriculum support collectivism and communal practices and are those that value multiple ways of knowing across cultures.

SHATTER SILENCES AROUND RACISM

Educators name racism proactively and explicitly and help students develop a working definition of racism. This definition deepens across space, time, and context, making it possible for students to recognize social, economic, and political factors that create environmental conditions that oppress BIPOC and communities. Each summer, Tricia Ebarvia and I co-facilitate the Institute for Racial Equity in Literacy (IREL), a unique professional development experience that supports educators in the work of antiracism and equity in their classrooms, schools, and communities. This work demands critical reflection and action. We challenge educators to identify the ways in which racism has been embedded throughout history and in every societal institution, including schools.

And we ask educators to reflect on questions such as these: *How can we ensure that our educational practices are not just inclusive but equitable? How can we use our power and position as educators to transform systems, whether those systems be our individual classrooms, districts, or greater communities? How can we help students read, write, and speak up for justice?* **Therefore, antiracist teaching helps students recognize ways racism is entrenched in institutions and systems such as education, housing, health care, media, government, law enforcement, and more and ways we can work to dismantle oppressive systems.**



Learn more about the IREL here.

TEACH RACIAL LITERACY

Antiracist educators acquire racial literacy themselves and help their students become racially literate. This involves teaching that invites students to recognize race as a social construct, acknowledge racism as a contemporary problem and not just a past condition, and interrogate the ways Whiteness drives the values, structures, and systems in the United States and beyond. Dr. Detra Price-Dennis and Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz (2021) convey the urgency for educators to not just talk about race and racism “but to learn how to examine carefully how race is lived in our society” (p. 21). When educators acquire this skill, they are able to support the racial literacy development of their students so they are able to navigate and interrupt racist structures, systems, policies, and practices. Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz (2021) explains that “a desired outcome of racial literacy in an outwardly racist society like America is for members of the dominant racial category to adopt an antiracist stance and for persons of color to resist a victim stance.” **Therefore, antiracist teaching supports authentic, critical, and constructive conversations as students apply racial literacy skills to read and discuss texts and develop tools to disrupt racism in their lives.**

LEARN ABOUT COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS

Antiracist educators learn about folk locally as well as globally who are working to dismantle racism. They recognize that those who make this their life’s work aren’t always heralded in books for students to access. Also crucially important is the recognition of ways activists work in community with others. Dr. Parker (2022) defines community as “a group of people who come together around shared purposes” that

includes “members’ needs for connection, interdependence, and the belief that a community—and the work required to create and maintain it—are necessary and possible” (p. 50). The work of antiracist educators cannot flourish without cultivating community in our classrooms. Community, Dr. Parker asserts, “must be intentional if we want it to be liberatory” (p. 51). The nurturing of our classroom communities must also include connecting students to the people and organizations in the wider school community who work to make life more equitable in their neighborhoods and in the world. Such connection is one way students maintain hope for a more just world—a hope that is underpinned by intention, commitment, and action. **Therefore, antiracist teaching creates community and connects young people to activists that empower them to consider how they locate themselves in the longevity of work for liberation and ways they will cultivate new ideas that become seeds of change.**

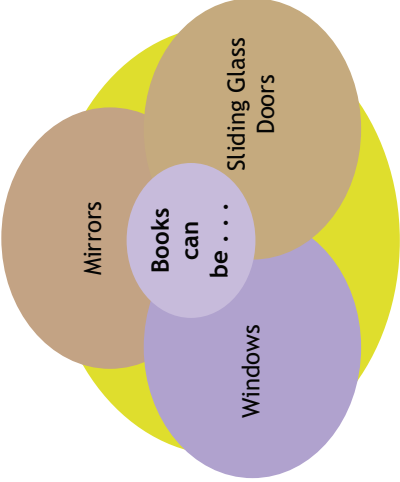
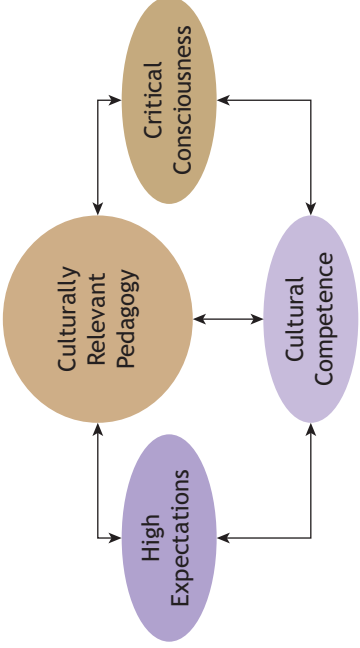
SIX CRITICAL LENSES TO SUPPORT ANTIRACIST READING INSTRUCTION

To help implement these antiracist teaching characteristics in reading, I provide six critical lenses that support the instructional approaches of educators and the insights of students as they read and discuss books. These lenses are demonstrated throughout the remaining chapters in this book, which will guide you through texts and practices that provide a foundation for an antiracist reading revolution in your classroom. While they do not have to be implemented in any particular order, there is one exception. I urge you to always begin this work with affirmation, that you begin in ways that lets students know they are loved. This is essential for the emotional and spiritual well-being of Black and Brown students who have often received messages in education that are the antithesis of this. Use each, any, and all of the critical lenses as you develop your antiracist teaching practice. The six critical lenses I offer extend from the research of Black women scholars who shape my knowledge and practice of antiracist teaching (Table 1.1).

To nurture an antiracist reading revolution, we can apply two overarching lenses from the scholarship of culturally relevant and critical pedagogies to inform the ways we teach reading: affirmation and awareness.



Antiracist educators work intentionally to affirm the racial and cultural identities of students. This work is not left for chance or for students to solely experience from reading a particular text. Instead, antiracist educators help students understand the ways characters and people are fully recognized and validated in a text and the importance of recognizing

TABLE 1.1 Scholarship of Black Women Who Shape Antiracist Teaching

SCHOLAR	SCHOLARSHIP	FRAMEWORK
<p>Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop <i>Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors</i> (1990)</p>	<p>“When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences and similarities, because together they are what makes us all human.”</p>	
<p>Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy” (1995)</p>	<p>“Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate.”</p>	

(Continued)

(Continued)

SCHOLAR	SCHOLARSHIP	FRAMEWORK
<p>Dr. Barbara Love <i>Developing a Liberatory Consciousness</i> (2010)</p>	<p>“With a liberatory consciousness, every person gets the chance to theorize about issues of equity and social justice, to analyze events related to equity and social justice, and to act in responsible ways to transform society.”</p>	
<p>Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz <i>Racial Literacy: A Policy Research Brief</i>, produced by the James R. Squire Office of the National Council of Teachers of English (2021)</p>	<p>“Research has revealed that conversations about race, when done effectively, provide education professionals with the confidence they need to alter their pedagogy in more culturally responsive and culturally sustaining ways. They become skillful at engaging their students in essential conversations that relate to their learning and social development.”</p>	

people in these ways in their lives. One aspect of culturally relevant pedagogy as theorized by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings is educators working to affirm students' cultural identities. Dr. Ladson-Billings (2009) explains that for Black students in particular, affirmation has not been easy to access in schools:

The typical experience in the schools is a denigration of African and African American culture. Indeed, there is a denial of its very existence. The language that students bring with them is seen to be deficient—a corruption of English. The familial organizations are considered pathological. And the historical, cultural, and scientific contributions of African Americans are ignored or rendered trivial. (p. 151)

There should be no surprise, then, when Black students do not trust schools and find them to be “spirit-murdering” (Love, 2019) spaces rather than humanizing, liberatory spaces. For educators who wonder about the importance of culturally relevant and sustaining teaching in predominantly White contexts, Drs. Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2017)

address the inclination of White teachers to avoid this work with White students. They convey that “developing a multicultural, multilingual perspective or competence means that all students (including white, middle-class students) broaden their cultural repertoires so that they can operate more easily in a world that is globally interconnected” (p. 145). Further, whenever working to make structures, systems, and institutions more racially just, it is those who have experienced the most racial injustice that must be centered.

The work of affirmation in reading instruction provides opportunities for BIPOC students to appreciate their own culture and “make connections between their community, national, and global identities” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 38). Such teaching demands that educators have an in-depth knowledge of their students—their racial and cultural identities, the values instilled in them by their families and communities, their joys, hopes, and dreams. Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz (2021) names this kind of commitment Critical Love, “a profound commitment to the communities we work in.”

Antiracist educators also work to help students develop an awareness of racism and an understanding of how racism functions systemically. As a result, students are better

Whenever working to make structures, systems, and institutions more racially just, it is those who have experienced the most racial injustice that must be centered.

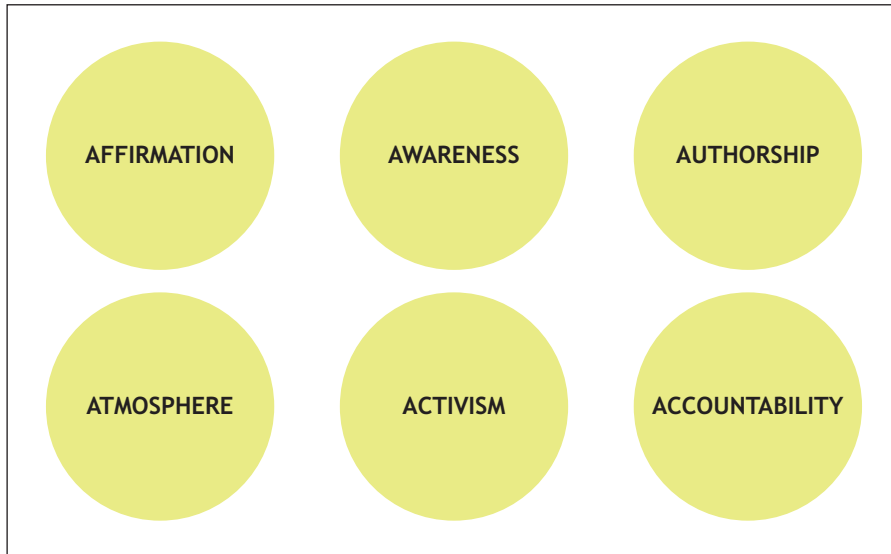
able to make antiracist decisions in their own lives that are a disruption of the status quo, and they can determine how they want to move through the world in ways that promote equity and justice. Educators tend to shy away from this work because of their own discomfort confronting issues of inequities. And they tend to avoid instruction about race and racism, believing that children are too young or too tender for such conversations. However, research disrupts the myth that children are too young to discuss issues related to race and the importance of educators developing the skills needed to facilitate these discussions (Sullivan et al., 2020).

The work of awareness in reading instruction involves raising students' sociopolitical consciousness. Students acquire language and tools to discuss and disrupt injustice (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). Such teaching makes it possible for students to live their lives from what Dr. Barbara Love (2010) calls “a waking position” in an oppressive society with “awareness and intentionality, rather than on the basis of the socialization to which they have been subjected” (pp. 599, 600).

Antiracist educators work alongside students to develop a “liberatory consciousness” and racial literacy. Love (2010) says, “A liberatory consciousness enables humans to maintain awareness of the dynamics of oppression characterizing society *without giving in to despair and hopelessness about that condition*, to maintain awareness of the role played by each individual in the maintenance of that system *without blaming them for the roles they play*, and at the same time practice intentionality about changing the systems of oppression” (p. 599). Racial literacy development, Sealey-Ruiz (2021) shares, is critical for educators, particularly those teaching in racially diverse contexts. Critical Love, she theorizes, is the foundation of racial literacy development and involves educators working to recognize and reckon with their own biases and racist assumptions, in order to fully and authentically love Black and Brown children as they are.

With Affirmation and Awareness as cornerstone concepts, the six critical lenses I provide build upon this scholarship to support antiracist teaching and learning in reading. Educators can use these lenses to examine curriculum and plan instruction that centers BIPOC students—their lives, their experiences, their communities—and strives toward liberation. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of always beginning with affirmation. When Black and Brown students can only see themselves reflected in the curriculum through the lens of oppression, this is not humanizing. This is not liberation. So it is critical that the work of affirmation is where your work starts in order for BIPOC students to see the fullness of who they are. The remaining lenses do not have to be implemented in any particular order, though I urge you to use each, any, and all of the critical lenses as you develop your antiracist teaching practice.

FIGURE 1.3 Six Critical Lenses



AFFIRMATION

Always begin with affirmation. Simply put, affirmation makes readers feel that they matter, not only in classrooms, but in the world. Identity-inspiring texts make it possible for readers to see themselves reflected in powerful ways. Educators can foster affirmation in students' reading lives by considering: Do the books in their classrooms make children feel seen, valued, cherished, loved, and that they matter? And in what ways do the books accomplish this? It's important to know and understand this, so we can teach into this. Educators can facilitate in ways that help students to recognize this in the books they read and discuss with peers.

AWARENESS

We're living in a time where truth is weaponized. And the truth is not a weapon. The truth is love. The truth is liberation. Educators can help raise students' awareness by considering: In what ways are the books in their classrooms truth-tellers about racism? About White supremacy? About what it means to engage in collective struggle? To labor for freedom together? About what it means to be antiracist? Educators can coach

in ways that help students to understand the meaning of solidarity and what it means to work as a collective in the greatest sense.

AUTHORSHIP

Who writes the story matters. The research around children's publishing led by educators and scholars such as Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen, Edith Campbell, Dr. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Dr. Debbie Reese demonstrates the misrepresentations and distortions that are prevalent in books written by White authors who do not know the Black and Brown people and communities they are writing about. At best, many books can demonstrate a lack of nuance and care. These data reveal the ways Black and Brown people are systematically erased from their own narratives. It's critical that students learn to question when identities do not mirror the characters or people being written about, what work has been done to do so with accuracy and care? Antiracist educators recognize deeply that who authors a text (fiction and nonfiction) significantly matters and utilize reading instruction as opportunities for students to understand this as well.

ATMOSPHERE

Atmosphere relates to the setting and context of the books educators share with students. As a result of doing an audit of my classroom library, I realized that the overwhelming majority of books on my shelves that were about BIPOC characters were historical fiction. This is not to say that historical fiction isn't valuable. It absolutely is! However, if Black and Brown children could only ever see themselves in the past, how could they imagine their place in the world right now or in the future? When thinking about atmosphere, educators consider questions such as: How are Black and Brown people positioned in the books students have access to? What is the context? What are the circumstances around the issue of oppression? Students need access to all kinds of books including contemporary books that speak to their lives right now.

ACTIVISM

A commitment to antiracism is a commitment to action. For some students, their understanding of activism is about the big, bold actions they see from individuals and groups that may be well known through the media. Antiracist educators can

help students understand that the actions students take in their daily lives may seem small, but are mighty. Actions such as building relationships with peers from various racial and cultural identities, taking an inclusive approach in their reading lives, and learning about issues that impact the lives of those who have been marginalized help to expand students' perspectives. Educators invite students to consider what they are learning about people and society in the texts they read. What are they being invited to challenge and change? And how might they do this within and beyond the four walls of the classroom and school?

ACCOUNTABILITY

The work of antiracism relies on evaluating how our words align with our actions. Educators and students consider the implications of what they've learned through reading and work to apply these learnings in ways that benefit the collective. Together, they consider how they will hold themselves accountable for sustaining their new understanding about justice to care for each other and their communities.

ANTIRACIST READING FRAMEWORK

Together, the characteristics and critical lenses work as an **Antiracist Reading Framework** that cultivates and sustains reading instruction and reading practices of students. This framework provides the structure for the following chapters that are organized around each of the five characteristics of antiracist teaching. I model ways to apply the **Antiracist Reading Framework** to a carefully curated collection of mostly picture books about racially and culturally diverse characters and people from various backgrounds. (Because I model with mostly picture books, I have included in the Appendix a list of middle-grade and young adult (YA) books that are examples of wonderful longer fiction and nonfiction books to include in classroom libraries and to center in curriculum and instruction.)

You may be wondering why picture books? First, picture books are for all ages. I repeat: Picture books are for readers of all ages. What I have observed and continue to notice is this—the higher the grade, the fewer (if any) picture books students seem to have access to. Picture books are enjoyable to read; they are exceptional models of craft, structure, and art; and they help readers develop empathy. Further, picture books are excellent to teach with because they can be read in one sitting. Of course, volume and stamina matter in order for students to blossom as strong readers. This involves them reading longer texts. I hope that modeling with picture books can provide insights for

applying the **Antiracist Reading Framework** when teaching with novels and longer nonfiction and informational books that students may be reading independently, in book clubs, or as part of a whole class shared reading experience.

In my work with thousands of educators and caregivers, I am often asked if I can provide a book list—the titles and authors of texts I recommend for the kind of vision I discuss and teach about. Earlier in my career, I obliged. In thinking more about this, I've come to recognize that providing these lists can be problematic. First, lists may give the impression that only the titles on it are *the* books to teach with and include in libraries. There are wonderful new books that are released each year that deserve to be read, loved, and made accessible to children. Second, providing a list can be dangerous. They can reinforce the *collection approach* I discussed in the introduction when these titles are purchased and educators assume that simply having them in the classroom is enough. So it is my goal that the **Antiracist Reading Framework** supports the application of antiracist teaching and also serves as a guide for book selection by educators, caregivers, and students.

You may have the urge to purchase the books referenced for your classroom or to ask a school leader to do so. Lean into that temptation! Even though this book selection is not intended to serve as a finite list, the authors and illustrators highlighted deserve your patronage. These books deserve to be centered in curriculum, read, discussed, and loved by children. However, I discourage the belief that antiracist teaching isn't possible without the specific books featured. Remember, antiracist teaching is not a checklist, and these are not the only books to teach with and make available to students. Book lists can lead to fixed collections instead of living libraries that have the potential to fortify students in myriad ways. With the **Antiracist Reading Framework**, I aim to provide you with a set of transferable skills that make it possible for you to do this work with various books—the ones featured across these pages and beyond.

The pages that follow are not curriculum or lesson plans, although ideas may be developed into this. What follows is insight that I hope helps to sharpen our lenses when selecting, reading, and teaching with books; guidance that supports seeing and doing more with books; and tools that activate our minds and galvanize us to actions that move us closer to an antiracist future. If you are planning to use any of the books I model with, please read them first, prior to using them in instruction. This creates an opportunity for you to both bring your insights and perspectives as well as interrogate the ways you may be responding to a text with biases and assumptions that can cause harm.

The prompts I provide as students read and discuss books are not the *only* prompts that can be used. Consider your learners and the fullness of who they are and what they bring to your classroom as you consider what might spark rich, vibrant conversations. Every text is informed by our own identities, backgrounds, and experiences.

The pathways included are based on discussions I've had with children and their responses that can help you to imagine the possibilities that can occur in your classroom, and they are insights into ways you might further support thinking and discussions. Many of the books I model with could be placed in more than one chapter, as they address more than one characteristic of antiracist teaching. Antiracist teaching is not a binary; it is layered, interconnected, and iterative. The presence of the **Antiracist Reading Framework** serves as a reminder of this. The purpose of the organization of this book is to deepen your understanding about antiracist teaching. I hope you'll consider the implications and applications of this work as you develop an antiracist reading stance.

In a world that often fails to hold fast to a vision of teaching and learning for liberation, I urge educators to be like dandelions. Abundant. Unmovable. Resilient. Refuse to allow anyone to dismiss this work as weeds. Like a dandelion seed, allow a gust of wind to carry you to fertile ground and take root, believing firmly that antiracist teaching is not about uniformity; it's about possibility. There are seeds of hope we can plant everyday through intentional antiracist reading instruction practices.

