

What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

Afrika Afeni Mills's book fills an important gap in the arena of diversity, equity, and inclusion. She helps us understand why White students need to build their cultural competence if we are to truly have a society that is bias-free. If you're a White educator or parent, this book will help you to let go of the things that no longer serve you and to teach your students to embrace those things that will help create welcoming environments where all feel a sense of belonging.

—**Zaretta Hammond**, author
*Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain:
Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor*

Afrika Afeni Mills expertly offers just the right blend of reflective questions for increasing racial consciousness, with numerous resources, and asks us as White educators to heal ourselves so that we might provide a more accurate racial understanding for all of our students. Doing the exercises within this book is a must-do for any educator who wants to further the work of racial justice in schools.

—**Jenna Chandler-Ward**
Co-Founder, Teaching While White

In this book, White teachers have an answer. The work of being pro-human is hard and in some ways requires that teachers reinvent the wheel. Afrika Afeni Mills has done a fantastic job of laying out a process for these teachers to follow. From the prologue to the very end, there are nuggets of wisdom and powerful examples that offer concrete ideas. Considering the struggles our schools are facing and the needs White students have for ABAR learning, this is a timely and necessary book.

—**Lorena Germán**, author
*Textured Teaching: A Framework for
Culturally Sustaining Practices*

Afrika Afeni Mills's *Open Windows, Open Minds: Developing Antiracist, Pro-Human Students* is a must-read for K-16+ educators who want not only to espouse antiracism practices but also to do the deep transformative work required for this within schools and communities in a way that orients us all toward freedom and liberation.

—**Anneliese Singh**
Associate Provost for Diversity and Faculty Development/Chief Diversity Officer
Office of Academic Affairs & Provost, Tulane University

Afrika Afeni Mills's work is, in short, exceptional. She guides her readers through some of the most important reflections that we can undertake, often with a clever approach that places our answers in conversation with other thoughtful educators around the country. Next, she guides us through practical strategies that not only are grounded in the early chapters' reflective practices but also show us how to inspire students to start—or continue—their own journeys of rigorous reflection about their racial identities. I love how, when doing this, Mills never offers the empty generalities that we have become accustomed to in recent times. She instead embraces complexity and shows us how we can encourage our students to do the same. *Open Windows, Open Minds* is truly a must-read, in every sense of the phrase.

—**Matthew R. Kay**, teacher

Author, *Not Light but Fire: How to Lead Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom*, and

Co-Author, *Answers to Your Biggest Questions About Teaching Middle and High School ELA*

The key contribution of *Open Windows, Open Minds* is Afrika Afeni Mills's ability to carefully, transformatively step readers—and especially White teachers—through our own *knowing better* so that we can *do better* supporting students' abilities to know and do better.

—**Paul Gorski**

Founder and Lead Equity Specialist, Equity Literacy Institute

Open Windows, Open Minds is a powerful and instructive guide for White educators who are striving to become more effective allies, accomplices, and co-conspirators. Afrika Afeni Mills offers a progression of reflection and action that will empower White educators to dismantle our internalized biases and prejudices and provide better learning opportunities for our students.

—**Donalyn Miller**, teacher

Author, *The Book Whisperer*

Open Windows, Open Minds isn't simply a book you will read. It's a brilliant book you will reread, mark up, keep near, talk about, and encourage others to read. It's a critical text for anyone committed to living an antiracist life. It's a book you will start reading for just ten minutes and then discover you have sat still with thoughts racing for an hour. It's a how-to book that is also a why-you-must book.

—**Kylene Beers**, author

When Kids Can't Read, Notice and Note, and Forged by Reading
Past President of the National Council of Teachers of English

Open Windows, Open Minds

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*To Noah, Mateo, Jack H., Liam K., Fiona, Mira, Gabe, Grace, Hayden,
Kellan, Camryn, Riley, Liam G., Wayne, Moira, Abraham, Lazarus,
Augustine, Llewyn, Juliet, Micah, and Tyler.*

May the words in this book help this world to become the world you deserve.

Open Windows, Open Minds

Developing Antiracist,
Pro-Human Students

Afrika Afeni Mills

Foreword by Cornelius Minor and Kass Minor

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A SAGE Company
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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mills, Afrika Afeni, author.

Title: Open windows, open minds : developing antiracist, pro-human students / Afrika Afeni Mills.

Description: Thousand Oaks, California : Corwin, [2023] |
Series: Corwin literacy, Volume 1 |
Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022015472 | ISBN 9781071852897 (paperback) |
ISBN 9781071887011 (epub) | ISBN 9781071887028 (epub) |
ISBN 9781071887035 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Multicultural education. | Effective teaching. |
Anti-racism—Study and teaching. | White people—Race identity. |
Educational equalization.

Classification: LCC LC1099 .M55 2023 | DDC 370.117—
dc23/eng/20220511
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022015472>

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

22 23 24 25 26 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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On Children

by Kahlil Gibran (n.d.)

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,
But seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday.

❖ ❖ ❖
“The paradox of education is precisely this, that as one begins to become
conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.”

→ James Baldwin ([1963] n.d.), “A Talk to Teachers”

❖ ❖ ❖
“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of
the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and
you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

—Bishop Desmond Tutu (1984)

❖ ❖ ❖
“Nobody's free until everybody's free.”

—Fannie Lou Hamer (Ladd 2011)

❖ ❖ ❖
“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come
because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

—Aboriginal Rights Group, Queensland, Australia, including Lilla Watson (n.d.)

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For access to antibias, antiracist (ABAR) resources,
visit the companion website for *Open Windows, Open Minds* at
resources.corwin.com/openwindows.

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A Foreword in Two Voices

Cornelius Minor and Kass Minor

CORNELIUS

When I was in 6th grade, I had a White friend, and my father would never let me stay at his house for extended periods of time. Every time that I asked, the answer was, “No.”

At first, the “Nos” were simple and direct. When my father could tell that I would not relent, the “Nos” became patient, yet terminal. Stop asking, Cornelius.

So when I kept pressing for weeks, the “Nos” became tense. As if to communicate, “Don’t make me have to have a ‘conversation’ with you right here, young man.”

I was 11. The last thing I wanted was a right-here “conversation” with my unyielding father. So I stopped asking.

But this was still peculiar to me, because my parents cultivated the kind of community where we shared everything—time, food, wisdom, hand-me-downs, experiences. Our living room was a meeting place, cafe, guest room, lounge, and healing center. For everyone.

My father curated a lifestyle for our family that fortified relationships by encouraging conversation, prioritizing honesty, and teaching humanity.

So being unable to spend time with Robert and his family was a mystery. Especially because Robert spent so much time with my family. So one day I asked my dad. Outright.

At the time, wisdom and strategy were nascent concepts to me, so I thought it would go really well if I asked him IN FRONT OF ROBERT.

“Hey, Daddy, why can’t I ever spend time at Robert’s house?”

Stern Liberian father look

Seconds, all of a sudden, felt like millenia.

Stern Liberian father look pans from Robert to me

My father exhaled in the way that Black daddies do when you MUST listen to what they are about to say next. Even Robert seemed to know that he had to pay close attention.

“Son. And . . . Robert. I am afraid. This is why you cannot visit Robert’s home. Robert’s parents are great friends to us, but I am afraid that Robert’s parents do not know America well enough to keep you safe in it.”

Each word was heavy. I remember hearing their weight then. I can feel the heaviness as I type them now.

“Cornelius, Robert’s parents do not carry the same kind of worry for Robert that we are forced to carry for you in this country.”

I heard what my father was telling me. I did not know then what he was teaching me. But he continued with words that echo across my consciousness still—as I parent his grandchildren.

“I’ve never seen Robert’s parents seriously consider the history of racism in this country, and I have no way of knowing if they even understand how it impacts you every day, son. I value their friendship, but without that understanding, I cannot trust them to keep you safe in my absence.”

These words are tattooed onto my consciousness.

They inform every decision that I make as a parent and as an educator. Who can keep my children, Black children, our children intellectually, emotionally, and bodily safe in my absence?

I wish that I could say, “Every teacher.” In this profession, it bothers me that I cannot . . .

KASS

In the first conversation Afrika Afeni Mills and I shared, it didn’t take long for us to note the mutual joy and necessity we find within the work of building social justice in schools. While sharing the stories of our lived realities, we learned there are many roles that guide our work as both mothers and daughters, teachers and partners. We understood that for each of us, our work towards justice isn’t something we just do, rather, it’s who we are. We have been called upon, both spiritually and without negotiation, from the people we love the most to the people who have hurt us the worst, to make the footprint of our presence powerful.

In that first meeting (counter to the color-blind norm in the United States), we did not skip over the significance of my Whiteness and Afrika's Blackness in terms of how we navigate our work in schools as professionals: as one of the White people who makes up nearly 80 percent of the US teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics), I rarely experience a second glance when I am signing in to a school at the front desk, I have never been mistaken for anybody other than a mother or a teacher at a school. The same is not true for Afrika.

We also talked about how our racial identities impact how we are able to live our lives and mother our children. As a mother of two Black-Biracial children, already, I have witnessed my children carrying the labor of their lone racial awareness amongst most of their elementary school classmates. For most BIPOC children going to schools that are predominantly White, this is true. This, as mothers of BIPOC youth, Afrika and I share.

But being in close proximity to BIPOC people, whether they are your partner or friend or child, is not enough.

If you are White, I ask you to consider these questions through your White identity: Have you ever thought much about your race and/or racial identity? Your ancestors? Their role in the making of America? The effect of your visual appearance, the timber of your voice in the space of a classroom? Or still how much you know or don't know about the role of Black, Indigenous, and other Persons of Color (BIPOC) in your community? In history? In your personal life?

I didn't always ask those questions. In elementary school, I skirted the surface on a few of those ideas, but they were mostly banal, surface-level wonderings around physical appearance and social life. For example, I thought about the difference in hair between me and my Korean-American, Black, and Latinx friends, but I never assumed that one type of hair was more accepted by society than the other. I also wondered about the different ways our families convened during our parents' work cookouts, but I never assumed that people congregated in racial groups for a reason. Back then, I didn't unpack any power dynamics I may have noticed because no adult spoke to me about them, nor did I hear them talking about power dynamics regarding racial identity, ever. For me, the '90s were underscored with colorblindness.

As I read *Open Windows, Open Minds*, the depth of Afrika's experience, knowledge-base, and grace within her pedagogy was illuminated, and I believe her work has the power to heal, and perhaps more importantly, prevent the future harm of silence and curricular omission regarding race, identity, and social justice in schools.

For many school communities, social justice is seen as ominous, nebulous, and/or impossible. This book that Afrika has crafted is the antidote for that pushback and those notes of impossibility. Afrika brings the necessary elements for the contents of her book to come to life, providing clarity for how she enacts that love in the

everyday-ness of schools with school leaders, teachers, kids, and their families. Her clarity comes in the form of powerful research, collected anecdotes from teachers and social justice agents in the field, protocols for discourse, lesson plans, as well as curriculum design frameworks.

I am the only White member of my immediate family. As I look upon my time line of “unknowing,” it is with great pride and with great thoughtfulness that my own children are far more knowledgeable than I was at their age; they are capable of naming their identity markers in expansive ways, their histories are surfaced honestly, boldly, with both pride and earnest regard. From Liberia to Ireland to the United States, there is no doubt they know where they are from. My Whiteness, elements of their proximity to Whiteness, is named—not with shame, but with responsibility.

With Afrika Afeni Mills’s work, White children can also have this profound experience of knowing who they are, where they come from—their honest and complicated histories. There needn’t be shame, but there needs to be acknowledgement, and later, responsibility met with action.

CORNELIUS

. . . when Robert went home that evening, my father let me stay up late, and the two of us talked for hours. He told me, “You and Robert will grow old together, and even though you love him, he will inherit his parents’ silence. One day, what Robert does not know about his own Whiteness will hurt you.”

This bothered me. It bothered Robert too. As we matured together, we talked about this. Frequently. When we graduated, Robert thanked my dad. He told my father, “You were right. The things that I learned in your living room were things that my parents and teachers never talked about. Even when I asked them. I am so much more prepared for the world than I would have been.”

My dad’s response was uncharacteristically simple. He told Robert, “There is no better feeling for a parent than knowing that the young people in the community feel prepared to meet the world.”

I imagine that there is no higher praise for an educator. Afrika Afeni Mills’s work leaves all of us so much more prepared for the world.

Acknowledgments

Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—I have been forever changed by Your love for me, and by the unforced rhythms of Your grace, mercy, and the beauty of Your holiness. I offer You my mind and my hands. May Your gifts flow through me so that this book will help Your image bearers to experience the same uninterrupted belonging and healing that I find in You as we navigate this time of both now and not yet. Truly You taught us to love one another. Your law is love, and Your gospel is peace. May all chains be broken, and all oppression cease. Micah 6:8

Dishon, my best beloved, soul mate, and biggest cheerleader on earth. Thank you so much for supporting and believing in me. I love you with my whole heart.

Serena, Baby Girl and Queen, and Cairo, Baby Boy and my Sonshine, I love you both so much and I am so proud of who you both are. My world is so much more beautiful because you're both in it.

Rabbit, whose snuggles and love are a constant source of joy and comfort for me.

Ronald and Sandra, my parents and first teachers, your love, encouragement, and prayers have been precious gifts to me. You gave me both roots and wings, and I am deeply grateful! I love you both, and may all you invested in me return to you a hundredfold.

Gabrielle, my scoop! You are the little sister I always wanted, but I never could have dreamed of someone as special as you. May God lavish all of His richest blessings on you!

Bootsie, Dee Dee, and Ronnette, my sisters, you were all taken from this world before we really got to enjoy life with one another. But in my mind and in my dreams, we get to play together, jet skiing, laughing big belly laughs, and basking in the sun. I pray that you're all proud of me!

To unknown ancestors whose dreams I have become, am now, and am becoming, I am so grateful to you. And to those who chose the sea during the Middle Passage, I, too, choose to be unshackled by bondage and unbound by fear.

Tori Mello Bachman, doula for my words and ideas, you are not only my editor . . . you are my friend, and I am so grateful that you are in my life as a writer, yes, but mostly as a person.

Michelle (Mischa), my bosom friend and kindred spirit, with whom I am so grateful to enjoy our own raspberry cordials alongside our own lake of shining waters. The space you and I share is sacred to me.

Charlotte, everyone needs a friend with whom to enjoy magic. You are that friend to me. With you I enjoy the Shire and Rivendell, Hogwarts and Twilight. I love having a space in this world where I can be authentically myself—where there is no such thing as TMI.

Romain Bertrand, my friend and original partner in BetterLesson's Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning work with the original coaching team. Je t'aime, mon frère, et je l'apprécie.

Jeff Broadnax, my brother who cared for me when I began to venture outside of New York City. In Orr, Minnesota, in Big Sandy, Texas, who cared for our children when they first went to overnight camp at New Heights, and whose love surrounds my family to this day.

Monica, my Ace, sister, and forever facilitation partner, I appreciate your friendship so much, and I pray that your life is continually blessed with every good thing. I will always be grateful for the doors you opened for me to participate in the National Teacher Leadership Conference, to be embraced by the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) family, and to be part of your life. What an honor!

Laura, my soul sister, I love how the roots of our friendship journey during our time in Vermont have stretched, grown, strengthened, ventured beyond the soil, and established something so beautiful! It continues to bless my life with shade and fruit and contentment. I love you so, and hearing your laughter is everything!

Jenna Madeline, thank you for your constant support, love, guidance, and for always holding space for me. Walking along the beach with you, learning how to find sea glass will always be one of my fondest memories. And do we know, yet, what it means to fold in the cheese? ;)

Uche, you are one of the most beautiful, joyful sources of love in all the world. I so enjoy you—your radiant smile, exquisite voice—and how you laugh with your whole body is priceless.

Meaghan, you are absolutely one of my most favorite people in this world. Voxing with you and spending time with you is a gift to me.

Kim, you are one of the most special people I have ever been blessed to call a friend. Getting to witness the gestation, birth, and growth of *The Artful Alphabet* inspired me and helped me to see what's possible. Everything we can imagine is real, right? Our breakfast dates were life-giving to me, and I have not forgotten about our trip to DC. Let's make it happen!

Ruth, when we enrolled Serena in gymnastics as a little girl, I never imagined that from that experience I would be blessed with a friendship that developed as we watched our little girls tumble and soar. Precious serendipity! I have so much admiration and respect for you, and we will always have Amber Road.

GRATITUDE TO THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE

Jenna Chandler-Ward and Elizabeth Denevi, who made space for my spoken words on the *Teaching While White* podcast and for my written words in the *Teaching While White* blog.

To those who made space for my voice on their podcasts, including Lindsay Lyons on *Time for Teachership*, Jen Cort on *Third Space*, Danny Bauer on the *Better Leaders, Better Schools* and *School Leadership Series*, Sheldon Eakins on *Leading Equity*, and Amplify Education on the *Science of Reading*.

Corey Scholes, who made and continues to make space every year for me and Monica at the Amplify Conference for Educators of Color.

Alex Grodd and Erin Osborn, who made space for me to develop my culturally responsive, diverse, equitable, inclusive, antibias, antiracist (ABAR) voice.

Chloe Davis-Carden for putting skin in the game with me and showing me what it looks like to discover and walk in your truth.

Sharif El-Mekki, Chris Emdin, Zaretta Hammond, and Dena Simmons, whose work continues to push and inspire me.

Winston and Laina Cox, whose love for one another, and for our children, is constant and compelling.

Loresha and Amira, my former students who not only made my time at the Tobin K-8 School beautifully memorable but who still bless my life to this day.

Education Post, for making space for my words when I first started to blog.

Debby Irving, who helped me to connect with many of the educators featured in this book.

Karen Sekiguchi, who helped me to name my firstborn book baby.

Anneliese Singh, whose words supported me through racial healing.

JoAnne Kazis and Johnny Cole, my Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students (IDEAS) instructors.

Carly Riley, who I met at the National Anti-Racism Teach-In and who made space for me in *Embracing Equity* as a participant and as a facilitator.

Abby Machson-Carter, who I met at a (then) Teaching Tolerance workshop and who opened a door for me to work with MIT's Teaching Systems Lab on the *Building a More Equitable Educator: Mindsets and Practices* course.

Eddie Moore, who made space for me at the White Privilege Symposia, on The Privilege Institute's "Coffee with the Founder" episode, and the 2022 White Privilege Conference.

Jack Hill, who made space for my voice at the National Anti-Racism Teach-In in 2019 and 2020.

Yocelin Gonzalez, who made space for my voice at the Multicultural Teaching Institute in 2021 and 2022.

Boston Public Schools' Race, Culture, Identity, and Achievement series, Ulana and Zoe of the Boston Educators for Equity, METCO annual conferences, Ron Walker and the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color Annual Gatherings, the Kauffman Foundation's Amplify: Empowering KC's Educators of Color for Student Success, Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance) workshops, Facing History & Ourselves workshops, L'Merchie Frazier of the summer institutes sponsored and co-led by the Museum of African American History, Suffolk University, and Boston Public Schools focusing on Blacks in Boston and the abolitionist movement.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the teachers in my educational experiences who showed me what it means to create and sustain the types of learning environments that children deserve: Ms. Jamila, Ms. Kamler, Ms. Miller, Mr. Habib (the quintessential warm demander who transitioned in November 2021 as I was writing this book—may his memory be for a blessing), Mr. McDermott, Mr. Visco, and Mr. Maffei.

I owe the same to the administrators and supervisors in my teaching and coaching experiences who saw something special in me and provided opportunities for me to develop into the educator I was, am, and am becoming: Bunny Meyer, Nanzetta Merriman, Ann Deveney, and Cheryl Watson-Harris.

To my colleagues throughout my career as an educator who made work feel like family and took good care of me: Belinda Mpagazehe, Phyllis Starr, Michelle Hall, Lesley Ryan-Miller, Chandra Joseph-Lacet, Roberta Reingold, Taisha Sturdivant, and Okello Carter.

To my writing teachers and mentors who helped me to refine and develop my writing voice: Susanna Kaysen and Sandra Byrd.

I am exceedingly grateful to the educators and activists who offered their personal accounts of racial reckoning and ABAR classroom solutions to this book. You can read their words in chapters throughout the book as well as in the online companion: resources.corwin.com/openwindows:

Darcy Annino, Liz Caffey, Sydney Chaffee, Melissa Collins, Shawna Coppola, Jen Cort, Michelle Cottrell-Williams, Michael Dunlea, Leigh Ann Erickson, Jill Ferraresso, Paul C. Gorski, Nicole Greene, Sarah Halter Haahes, Shannon Hardy, Jennifer Harvey, Marianne Hunkin, Debby Irving, Alexis Johnson, Kate LaBelle, Tiffany Lane, Kelly Lawlor, Lina Lopez-Ryan, Lindsay Lyons, Megan Mathes, Claire Miller, Sara Nadeau, Chris Odam, Amy Perrault, Shannon Pitcher-Boyea, Melissa Pointer, Kara Pranicoff, Carly Riley, Martha Santa Maria, Matt Scialdone, Eileen Sears, Karen Skeguichi, Rebecca Smoler, Shelly Tochluk, Bret Turner, Monica Washington, Jennifer Burgess Wolfrum, Brianna Young, and Kerry Zagarella.

PUBLISHER'S ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Corwin gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following reviewers:

Melanie Meehan
Author and Writing/Social Studies Coordinator
Simsbury, CT

Paula Bourque
Author and Literacy Coach
Gardiner, ME

Matthew Johnson
Author and ELA Teacher
Ann Arbor, MI

Lynn Angus Ramos
Curriculum & Instruction Coordinator
Decatur, GA

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Indigenous Land Acknowledgments

I began writing this book on the unceded, stolen ancestral lands of the Massadchu-es-et people, in a town currently known as Randolph, Massachusetts. I finished writing this book on the unceded, stolen ancestral lands of the Catawba Nation, including the Sugaree Tribe in a city currently known as Charlotte, North Carolina.

I express my gratitude for the privilege of living on this land, as well as my brokenness for the way that I came to live on this land and what happened to the people who first occupied and stewarded this land. May their memories be for a blessing, and may I honor their stewardship, sacrifice, and loss with the courage to speak truth and to continue learning and contributing to a reimagined world where we destroy walls and build a new table where everyone can be. Be safe, whole, truthful, humble, vulnerable, generous, brave, and filled with joy.

FOR THE READER

I live/work in _____ (city, state),
which is the original land of the _____
_____ people.

Go to <https://native-land.ca> to determine the original caretakers of the land you live/work on.

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About the Author



Afrika Afeni Mills (she/her) is a veteran educator and an education consultant. She works with colleagues, teachers, coaches, and administrators to transform instructional practices. Afrika is regularly featured on podcasts, blogs, and webinars. Afrika also delivers keynote addresses and facilitates sessions at conferences and in schools, both virtually and in person across the United States. Afrika believes that all educators can be motivated, engaged, dynamic practitioners and leaders when provided with the support needed to create student-centered, culturally responsive

learning environments that inspire wonder and creativity and nurture diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging from an ABAR, pro-human mindset. You can connect with Afrika online at AfrikaAfeniMills.com.

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Prologue

I am a curious person, and I am particularly filled with wonder about things that veer outside of what we've come to consider as "normal." One of the things I enjoy most is reading about, listening to, watching, and learning about stories that center people working together in solidarity toward building awareness and liberation across racial differences—particularly Black and White people in the United States because I am a descendant of people who were enslaved in this country. In full disclosure, maybe it wasn't so much about solidarity and liberation at first. Perhaps my enjoyment came more from the rare opportunity to see people forming and sustaining friendships and partnerships across racial differences depicted in the media I consumed. There was something both curious and special to me about bearing witness to those relationships, especially in a society where those connections were more the exception than the rule.

The work of Emily Style of the National Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) Project (Style 1988) and Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) regarding *windows and mirrors* provides us with a powerful frame for this book. "Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar, or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books" (Bishop 1990). The problem is that White students tend to have far too few windows and far too many mirrors. What's more, even the mirrors White students have, like funhouse mirrors, often provide them with a distorted view of themselves in relationship with others.

My parents were my first teachers, and it was from them that I first learned about Black history, with the books of W. E. B. Du Bois, Ntozake Shange, Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, and Eldridge Cleaver on the bookshelves my father put up on the walls of our Brooklyn apartment. When I was a sophomore in high school, however, the person who taught my African American history class was a White man

named Mr. McDermott. We read *Before the Mayflower* by Lerone Bennett Jr. (another book that I remembered seeing on a bookshelf in my home) as our text that year in addition to watching the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary series. Mr. McDermott was the first teacher to engage me as a student about Black history, including the fact that Black history long precedes enslavement. I didn't know the term *ally* then, but when I think back, especially as an educator, Mr. McDermott could have chosen to teach other subjects. He chose to teach African American history. And he chose to do it from a liberatory text and perspective. I wonder what compelled him to make this professional choice?

When I was in graduate school studying to become a teacher, I learned that Ezra Jack Keats, the author and illustrator of *The Snowy Day*, was a White man. What made him write this book featuring this little Black boy in 1962? I was also introduced to Ann Turner's book *Nettie's Trip South*, which tells the story of a young White girl's frightened and disgusted response to the horrors of enslavement. What compelled her to write this book?

When I became a teacher, I began to learn more about the abolitionist movement in the United States and to wonder about the White people who chose to offer safety, food, hiding places, diversion, clothing, rides to and for Black people who were escaping enslavement . . . those who lit lanterns and left out quilts to signal safe haven. I learned about those who authored newspapers like *The Liberator*, who spoke publicly about the ills of enslavement and the human violation of anyone attempting to own another person. I wondered about what inspired them to be who they were. William Lloyd Garrison said, in response to questions about his fiery approach to abolitionism, that "I have a need to be all on fire, for I have mountains of ice about me to melt" (Mayer 1998). What made him feel that way? What made him believe that he bore some responsibility to help melt the icy mountains of enslavement, cruelty, and oppression? What was it that compelled John Brown to organize the raid on Harpers Ferry? What made him and others like him persist in spite of backlash and scorn as well as potential and actual harm?

I went on to explore the Civil Rights Movement and noticed the light- and dark-skinned mugshots of the Freedom Riders, including White people like Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, Jim Zwerg, and David Fankhauser as they journeyed toward liberation together with Black people in the face of fear and loss. I don't believe that they were unafraid. I know their families must have been terrified for them and probably wondered why they would engage in this resistance despite the fact that they could have easily looked away. Maybe that was it. Maybe it wasn't really possible for them to look away. How did they develop the will to be courageous in the face of so many who did?

I have enjoyed reading historical fiction that explores the relationships of characters connecting across racial differences. One of my favorite examples is the

fictitious relationship between Hetty (Handful) and Sarah Grimké in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Invention of Wings*. Handful is given to Sarah as a gift on her eleventh birthday, and as they grow, they both embrace abolitionism—Handful as a follower of Denmark Vesey as he is planning a revolt and Sarah as she connects with William Lloyd Garrison and becomes an abolitionist in her own right. These two characters have extremely different backgrounds yet find common ground in their sense of justice and humanity.

While it's important to be aware of the harmful impact of books and movies that exemplify a White savior narrative, portray stereotypes, or show inaccurate, white-washed, and/or White-centered views of the world, I appreciate books and movies about people and characters who connect authentically with one another across racial differences in a way that honors the humanity, dignity, and agency of the people involved in interracial relationships. Examples of how we can work in solidarity with one another in the pursuit of liberation are powerful.

Doesn't the journey toward liberation involve people who have been socialized to believe that they are better, more deserving, more intelligent, more entitled to advantages, privileges, and access to resources beginning to see that there's something not quite right with this narrative? Doesn't transformation begin to happen when those who have been designated as the dominant group see the fallacies in the way our society has been constructed—who look beyond racialization, stereotyping, prejudice, xenophobia, and bias and begin to see those who have been othered for who they truly are? To see that there are people in the world whose lives, histories, thoughts, experiences, cultures, and interests are dynamic, brilliant, creative, beautiful, and worthy of attention—and to realize that this reality has been hidden, distorted, misrepresented, denied, suppressed, and lied about.

If you, reader, are someone who identifies as White, something has been taken from you, from your parents, from your grandparents, and those who came before them. Not only were you most likely not taught the truth about people who are racially different from you as a K–12 student but you most likely didn't learn about the parts of your ancestry, like family names and traditions that were erased at Ellis Island and surrendered in order to be considered White. You may not have had the opportunity to learn that people who look like you were not only colonizers and oppressors but that there were others who, somehow, though surrounded by false messages about people of other races, didn't believe what they were being told and dedicated their lives to the pursuit of liberation through ABAR ways of being.

I'm writing this book to you, reader, as you are presently and also to younger you. The you who wondered and asked questions, the you who enjoyed being curious and investigating. The you at the age when your two front teeth were missing, when you loved to play and make friends without boundaries and walls. The you who was unhindered, curious, and undaunted—your questions about other people

were not yet hushed and silenced out of politeness, or shame, or something else. The you who wondered why there weren't more People of Color in your neighborhood and schools. You deserved so much more than what was offered to you in schools and by society.

You deserved to learn to appreciate the beauty in difference.

You deserved to have your questions about racial difference answered.

You deserved the opportunity to become friends with people who were different from you.

You deserved to have neighbors who didn't look like you and to understand why there wasn't more racial diversity in your community.

You deserved to grow up unburdened and unencumbered by assumptions, stereotypes, and misinformation.

You deserved to learn how to stand up for those who are marginalized.

You deserved to know the truth about this country's history.

You deserved to grow up reading books written by people who are not like you.

You deserved to see accurate depictions in movies and on television shows of people who are different from you.

You deserved to grow up enjoying the song of the accents of languages and ways of communicating that differ from yours. The White children in our classrooms deserve the same. We have the opportunity to do things differently with and for current and future generations.

I have been an educator for twenty-three years, and during that time, I have enjoyed many amazing professional learning experiences. Some of my favorites are listed in the Acknowledgments of this book. All of these experiences were powerful and provided me with the opportunity to learn about things that were missing from my K-16 learning experiences and from my teacher preparation program. I had to pursue essential learnings like culturally responsive teaching and learning and ABAR instructional practices on my own. It wasn't part of what was required for me to be considered an effective educator, and there's still so much I need to learn. I can't help but wonder about the educator I could have been if the mosaic of learning experiences I've been able to create over time was part of my formal education all along. You may feel the same way.

I have envisioned this book to be an opportunity for me to gift back to you as a reader what I have learned from others over the years about the history of race, racialization, racial identity as well as what it looks like to work in solidarity with one another toward liberation. It is my sincere hope that it enriches your life and

teaching practice the way my teachers, guides, mentors, and visionaries have enriched my understanding by sharing their wisdom with me.

This book is not about shame or guilt but about honesty, vulnerability, and openness to growth. It is about discovering the role we all can play in recreating our learning spaces. It's an invitation to become an active ally, accomplice, and co-conspirator. It is also an invitation back to that version of you as a child who was filled with wonder and curiosity and who was unafraid to ask questions, take risks, and make mistakes. And this is a book for White educators who teach in majority-White schools. Your students may not know many People of Color. They may receive confusing messages from media, family, friends, and school curriculum, yet they are part of the most racially diverse generation in history.

You may already have a road map as you engage in this work, but if not, this book is designed to equip you to be the cartographer you've been looking for. Others will benefit from the road map you will create with the support of this book. On this journey, you will go from being *unaware*, to *becoming aware*, to *acting on your awareness*, to *becoming more aware*. And because of this, those within your sphere of influence will have access to the opportunity to do the same.

This journey will not be easy. You will encounter resistance. Some resistance will be internal, because change is hard as it involves loss. Some will come from those around you who have allowed themselves to become comfortable with the status quo. I am a fan of *The Matrix* movie trilogy (okay, in full transparency, I *loved* the first movie. The last two installments, not so much). If you're also a fan, you'll remember that the main character, Neo, was offered an option by Morpheus: to take the blue pill and remain in ignorance of the disturbing reality around them, or take the red pill and learn the uncomfortable truth about that reality. Neo chooses the red pill, yet there's another character, Cypher, who, after also choosing the red pill, comes to regret his choice and decides that he would rather be reintegrated into the system to enjoy what he sees as the benefits of ignorance. You're reading this book, though, because like Neo, there is a splinter in your mind that tells you that something is not quite right with the world around us, that there are truths we need to uncover, things we need to unlearn, challenges to overcome, and a world to reimagine and rebuild.

Here are my main hopes for you, reader:

- To see how you were harmed during your K–16+ educational experiences
- To see that it is imperative to keep students from continuing to be harmed
- To move through the process of being unaware to becoming aware to acting on your awareness all the way through to becoming even more aware and continuing this cycle throughout your life
- To see that you're not alone in your pursuit of ABAR teaching practices. You are part of a larger, often unseen community of educators around the country

who are engaging in this work. You will meet educators like Sarah, Leigh Ann, Sydney, Carly, Shannon, Michael, and Shawna in these pages.

- To examine your own racial identity and how it has been formed
- To equip you with strategies for decentering Whiteness in your literacy curriculum in order to manifest true antiracist teaching practice
- To find concrete examples of ways you can engage in ABAR instructional practices
- To be undaunted in the face of resistance

This book will help you to let go of the things that no longer serve you and to teach your students to do the same. In these pages, you will be wooed to a window you hadn't noticed before. Though the curtains are closed, light streams in at the edges, as light tends to do. In response to the call of the light's invitation, you will take hold of the fabric, pull it apart, and feel the warmth of the sun. You'll open the window, breathe in the fresh air, and smell the aroma of the unfamiliar and beautiful. You'll see things you've never seen before, and you'll invite your students to come and stand alongside you. Together you will gaze and behold, wonder and learn, and because of this, your students will begin to open windows of their own.

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PART 1

WHY WINDOWS ARE CRUCIAL FOR WHITE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

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Windows for White Students

I was twelve when I first experienced someone calling me the N-word. Actually, it wasn't just someone. It was a car full of someones. My family didn't have the opportunity to go on many vacations, but as part of a festival celebration in a church we had just joined the year before, we traveled to St. Petersburg, Florida. I had only ever stayed in a hotel a couple of times before that, and only when traveling with other families. That week had been one of the most fun weeks of my life—the operative words being *had been*. On the last day of the festival, as we returned to our hotel after the church service, a car full of what appeared to be teenage White boys yelled “N*****s!” out of the open windows of their pickup truck as they drove by.

I can't help but wonder how different things may have been for my family and for those boys had someone taught them an honest version of the history of the United States. What if someone had taught them that race was a social construct, to resist participating in the cruelty of racial oppression, and to value diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, justice, and an antibias, antiracist (ABAR) view of the world? What if someone had taught them that to hate and oppress people because of their skin color diminished their own humanity? What if they had learned US history in a way that decentered Whiteness as the default? I don't believe that those teenage boys were taught any of these things, and so that day in St. Petersburg, Florida, is part of my story—and similar incidents are part of the stories of far too many people who look like me. The boogeyman of racism that my parents had warned me about became very real to me that day—cold eyes reflecting images of auction blocks, burning crosses, and nooses; razor-sharp teeth and claws; bone-chilling growl and all.

The best way for us to learn to challenge stereotypes and false narratives about people who differ from us is to develop and sustain meaningful relationships with one another. Despite regular efforts to build and sustain integrated spaces in our society, however—neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, workplaces—spaces where people of all identities can thrive and learn from one another, our country is still racially segregated.

As educators, particularly those of us who are teaching in schools and districts mostly composed of White students, we have the opportunity to be active change agents. We can evaluate the content we teach and the learning experiences we design and facilitate to determine where we need to engage students with opportunities to identify biases and stereotypes, and learn from other perspectives and ways of being. These types of learning experiences lay the foundation for students becoming critical thinkers, and those who will be equipped to not only challenge and dismantle systems of oppression but reimagine and rebuild something much better, inspired by the freedom dreams that come from transformed ways of thinking and being.

WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT WINDOWS

Over thirty years ago, Rudine Sims Bishop wrote her seminal article “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” which discusses how children’s books can be windows into the realities of others, and books can be mirrors that reflect the lives of readers. Too often in our schools, books serve as mirrors that reflect the lives of White readers. In this book I aim to help you to provide more window experiences for students—and to open those windows to help White students understand the lived experiences of people whose experiences have been marginalized by school and society for too long. Open windows lead to open minds.

As Sarah Park Dahlen (2019) and David Huyck’s (illustrator) *2018 Diversity in Children’s Books* infographic shows (see Figure 1.1), White children are surrounded by mirrors in children’s books. It’s important to note the following:

- The representation of American Indian/First Nations people increased from less than 1% in 2012 to 0.9% in 2015 to 1% in 2018.
- The representation of Latinx people increased from 1.5% in 2012 to 2.4% in 2015 to 5% in 2018.
- The representation of Asian Pacific Islander/Asian Pacific American people increased from 2% in 2012 to 3.3% in 2015 to 7% in 2018.
- The representation of African/African American people increased from 3% in 2012 to 7.6% in 2015 to 10% in 2018.

FIGURE 1.1 2018 Diversity in Children's Books

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: cbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp

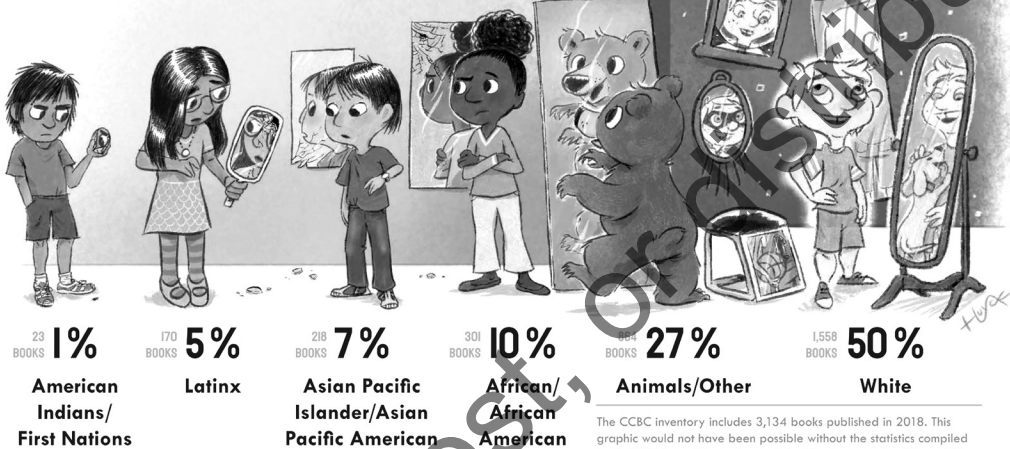


Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen
Released under a Creative Commons BY-SA license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

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.

Sarah Park Dahlen (2019)

- The representation of White people decreased from 93% in 2012 to 73.3% in 2015 to 50% in 2018. As the representation of White people decreased between 2015 and 2018, there was a 14.5% increase in the percentage of animals and inanimate objects (e.g., trucks) from 12.5% to 27%, which is more of an increase than in the representation of all of the groups of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) combined.

While publishers are making small steps toward diverse racial representation in children's books, we also see that there are even larger steps being taken to give the illusion of increased racial diversity while really maintaining the status quo. This overrepresentation of White people and erasure of People of Color in children's books extends to the content in K–12 classrooms, particularly in the way “classics” in English language arts and US history are taught. The International Literacy Association's *Children's Right to Read Campaign* highlights the fundamental rights that we deny children when we fail to provide access, choice, and windows and mirrors for all children and their reading lives.



<https://bit.ly/3v5VpC2>

We'll take a deeper dive into how to navigate resistance and opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary learning experiences that span across all content areas in later chapters. It's worth acknowledging now, though, the pressures across the United States to suppress curriculum around race/gender studies and the impact that this censorship has on students in all content areas.

When Whiteness is centered as the norm, as we see in many of our traditional curriculum and teaching practices, White students can develop uninformed, harmful mindsets. In his “Mirrors, Window, and Sliding Glass Doors” TED Talk, high school student Akhand Dugar discusses the impact of this erasure on students and the importance of shifting our literacy practices.



<https://bit.ly/3vCyxcx>

As a result of this lack of windows, segregation, and not engaging White students in meaningful conversations about the impact of racialization, White students can develop uninformed, harmful mindsets and ask questions or make statements that impact people from marginalized groups as microaggressions, like the following:

When I look at you, I don't see color.

Why don't we have a White History Month?

Affirmative action is racist.

It's unpatriotic to kneel during the national anthem!

According to the research of the Children's Community School (2018) in their infographic (shown in Figure 1.2), *They're Not Too Young to Talk About Race!*,

“By five, Black and Hispanic children in research settings show no preference toward their own groups compared to Whites; White children at this stage remain strongly biased in favor of whiteness” (Dunham, Baron, and Banaji 2008). It goes on to state that “silence about race reinforces racism by letting children draw their own conclusions based on what they see. Teachers and families can play a powerful role in helping children of all ages develop positive attitudes about race and diversity and skills to promote a more just future—but only if we talk about it!” As Sims Bishop states, “It's not just children who have been underrepresented and marginalized who need these (diverse) books. It's also the children who always find their mirrors in the books and therefore get an exaggerated sense of their self-worth and a false sense of what the world is like.” The major goal of this book is to raise

FIGURE 1.2 They're Not Too Young to Talk About Race!



SOURCE: Infographic created by the Children's Community School, based in part on information and ideas from Jillian Addler at FirstUp, Lori Riddick at Raising Race Conscious Children, and kiran nigam at the Anti-Oppressive Resource and Training Alliance. Copyright 2018.

awareness about the harmful impact of neglecting to provide support for students as they grapple with crucial questions about race and to equip educators to push against the temptation to remain silent with our students.

ANTIBIAS TRAINING IS NOT ENOUGH: LEARNING FROM THE TESTIMONIES OF ABAR PRACTITIONERS

In 2018, several incidents gained media attention across the United States where White people called the police on Black people for things like sitting in Starbucks, barbecuing in a park, attempting to redeem a coupon at CVS, or entering their own apartment building. Police were even called on a child who mistakenly brushed past a woman with his backpack. The response was often to provide implicit bias training. But simply being aware of our biases is not enough. In the United States, many of our communities are hypersegregated, and much of what

White students tend to “know” about people with other racial identities can come from stereotypes and misinformation. What do we do about the harm our biases can cause?

I reached out to several White colleagues who are committed to ABAR practices as educators, teacher developers, and authors. These individuals are from different generations with a variety of years of teaching experience who grew up across the United States in different regions of the country. However, they had very similar experiences, which shows that these are not experiences that are isolated to certain parts of the United States as so many tend to believe. They shared their thoughts with me about their racial experiences and how they wish those experiences had been different. I’ve included a sampling in this chapter, and you can find more in the online companion: resources.corwin.com/openwindows.

These accounts reaffirmed for me the need for educators to connect about the impact of our own racial socialization—and in so doing to realize that we’re not as isolated in our experiences as we may think—and to reimagine much better learning experiences for our students today.

Specifically, I asked them each the following questions:

- *When do you recall first noticing racial differences between you and other people (in your community, school, place of worship, and/or in the world in general)? Did you say anything to your family about what you noticed? If so, how did your family respond to you?*
- *When was the first time you remember seeing and/or reading about people of other races in books, movies, and/or TV shows? Reflect on those books, movies, and/or TV shows.*
- *Growing up, what do you remember your K–12 teachers and/or school doing that clearly showed they didn’t understand the history, culture, and oppression of People of Color?*
- *If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K–12 learning experiences related to people of other races?*
- *If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K–12 learning experiences related to being White?*

Over the following pages, I present a sampling of the responses to these questions, along with a summary of major themes that I gleaned about each question. As you read these educators’ responses, please reflect on the questions yourself; there is space within the Breathe and Reflect sections of each segment for you to record your own thoughts. You will also find a Ways to Respond section after the reflections on each question. Please be sure to approach the Ways to Respond not as a checklist but as important considerations for educators.

When do you recall first noticing racial differences between you and other people (in your community, school, place of worship, and/or in the world in general)? Did you say anything to your family about what you noticed? If so, how did your family respond to you?

“I am fairly confident that I didn’t notice anything—including how racially homogenous my community was—until I began school and became acquainted with a classmate of mine who was Korean and who was adopted by a White family. I didn’t talk about race with my family until I was older, and they never talked about it with me, as far as I can remember. I don’t recall noticing race in my surroundings unless we were at a large amusement park or something where folks from neighboring states came together for recreation.”

—Shawna Coppola, educator, consultant, and author of *Renew: Become a Better and More Authentic Writing Teacher* (2017) and *Writing Redefined: Broadening Our Ideas of What It Means to Compose* (2019)

“In first grade. I don’t think I had the language even of ‘race’ to describe the differences or talk about it. But I do remember disagreeing with [a family member] when he would say racist things, even when I was seven or eight years old.”

—Paul Gorski, founder of the Equity Literacy Institute author of *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty* (2013) and coauthor of *Cultivating Social Justice Teachers* (2013) and *Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Action* (2013)

“Elementary school (starting in first grade). I didn’t say anything because my first experience made it clear to me I wasn’t ‘supposed’ to talk about this (negative encounter with my first-grade teacher who overheard a conversation I was in and concluded we were being racist so told us to ‘never talk like that again,’ which scared the heck out of me). I NEVER talked about it at home.”

—Jennifer Harvey, college educator, director of the Crew Scholars program at Drake University (Iowa), and author of four books about disrupting White supremacy and social justice

“Kennewick was a very White, conservative town. There were very few Latinx people and even fewer Black and Asian families. I recall being about ten and hearing my grandfather speak very negatively about a biracial couple and knowing in my heart what he was saying was wrong but not having the words to describe it. I didn’t feel brave enough to say anything to him at the time.”

—Melissa Pointer, public school educator and elementary school principal in a school leading the implementation of instruction on race and identity

“I don’t recall ever thinking about race or my own skin color until I was in a gymnastics class when I was six or seven. I was sitting next to another little girl, and we were both wearing leotards and our bare legs were next to each other. She pointed to my bare leg

(Continued)

(Continued)

and said, 'Ew, you're really pale.' In my memory, her skin looked very tan, however I do not recall her racial or ethnic identity.

"This was the first time I remember making a connection that skin color held value, and when I asked my mom about what it meant that my skin was pale, she just said that it was because I was a redhead (both my parents and my brother all have red hair and very White skin just like my own, so I always thought it was just 'normal'). Otherwise, we didn't talk about race or Whiteness in any way."

—Carly Riley, director of virtual learning and a facilitator for Embracing Equity

Reading through these responses, you notice the following themes:

- Noticing race around ages six or seven but realizing it's not something to talk about
- Receiving negative info or misinformation when asking questions about people who are not White

Ways to Respond

- If you are working in a racially segregated community where most/all of the people are White, consider what you think about how this came to be. What do your students think about it? Provide opportunities for your students to ask the race-related questions that are on their minds.
- Since White students, especially in homogenous communities where there are few or no People of Color, often struggle with seeing themselves as having a race instead of thinking of people who look like them as “normal,” embed opportunities for your students to talk about their race. Make the implicit explicit.
- Provide opportunities for your students to grapple with any messages they have picked up on that they may be more intelligent than another group of people because of their race. This may cause you to take a hard look at some of our educational practices like labeling certain students as gifted and talented/advanced and academic tracking.
- Find out what your students think about Indigenous People, Columbus Day, and Thanksgiving. Are they aware of the origins of the land where your school is located? What do they know about the original caretakers of that land? Are they holding on to a deficit narrative about Indigenous People? As you’re asking these questions of your students, it will be important for you to answer these questions yourself.
- Find out if your students have stereotypical beliefs about Black, Latinx/a/o, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) people. If they do, prepare to offer an accurate narrative.
- Consider if there are ways that the perception of being a “good White person” has hindered ABA action in your school community. How is goodness defined?
- If there are transracial adoptees who are Students of Color in your school community, find out what their experience has been in the school and if there are any shifts you can make in your instructional practices that will improve their family’s experience in your school.
- If your students are experiencing discomfort because of hearing racist comments from family and/or community members, consider how you can create space for your students to process and find words for their feelings.

When was the first time you remember seeing and/or reading about people of other races in books, movies, and/or TV shows? Reflect on those books, movies, and/or TV shows.

“I was a voracious reader as a child. I read anything I could get my hands on, and I went to the library each week and checked out the maximum number of books allowed (8). . . . I recall reading one book when I was young. In it, the author talked about a ‘colored girl.’ Having never heard the word *colored* used in reference to race before, my mental image of this character in the book was of a little girl with rainbow skin. The story in that book seemed magical to me as a result. I read books alone and didn’t talk to anyone about them, usually, so this misinterpretation wasn’t corrected by anyone. But the mental image of the little rainbow girl stuck in my head for whatever reason. Only years later, when I was much older, did I realize that the book had been referring to a Black girl. I wish that I could remember what book it was and go back to read it again now. It wasn’t a magical story after all.”

—Sydney Chaffee, teacher of Humanities 9 and instructional coach at Codman Academy Charter Public School, Boston, Massachusetts

“I was a child of the ’90s, so I watched *Family Matters*, *Hangin’ With Mr. Cooper*, *A Different World*, *The Cosby Show*, all the stuff on mainstream TV. This always felt normal to me. Again, no one really talked to me about race, and likely the times this topic was addressed in these shows, it went over my head. As far as books go, the first book I read by a Black writer was in eleventh grade, and only because we had an independent author study, and I chose Alice Walker. I remember being so drawn to *The Color Purple* that I started reading other Black female authors on my own—Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Zora Neale Hurston, I remember. Again, I feel like I had no clear racial consciousness, but I do remember being drawn to those stories. In school, I never read a whole class novel by a BIPOC as far as I can remember.”

—Leigh Ann Erickson, founder of Undone Consulting and Undone Movement; author of the young adult book *What Is White Privilege?*; educator and developer of the Connect, Absorb, Respond, and Empower (CARE) curriculum and conference

“I know I had the Babar book series. I never thought of them as racist or including POC until later in life when a page was pointed out to me. On that page are ‘African cannibals’ attacking Babar’s cousins. The Africans are dressed in loincloths, have exaggerated red lips, and are attacking the elephants violently. I have to wonder what impact that had on me. The men on this one page surely sent me messages about Africans, or perhaps even a broader POC population, as subhuman, savage, and other.”

—Debby Irving, author of *Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race*

“When I think about my childhood with my adult lens, I remember it as incredibly White. However, when I think about it more, I’ve realized what I really mean is that I wasn’t exposed to conversations about race. I remember I used to watch *That’s So Raven* and

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Sister, Sister as a child. But my family or friends never talked about the importance of representation on TV. In my English class during junior year, we read *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which, as an adult, thinking about the pressures that teacher faced in making that selection in a very White town filled with overt racism and vocal parents, I am much more able to appreciate that my White male teacher made that choice. However, this teacher was the only teacher I can recall who explicitly talked about race.”

—Lindsay Lyons, educational justice coach, educator, and founder of the educational blog and podcast *Time for Teachership*

“In high school I gained access to BET when it was added to our cable package. I remember being far more interested in and drawn to that station versus MTV and my friends feeling like it was ‘weird.’ I preferred R&B and soul music and made mixtapes and ordered music in that genre and being called an “N lover” by boys at my high school because of it. This continued into college when for the first time I was around People of Color and began to build friendships with Black people specifically and again received negative feedback from White males about that.”

—Melissa Pointer, public school educator and elementary school principal in a school leading the implementation of instruction on race and identity

“I remember the book *The Five Chinese Brothers*, which is written and illustrated by two White people (though I didn’t know that at the time). The brothers all look exactly the same and have yellow skin. They don’t even have names except [First Chinese Brother], [Second Chinese Brother], etc. Their only individual traits are the unique, superhuman power that each brother possesses. I also remember watching Disney’s *Peter Pan* with lines like “We’re gonna fight the Injuns” and “Why is the Red Man Red?” song. I also watched *Little House on the Prairie* and remember Laura’s family’s limited interactions with Native Americans being rooted in, at first, fear, and later on, resentment, for having to leave the land they were living on.”

—Rebecca Smoler, English language arts curriculum coordinator for Grades 6-12 in Sharon, Massachusetts; instructor at IDEAS (Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students)

Reading through these responses, you notice the following themes:

- Mass media representations of people who are not White caused some confusion because these characters were inaccurate, negative, or flat/one-sided depictions.
- Sometimes books and television would lead to a curiosity that was left unsated, undiscussed outside of a small circle (not ever really at home).
- White racial consciousness isn’t really a thing for most White people.

Ways to Respond

- Consider how you can help students to process the racial implications of what they are reading (both in class-related reading and independent reading) so that they are less likely to form and hold racial misperceptions.
- As you're building relationships with your students, notice what media they enjoy—television shows, TikTok and YouTube videos, music—and if they enjoy media produced by or featuring people who are racially different, try to determine how they are processing their racial differences. Are they receiving negative feedback from peers about their interests? You can do the same with regard to the toys students play with. This will provide you with an opportunity to talk about the joy of appreciating racial diversity, how it differs from cultural appropriation, and how to navigate harmful comments from peers about their interests.
- Notice if the shows and music students enjoy convey harmful, inaccurate messages about certain groups of people, and use this as an opportunity to unpack those messages as well as to teach students to be critical consumers of media.

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Growing up, what do you remember your K-12 teachers and/or school doing that clearly showed they didn't understand the history, culture, and oppression of People of Color?

"I was taught, in AP US History, that the Civil War was fought primarily over 'states' rights,' not slavery. I did not learn to question this until college and beyond."

—Sydney Chaffee, teacher of Humanities 9 and instructional coach at Codman Academy Charter Public School, Boston, Massachusetts

"I can clearly remember doing a round robin reading of the book *Brian's Song* in sixth grade and noticing that my passage had the N-word in it. I was so nervous and, when my time to read out loud came, I told my teacher that I didn't feel comfortable reading the passage. She didn't coerce me into reading it but casually asked if someone else would be willing to read it. My classmate Danny read it, N-word and all, and we moved on. But I still remember that so clearly—I even remember what the classroom looked like and where I sat! I don't recall much else other than the absence of stories/works/history of BIPOC until I read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* for an independent study I did in American Studies my junior year and an elective class I took my senior year that was called 'Minority Literature.'"

—Shawna Coppola, educator, consultant, and author of *Renew: Become a Better and More Authentic Writing Teacher* (2017) and *Writing Redefined: Broadening Our Ideas of What it Means to Compose* (2019)

"I can't remember them doing specific things, it's more about omission. I don't remember learning anything about the history of liberatory action or activism, for example. I always noted that we'd learn about organizing and activism related to the Holocaust, but only learned very fluffy versions of activism related to racial justice in US history."

—Paul Gorski, founder of the Equity Literacy Institute, author of *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty* (2013), and coauthor of *Cultivating Social Justice Teachers* (2013) and *Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Action* (2013)

"I can now see the complete and total erasure of POC history as well as the erasure of how actual White history and White-told history impacted POC. Add to that the glorification of 'heroes' such as Christopher Columbus, promotion of the level playing field, and strict adherence to the norms of Whiteness, and I can now see the institutional and individual ignorance. At the time, this was just my comfortable normal."

—Debby Irving, author of *Waking Up White*, and *Finding Myself in the Story of Race*

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“They never addressed the racism that existed in our schools (from racial slurs to the confederate flags on student trucks in the parking lot) and rarely if ever did a teacher center stories or histories or accomplishments of people who were not White. Teachers who pushed back on this left the school. (I don’t know for sure why, but I imagine they were made to leave in some form or another.)”

–Lindsay Lyons, educational justice coach, educator,
and founder of the educational blog and podcast *Time for Teachership*

“I remember we went to a campground that had high-ropes/low-ropes courses and we spent three days there as a grade learning about the environment and doing cooperative lessons/activities. The facility was part of the actual Underground Railroad, which is pretty awesome. But I remember one night we had an Underground Railroad activity where teachers were literally pretending to be slave catchers, and we had to move silently from building to building, pretending to be enslaved people trying to get to freedom without being caught. This was done with an all-White staff and at least a 99% White student population. It is mind-blowing to reflect back on. I wonder if my teachers now think back on that lesson with a different perspective.”

–Kate LaBelle, Grades 3-6 physical education teacher
at Rutland Intermediate School, Vermont

“Since they never talked about race and only focused on the White, European American-centered version of history, it’s clear that they either didn’t understand the oppression of People of Color or they didn’t care.”

–Jennifer Wolfrum, graduate instructor and IDEAS (Initiatives
for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students) instructor

Reading through these responses, you notice the following themes:

- Whitewashed curriculum—teachers didn’t understand and/or didn’t teach about race
- Developmentally/psychologically inappropriate ways of engaging students about race-based historical occurrences
- Institutional and interpersonal ignoring of racism

Ways to Respond

- Ensure that when you're engaging your students with literary and historical content that you are teaching accurate information.
- Consider how you can include content about cross-racial liberatory work and activism as part of exploring US history.
- If there have been incidents where racial slurs have been used against students in your school community (or the larger community your school is part of), there are racially harmful monuments/flags in your community, and/or there are buildings/streets in your community named after people who have committed actively racist acts, think of ways you can provide students with a way to process these things. Chapter 7 focuses on concrete ways your students can take action against these types of injustices.
- Be sure to engage students in learning experiences about racially difficult topics in developmentally, psychologically, and emotionally appropriate/considerate ways. Be particularly careful about the potential harm that can be done through certain roleplays and reenactments.

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If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K-12 learning experiences related to people of other races?

“I wish we had read more books by BIPOC authors and learned about contributions and excellence of BIPOC beyond tokens, MLK, Black History Month. I wish my school’s ‘Diversity Week’ was more than a week of White people trying on other cultures’ music and dance in the school gym. I wish I had had more teachers and classmates who were not White.”

—Sydney Chaffee, teacher of Humanities 9 and instructional coach at Codman Academy Charter Public School, Boston, Massachusetts

“EVERYTHING! I just finished my master’s in ABAR education, and what I learned, which people who have been doing this work for DECADES already knew, is that we need to support healthy identity development in all children that honors difference as a strength and disavows notions of superiority and inferiority. AND WE NEED TO TELL CHILDREN THE TRUTH ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THIS PLACE. We also need to uplift and honor the brilliance and resilience of People of the Global Majority who are still here despite calculated attempts at their erasure.”

—Marianne Hunkin, educator committed to collective liberation

“I would center non-White stories and histories. I would engage students in conversations about race and racism and White supremacy regularly. I would note the examples of racism in the school community, and I would model critical analysis of things we as students had taken to be acceptable but were examples of racism.”

—Lindsay Lyons, educational justice coach, educator, and founder of the educational blog and podcast *Time for Teachership*

“First, I would change the fact that race and identity were never discussed. My experience in schooling was very ‘color-blind’ and, because we did not openly talk about race, identity, and culture, we missed out on learning about so many of the things that made us all who we are. I also wish I would have learned a more expansive history of this country—like the truth about colonization and mass enslavement, as well as the breadth of abolition and resistance movements. And I wish that I would have been exposed to so many more voices, perspectives, cultural traditions, and lived experiences rather than my education about BIPOC through the limited lens of brutality and exploitation (e.g., land theft, genocide, enslavement) or singular, exceptional—whitewashed—heroes (MLK, Rosa Parks).”

—Carly Riley, director of virtual learning and a facilitator for Embracing Equity

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“At my MS & HS, I would diversify the schools and staff since research and experience show we all benefit from learning and being surrounded by both people of similar (for affinity) and different (for developing understanding and empathy) backgrounds. K-12, we’d have explicit conversations about identity and race in my classes, where we share strengths/ joys and challenges relating to race and other aspects of our identities. The literature and histories that I was taught would include a wide representation of BIPOC voices and experiences—history, identity, culture, & everyday stories, achievements, oppression & struggles. Literature and histories not just in ELA & SS, but all classes.”

—Rebecca Smoler, English language arts curriculum coordinator for Grades 6-12 in Sharon, Massachusetts; instructor at IDEAS (Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students)

“I’d want my school to be socially justice oriented, helping me to see beyond my child’s eye. I think class issues were likely pretty present in my elementary school, but they were never addressed. There probably isn’t enough room to write what should have been changed about my high school. It was socially very White dominant, and the school should have done all it could to alter that. In terms of curriculum, I really wasn’t paying that much attention, but I know it was a Eurocentric curriculum that left me woefully unprepared to act equitably in a diverse world and racially illiterate as well.”

—Shelly Tochluk, author of *Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How to Do It* (2010) and *Living in the Tension: The Quest for a Spiritualized Racial Justice* (2016)

Reading through these responses, you notice the following themes:

- Longing for more content about People of Color—and from a nuanced perspective
- Wanting to experience an integrated community and authentic connections with people who were racially different, including teachers
- Wanting to know much earlier that race is a social construct
- Wanting to know about the origins of the land that the United States encompasses

Ways to Respond

- Take an inventory of the books you use with your students in your instructional practice and the racial backgrounds of the authors of those books. If you find that your books are largely written by and about White people, search for books that are written by and about people from racially marginalized groups. (Many book lists are available online to get you started.)
- If the staff at your school is mostly/all White, find out what efforts your district/school is making to racially diversify the staff, what you can do to support those efforts, and within your locus of control, how you can create opportunities for your students to learn from people outside of their racial identity (e.g., inviting guest speakers in to connect with your students, in person or virtually, from various racial/ethnic backgrounds).
- Explore what is lost by not engaging students with the truth about the history of the United States and the connection to current injustices and inequities. How does that instructional decision hinder students as democratic citizens?
- Build or join a community of White educators who are seeking to learn and implement ABAR instructional practices. Ideally, identify a grade level or content-based colleague to partner within this community so you can support and hold one another accountable.

If you could go back in time with a magic wand, what changes would you make to your K-12 learning experiences related to being White?

“I wish I had learned more about Whiteness. I wish my notions of Whiteness as the norm had been challenged. I wish I had known about intersectionality and that someone had been able to help me problematize White feminism, which was so dear to me.”

—Sydney Chaffee, teacher of Humanities 9 and instructional coach at Codman Academy Charter Public School, Boston, Massachusetts

“I would magically diversify the teaching staff. I wish I had the opportunity to learn from Black people when I was younger and develop those student/mentor relationships. I think that would have impacted me greatly.”

—Leigh Ann Erickson, founder of Undone Consulting and Undone Movement; author of the young adult book *What Is White Privilege?*; educator and developer of the Connect, Absorb, Respond, and Empower (CARE) curriculum and conference

“I think about this daily. At 33 I am learning about and understanding the lineage of White antiracists. I want children to understand that we do not have to be complicit in upholding White supremacy. That we have ancestors, even if they are not blood ancestors, who chose that path whose stories can fortify us. I want White children to have the language to intervene when injustice happens and for them to be able to dream about a different story for Whiteness. This is healing work, and White people have got to get after it. We can't wait. Our babies cannot wait.”

—Marianne Hunkin, educator committed to collective liberation

“I wish that I would have learned about both my own racial identity as well as the construct of Whiteness. I wish that I would have learned about white-skin privilege and the construct of White supremacy—not as the KKK but as a system. And I wish that I would have learned about White activists and abolitionists throughout history who have worked as accomplices and in solidarity to move forward racial justice movements. I think that if us White folx are able to learn about Whiteness as the toxic and harmful construct that it is, then we are less likely to be so fragile when Whiteness/racism is discussed AND we are also more likely to see that we have a role in dismantling it.”

—Carly Riley, director of virtual learning and a facilitator for Embracing Equity

“I'd cast a spell that eliminates the fake history, lies, and partial truths that advance White supremacist thinking—stories that paint people like Columbus and our presidents, such as Washington or Jefferson, as heroes and nothing else. We'd learn our real histories of leaders' participation or complicity with slavery, internment, colonizing, and also learn about antiracist White allies and co-conspirators who pushed back against

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oppression. I'd want to be taught about racial identity development and what a positive racial identity as a White person could look like. When I first started learning/unlearning about race and racism in our country as an adult, it was especially challenging taking in all of this information while navigating feelings of ignorance and shame. I think the earlier White children can start learning about race/racism/antiracism, the better. I wish I had been given more tools for examining and questioning what I was being taught. Questions I learned from JoAnne Kazis (who is also an Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students [IDEAS] instructor) like "Who is telling this story? Whose voice is missing? Who is advantaged by this story? Who is disadvantaged?"

—Rebecca Smoler, English language arts curriculum coordinator for Grades 6-12 in Sharon, Massachusetts; instructor at IDEAS (Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students)

"I would have my teachers give us the language and words to discuss and understand race, racism, White and settler colonial privilege. And then I would want to have those discussions."

—Jennifer Wolfrum, graduate instructor and IDEAS (Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students) instructor

Reading through these responses, you notice the following themes:

- Wanting to learn about intersectionality and White antiracists
- A desire to know more about White identity development earlier

Ways to Respond

- As you engage in this work, realize how your ABAR efforts serve as an antiracist model students can follow, and be willing to be vulnerable and honest with your students about your journey so they can see what's challenging and also what's possible.
- Equip yourself to tell students the truth about US history and current injustices, even when it's hard. By doing this, you will show students what it looks like to persist in the face of resistance.
- Teach students about White antiracist work so that they have a broader perspective about what it can mean to be a White person. Being White does not have to mean being a colonizer or oppressor. With intention, it can mean working for freedom, liberation, and truth for everyone in solidarity with people across our human family.

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So what light do all of these personal stories and reflections shine on our own experiences around race—and how have those school experiences shaped our racial identities and our teaching practice? What general themes can we glean from the stories of these White educators and activists? And what specifically can we do in our literacy teaching? These are the themes that jumped out at me while reading the reflections of these colleagues.

Although many of these stories reflect what did and did not take place in social studies and history classes, these experiences have significant implications for our literacy instruction and learning. When we engage students with nonfiction texts and historical fiction, we have the opportunity to present students with an accurate narrative—one that differs from the false and deficit-based narratives that they may have previously encountered or have been influenced by in the media. This may be particularly important for those of us who are humanities teachers. When we blend social studies and literacy instruction or teach social studies directly, we are supporting students to develop critical literacy skills where they continue to move beyond remembering and understanding content to applying, analyzing and evaluating, and laying the foundation for creating something new.

When I reflect on current headlines in the United States, I am convinced that we could all benefit from something new. On February 4, 2022, the Republican National Committee is reported to have stated that the January 6th riot was “legitimate political discourse” (Dawsey & Sonmez 2022). About a week later, a self-professed activist “unwoke” mom hosted a free webinar “to build an army of parents with the skills to torture woke teachers and administrators in schools with mountains of public records requests” (Borysenko 2022). In an attempt to censor what is taught in the classroom, several states would require teachers and administrators to post lesson plans a year in advance, including a list of all books, readings, and activities that teachers use in their lessons. I believe the hope of something better lives in our students, and it’s our duty to offer them the building materials needed to make our dreams of freedom, solidarity, and wholeness a reality. In Chapter 2, we’ll reflect on how engaging in our own racial identity development is a critical step in that process.

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