

School Gardens
Sowing the Seeds of Equity

After Charlottesville
Finding Strength, Moving Forward

Maya Angelou
The Life of a Legend

TEACHING TOLERANCE



ISSUE 58 | SPRING 2018
TOLERANCE.ORG

Teaching Hard History

It's more important than ever to teach about American slavery. Our new framework can show you how.



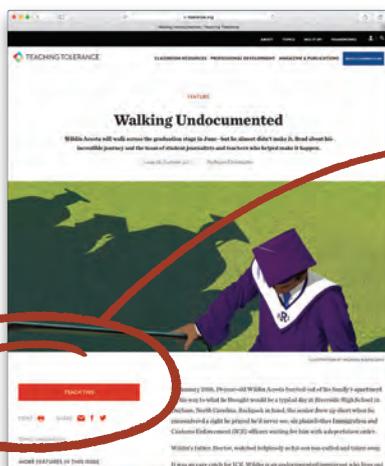
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The true story of the students and teachers who fought to secure voting rights for African Americans in the South. *Grades 6-12*



ONE SURVIVOR REMEMBERS

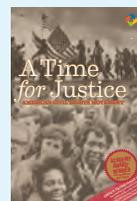
Gerda Weissmann Klein's account of surviving the Holocaust encourages thoughtful classroom discussion about a difficult-to-teach topic. *Grades 6-12*

STREAMING ONLINE



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A TIME FOR JUSTICE

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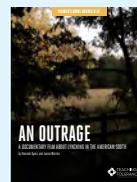
MIGHTY TIMES THE CHILDREN'S MARCH

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



BULLIED

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



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TEACHING TOLERANCE

ISSUE 58 | SPRING 2018

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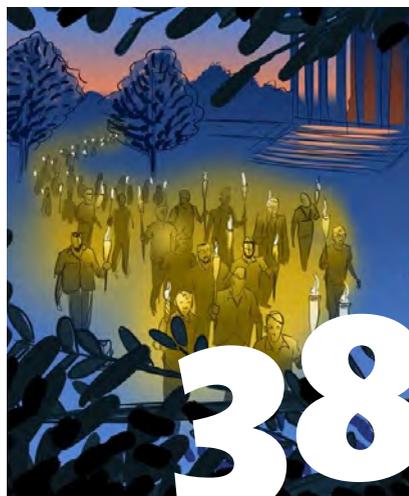
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on the cover

Teaching Hard History, a new project from Teaching Tolerance, offers robust resources for teaching about American slavery. Learn more about the texts and the framework, and hear from educators who are using inquiry and primary sources to teach students that the past is present.

ILLUSTRATION BY **SAM WARD**

Online Exclusive

Get to know Charlottesville Principal Lisa Molinaro, and learn how she used culturally responsive practices to change the “single story” of her school. tolerance.org/molinaro



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



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Perspectives

“Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history.”

— ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Annual Message to Congress, December 1862



THIS ISSUE OF *Teaching Tolerance* addresses some of the ways we teach—and sometimes mis-teach—United States history. We’re wrapping up our Spring issue at the end of a year during which current events, from demands to remove Confederate statues to white supremacist marches replete with Nazi flags, have taken history out of the textbooks and put it into the news. And this issue comes out at the beginning

believed that their race afforded them little or no advantage? Or that an NPR poll reported that, in the United States today, 55 percent of white people believe they are victims of racial discrimination?

The only way to explain it is that too many of us are comfortable with a history that tells us that past injustices have been corrected. It’s certainly easier this way; if we’re not encumbered with the responsibility of seeing injustice, then we’re not encumbered with the responsibility to do anything about it.

Learning history can correct false narratives and lead us to make better choices. Understanding how slavery operated, how much of our nation’s foundation was built by black labor, and how racial myths have been bred into the bones of American life may be the only way we can ever reconcile with—and triumph—over the past.

We invite you to join with us in *Teaching Hard History* and to become part of the journey.

—Maureen Costello

of a new year in which *Teaching Tolerance* launches a campaign to change the way we teach about our racial past: *Teaching Hard History*. The first phase of the campaign will focus on American slavery.

With *Teaching Hard History*, we’re calling on American educators, curriculum writers and policy makers to confront the fact that slavery and racial injustice are not only a foundational part of the nation’s past, but a continuing influence on the present.

Sam Cooke told the truth in his 1960 hit song, “Wonderful World”: We don’t know much about history. And we’re paying for it.

In the words of Professor Hasan Jeffries, chair of the *Teaching Hard History* advisory board, “Slavery isn’t the original sin of America; it’s the origin.” For 150 years slavery provided the labor that built colonial America; it persisted for nearly another 100 years after the Declaration of Independence proclaimed that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights ...” Racist doctrines and white supremacist ideology developed to provide a rationale

for this clearly inhumane institution. Even after slavery was formally abolished, this ideology lived on through Jim Crow laws, lynching and, later, the War on Drugs. And while the civil rights movement disrupted some of these more modern forms of racial control, the legacy of disparate outcomes has continued in the 50 years since the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

That’s 400 years of history bearing down on the present.

Yet we live with narratives created by those mainly white Americans who benefitted from social constructions of race and racism, rationalized their privileges and cast them as earned.

How else do we explain the existence of Confederate monuments and place names across the nation? The South didn’t win the Civil War, but Southern apologists wrote the history that allowed these monuments to be raised. Today, teachers tell us that students in the most unlikely states, from New York to Iowa and Idaho, embrace the Confederate battle flag as a symbol of their own independent spirit.

How else do we explain why, in 2017 (according to Pew), most white people

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#WhatDemocracyLooksLike



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FIRST BELL

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PHOTOGRAPH BY AP PHOTO/ADRIAN KRAUS

Reader Reactions

When kneeling during the national anthem re-entered the spotlight last fall, we wanted to be sure educators were prepared for the inevitable classroom talks. Read our #TakeAKnee blog at t-t.site/takeaknee-blog.

#taketheknee is the kind of silent, non-violent protest the likes of which we haven't seen since the first half of the 1960s, and I welcome and respect it. This is part of the history that should be in the curriculum.

DEB HARTOGENSIS GODDEN
VIA FACEBOOK

We teachers must have these discussions in our classrooms. All of us need information, time and reflection to figure out what we believe to be true about life. In our world of tweets and interpretive news, we often form opinions without much thought. Our young people need to learn and practice critical thinking skills.

PAT RAMSEY
VIA FACEBOOK

Our latest magazine issue, new website launch and social media news stories inspired a lot of dialogue with our community. Keep the feedback coming!

SHINY NEW SITE

The new website looks fantastic! Thank you and your team for all the excellent work that went into this. There are many wonderful, important and helpful resources here for educators, and we plan on using many of them.

—ALEXANDER WYETH,
VIA EMAIL

A USEFUL TOOL

From a teacher perspective, it can be so overwhelming trying to find articles and activities that align with standards, address real world issues and work appropriately with the longer text we are reading. The “build a learning plan” feature just eliminated all of that stress and pressure.

—OLIVIA TASCH,
VIA EMAIL

EDITOR'S NOTE

Have you tried our Build a Learning Plan feature? Visit tolerance.org and start building your own plan by selecting the blue button on any page or the red Teach This button on any article.

LACKING BALANCE

[On “What Is the ‘Alt-Right?’”] It is important for students to be able to discern hate from unpopular or politically incorrect

opinions, and what was noticeably lacking in the article was any mention of left-wing hate. Extremist groups exist along the political spectrum, including radical identity political advocates. Teaching Tolerance would garner more credibility if it even attempted to present a balanced perspective.

—GARY COURT,
VIA EMAIL

MAKING HISTORY MODERN

[I] showed *The Children’s March* DVD to my 8th graders today (third year in a row teaching this topic), and the students are completely enthralled. In the past, I haven’t used some of the resources that allow modern tie-ins because I felt as though there was nothing significant to which my students could relate, but in 2017, I am grateful for the opportunity to try them out!

—GINA STMAUR FOODY,
VIA FACEBOOK

EDITOR’S NOTE

Mighty Times: The Children’s March *and all of our other film kits are always free for educators! You can order films and accompanying guides at t-t.site/film-kits.*

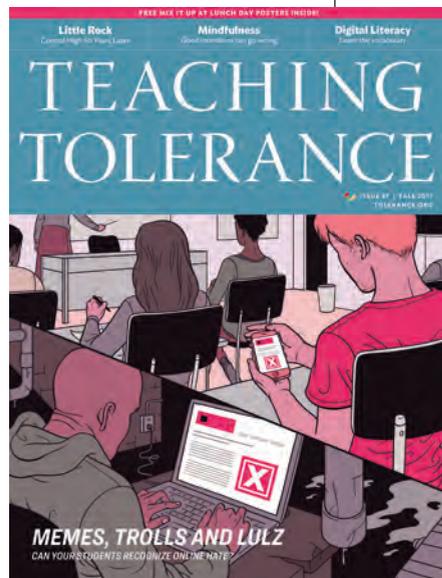


Sheila Soule @HUUSD_Learns

A reminder that in these trying times @Tolerance_org offers great resources to promote appreciation of diversity in schools. #hope

AN INCOMPLETE STORY

I’m typically very supportive of the articles posted by Teaching Tolerance. In this case, I’m a bit disheartened by this celebratory article that addresses the history



I cried and cried. No one has ever recognized what I do and feel every day. ... I’ve supported SPLC for years and years in my small way and used Teaching Tolerance in my teaching with immigrant children. This little story gives me yet another powerful reason to continue my support.

—ANONYMOUS,
VIA EMAIL

“WE ARE ALL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS”

I believe we are all teachers and students at one time or another. It’s become too easy to assume

of women’s suffrage and the “victory” gained through the ratification of the 19th Amendment. ... In some Southern states, women of color were unable to freely exercise their right to vote up until the 1960s. Not a victory! Simply a step in the right direction.

—SHAJAIRA P. LOPEZ,
VIA FACEBOOK

A RELATABLE STORY

I read Alice Pettway’s “Washed Away” (on OCD) in the Fall 2017 Teaching Tolerance magazine, and

we cannot create change as this destruction of our society rages. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, all other forms of social media have given rise to cowards who spew hatred without a second thought to the consequences. ... I appreciate your voice for enlightenment.

—JAIME RUBENSTEIN,
VIA EMAIL



Burrow Bunch

I train ECE and K–12 future teachers. Teaching Tolerance is a great tool that my students love because of the diverse perspectives offered by people or educators in the field. To know the law is important, but to know the rights of our children is empowering. There are lesson plans for all grade levels and the magazine brings current issues that are very useful in our weekly discussions and dialogues.

VIA FACEBOOK

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

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



A study of a high school gardening program in upstate New York found that students were more likely to select salad greens for lunch if they grew the vegetables themselves.

—Acta Paediatrica: Nurturing the Child,
May 7, 2017

Ask Teaching Tolerance



Q. As a white male teacher, how do I have any credibility at all talking about race to my students who, because of their race and gender, grow up with an American experience very different from mine?

The first step is acknowledging your own position and privileges when addressing and discussing race. By letting your students know that you are cognizant of your identity, you also give them permission to embrace their own. Start conversations with “As a white male who benefits from...” or something similar. Show that you honor their lives and experiences through your choices in classroom decor, texts and family/community inclusion. Allow time to listen to them, and be open about your learning journey regarding their culture, race and gender.

How do you teach students to engage with people who shroud hateful opinions behind “We have to respect each other’s ideas, so you have to respect mine”?

Creating a strong classroom culture is essential. When solid community norms are in place, comments that violate a common value, such as “No hate speech,” can be addressed by the class as a whole. Further, approach the idea of respect itself by having students analyze questions like these: What do we mean by respect? Are there any situations when it’s not a good idea to respect someone’s ideas? Look to resources like *Speak Up at School*

(t-t.site/speakupatschool) and *Let’s Talk! Discussing Race, Racism and Other Difficult Topics With Students* (t-t.site/ttletstalk) for more ideas on how to structure difficult conversations and handle differing opinions.

I’m a math teacher. In the past, I’ve done a project in which students learn about their culture of origin from a mathematical perspective. How can I modify this project to be more sensitive to students who may not know what country or region they are from, either because they are adopted, because their ancestors came to this country as

part of the transatlantic slave trade or for another reason?

Broaden the assignment for the whole class rather than singling out specific students. The instructions can simply be to research a culture or community of interest. That interest can be based upon many factors, which may or may not include an ancestral connection. If students need guidance to get started, meet with them privately to generate ideas. Some ideas might be to research the frequency and popularity of certain names in a student’s community or to look at demographic changes over time in a neighborhood. Stay focused on the overall goal: allowing students to select a topic that is relevant to them so they become invested in the research.

ASK TEACHING TOLERANCE!

Need the kind of advice and expertise only Teaching Tolerance can provide? Email us at editor@tolerance.org with “Ask TT” in the subject line.

DID YOU KNOW?

School gardens are most common at public elementary schools in the West, particularly urban schools and those with student populations of more than 450.

—Bridging the Gap



ARTICLE 7.18.17 // GENDER & SEXUAL IDENTITY, BULLYING & BIAS

Why Heteronormativity Is Harmful

BY CHRIS TOMPKINS

Not everyone is straight or cisgender. Yet we live in a heteronormative world, and many students spend their days in classrooms that are extensions of the world outside them. Through everything from pop culture to K–12 materials, the messages children receive inside and outside the classroom often put forth a heteronormative worldview.

Just the other week, I was at the grocery store with my 8-year-old nephew. We were waiting in the checkout line, and a woman at the register complimented his brown eyes and long eyelashes. She told him, “You’re gonna be trouble for the ladies. I’m sure all the girls have a crush on you.” It’s a seemingly harmless and sweet comment, but if you scratch beneath the surface, the message is harmful.

As my nephew and I left the store, I thought about how, when I was 8 years old and knew I was gay, comments like hers were part of the reason I hid in the closet. How did she know my nephew wasn’t gay?

And a reader replied...

I made some mistakes my first year but quickly learned. ... I not only no longer make those assumptions but make a conscious effort to weave in inclusive texts and conversations.

[READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE:](#)
t-t.site/heteronormativity

ARTICLE SPOTLIGHT

Check out some of our most talked-about posts. Go to tolerance.org and search for these headlines:



Ally or Accomplice?
BY COLLEEN CLEMENS



We Need the Lessons of Reconstruction
BY RIC DORINGO



A Culture of Care
BY SAMANTHA SCHOELLER



Beyond the Privilege Walk
BY JEY EHRENHALT

DID YOU KNOW?

Though National Poetry Month launched in 1996, one of its key initiatives, Poem in Your Pocket Day, didn't begin until 2002. Now, schools across the United States and Canada participate in Poem in Your Pocket Day.

—The Academy of American Poets

Why I Teach

Anne Garcia teaches fifth grade at Columbine Elementary School in Boulder, Colorado.



Raids

I hear whispers in the back: “La migra viene.” ICE is coming.

I wind my way through the tables and chairs to find a large group of my students huddled in the classroom library.

“We can’t come to school tomorrow,” one little girl murmurs to the group.

“What are you talking about?” I ask, standing behind them.

“Maestra, la migra is coming to school tomorrow to round everyone up.”

“Where did you hear that?”

“It’s all over the news, maestra. Mi mamá doesn’t want me to come. She’s scared.”

“No one is coming to get anyone here.” I react more strongly than I probably should.

“They are doing it, maestra. They are taking our parents and brothers and sisters.”

A little perspective: I’ve worked in the same school for 17 years, and I’ve seen the changes in our immigrant population. When I started, almost all of my students were undocumented. Now I have the younger siblings of these former students. Almost all of them were born here. The caveat is that now there are families with half undocumented members and half citizens. We have seen ICE go into

homes and rip families apart, detaining the parents and leaving kids in the house alone. It’s hard to fathom, but it isn’t anything new.

So now, with a changing of the guard and its aggressive rhetoric, there is fear.

Maria starts to cry. Her dad was deported four years ago, so now she just has her mom. She visits him every summer, but her parents have decided it’s best for the girls to stay in the United States.

“What if they get my mom, maestra? I’m scared.”

“They can’t come to school,” I reassure her, thinking, *Over my dead body*

SHARE YOUR STORY

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

will an immigration officer drag any child from my classroom. RESIST.

“It’s not that, but if I leave her alone tomorrow, they might take her,” Maria explains.

“You won’t let them take us from here?” Pedro asks.

“No, I won’t,” I state, as if it is a certainty. “And, Maria, I will help you if something happens to your mom.”

I go on to tell them I’m going to give them all my phone number. They should call me any time of day if something happens. I will go get them if I have to. It’s the only thing I can think of to calm them down, and the truth is, I will. I will get up in the middle of the night and pick them up, but then what?

RESIST.

Their hearts are full of anxiety, and they feel like outsiders. My students, who were born here and are being raised here, who speak two languages perfectly and contribute to the daily life of our school, feel like they don’t belong. I can’t have this, but what do I do?

After a little bit of investigating, we learn there is a protest. It’s not an ICE raid, but there is so much misinformation that families are anxious.

The next day, only four of my Hispanic students make it to school; 14 kids out of 28 are present. Everyone is feeling uncomfortable. The other children ask what is going on. We tell them about the protest, why their peers are not here. They look at me with misunderstanding in their eyes.

This is how prejudice and racism are fought, I think to myself. Letting them see how it affects their friends.

I feel sad inside, but I also try to find hope. Hope that these children will stand up for each other, for their families and for our nation.

ARTICLE 8.16.17 // RACE & ETHNICITY, RIGHTS & ACTIVISM

Why I Will Not Be Teaching About Charlottesville

BY JAMILAH PITTS

I sat with myself and remembered why I do this work. It is not because I love the long hours or the emotional grappling I have to do with students to get them to focus on the material when their lives are falling apart outside of my classroom. And it is not entirely the realization that the events in Charlottesville and the emotional breakdowns of my students are linked; the type of oppression on public display there is the same type of systemic pressure that causes students to enter my classroom so heavily burdened, though they may not be able to name it.

I am in this work because I am a teacher. I reminded myself that the manifestations of hate like those we saw in Charlottesville—and those we continue to see in the workplace, in the media, and in our own (increasingly gentrified) communities—are really social illnesses. So I remember that I choose to view my work as art, as a form of healing.



And a reader replied...

I agree 100% with this teacher. The racial mix in my school is different than in hers, but I strongly feel a responsibility to not re-victimize children of color every time there is a deeply painful incident. Children are already hurting and I too try to structure my response in a way that is empowering and healing.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE

t-t.site/not-charlottesville

DID YOU KNOW?

Ninety percent of highly segregated schools are in areas of concentrated poverty with high levels of student turnover and less qualified teachers.

From childhood to adulthood, seven out of 10 middle-class black Americans will experience downward social mobility.

—The National Council of La Raza

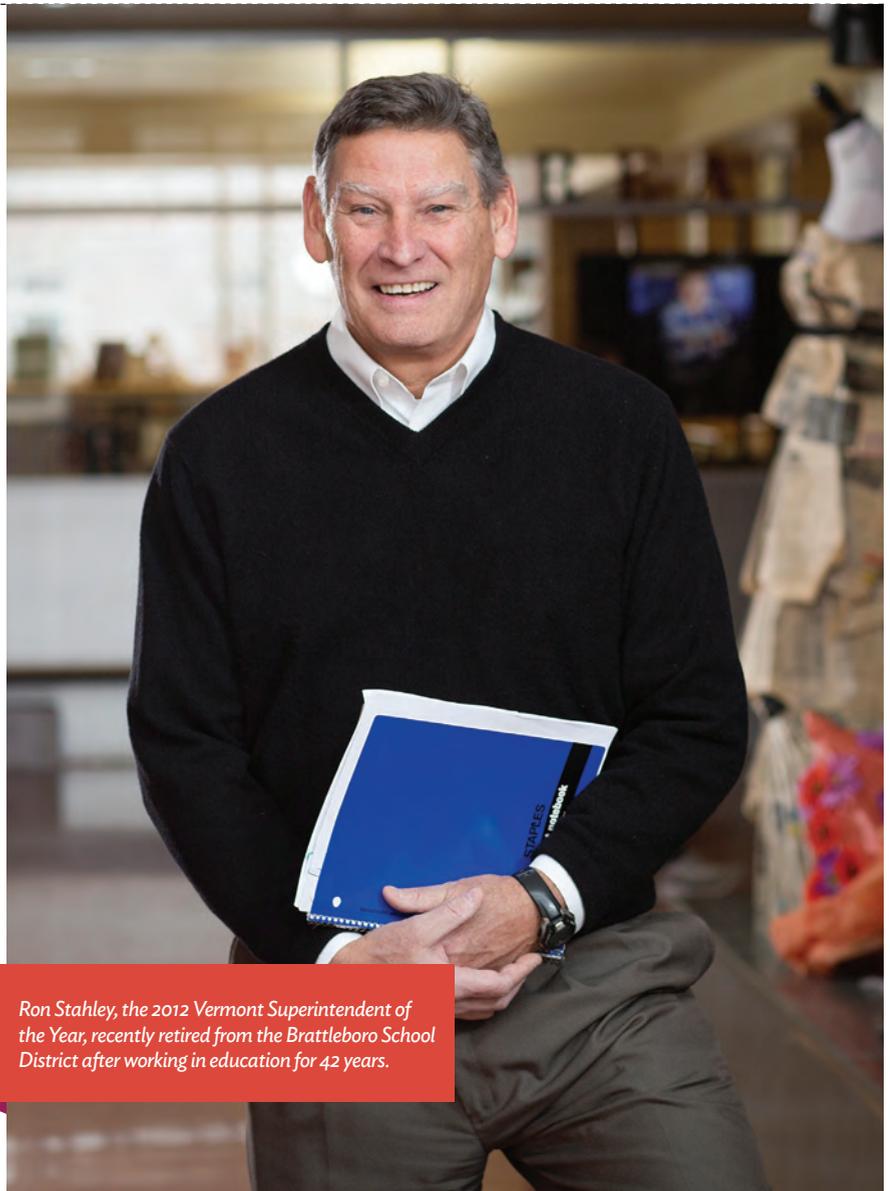
—The Brookings Institution

Every Student, Every Day

Equity and relationships are at the heart of every leadership decision Ron Stahley makes. Looking back over a long career in education, Stahley can trace a clear line from support programs he benefited from as a child, to the strong relationships he built as a teacher and student council adviser, to his student-centered priorities as a principal, to his school-climate focus as a superintendent.

One of the most visible examples of Stahley's commitment to equity is his role in Brattleboro, Vermont's Community Equity Collaborative. After a hate incident shook a local high school back in 2008, Stahley joined town officials, community members, law enforcement and clergy to respond to the incident with public statements, town forums and a community-wide conference based on the theme of "envisioning a community free of prejudice and discrimination." Over the last 10 years, under Stahley's leadership, the Collaborative has gone on to establish comprehensive programming designed to "galvanize the community," including middle school leadership trainings, yearly school climate surveys, student-led school leadership teams, collegiate high school courses that emphasize social competencies, and community diversity celebrations.

How did your experience as a teacher inform your work as a district leader?
I think it's invaluable as an administrator that you have a teaching background. I think a lot of my decisions came from being a teacher, knowing I had very supportive principals, but



Ron Stahley, the 2012 Vermont Superintendent of the Year, recently retired from the Brattleboro School District after working in education for 42 years.

I also had some principals who were not. And I felt like I wanted to support my colleagues. I held people accountable, but I believe developing relationships is really important.

As a principal and superintendent, I always thought about how my decisions as a leader would impact our teachers and students. So, I believe I'm student-centered, I think, because I enjoyed teaching so much.

Can you describe your collaborative approach in dealing with some of the

challenges your district faced relating to bias or discrimination?

Our high school principal encouraged me to work with him to change the school's mascot. Brattleboro Union High School is known as the Colonels and they had this image that really looked like a [Confederate] colonel. A young black girl had come to him with her student ID. It had her picture on it and the image of the Southern colonel. She stated, "I just don't feel comfortable with this." He replied, "Yeah, I don't either."

Lessons Learned

Our classroom resources align with the four domains of the Social Justice Standards: Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action. Find these lessons at tolerance.org/frameworks/digital-literacy.

Advertisements and You—Diversity

(Grades K–2)

This lesson shows children some of the kinds of advertisements they might run into online and helps them analyze these ads with a critical eye.

Evaluating Reliable Sources—Identity

(Grades 3–5)

Use this lesson to address the importance of locating and verifying reliable sources when working with online information.

Digital Activism Remixed—Justice

(Grades 6–8)

Students analyze the purposes and themes behind hashtag campaigns and consider their roles as creators and consumers.

Digital Tools as a Mechanism for Active Citizenship—Action

(Grades 9–12)

By breaking down strengths and weaknesses, students explore the ways in which digital tools can advance active citizenship.

We worked to change that over a two-year process that ultimately went really well. We had a lot of information sessions with student and teacher input. We just kept bringing it back to the students, how they felt. We changed it, and it was the right thing to do.

We had follow-up discussions and forums on race, discrimination and equity issues with a broad range of community participants. That laid the foundation for the Community Equity Collaborative.

Members of your staff describe you as an “active bystander.” What does that mean?

It’s part of our climate survey: “I know what it means to be an active bystander.” “I know what to do to stop people from hurting others.” “I know how to help students who are targeted.” So that’s part of our training. We talk about the word *bystander*, what would a bystander be, and kids will define it as somebody kind of watching what’s happening. And we talk about what would be an *active bystander* and what are the strategies as a student that you can take that wouldn’t endanger yourself. We just focus on what students can do. And I always felt from student council work, it’s really the students that make up what the school is like, as opposed to the teachers and the principal. And that gives the students quite a bit of power.

What strategies do you use to keep the school system focused on the needs of all students?

I went to a conference a couple years ago, and I heard this person use this quote, “Every student. Every day.” And that really struck me. That’s kind of the theme that we think about. Every student. Every day. That it’s not about the school system. It’s not about me. It’s not about the superintendent. It’s about every kid.

What suggestions do you have for other school leaders about how to sustain diversity and equity initiatives over time?

It’s got to be part of your core values. Get people in your district who can help work with you. We do what we call Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). We have a Diversity/Equity Committee with representatives from all schools. We work to incorporate those discussions into our staff meetings. We have community forums to support this work.

So, in terms of other administrators, I think you just have to believe in it and then think about resources that you can use to support the way to do it. You just have to believe that this is important. And the concept of the school culture and climate being so important—not the standardized test results—as the end-all, be-all.

Make a safe school and kids will thrive.

FREE STUFF!

These web resources offer diversity-rich information and materials for educators.

A project of the University of Michigan Law School, the **Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse Schoolhouse** turns legal cases into classroom resources that make constitutional law and civil rights litigation meaningful for grades 8 and up.

clearinghouse.net/schoolhouse.php

The **Global Oneness Project** highlights the power of stories to explore social, environmental and cultural issues with a robust collection of films, articles and photo essays that come with curricular materials for teachers.

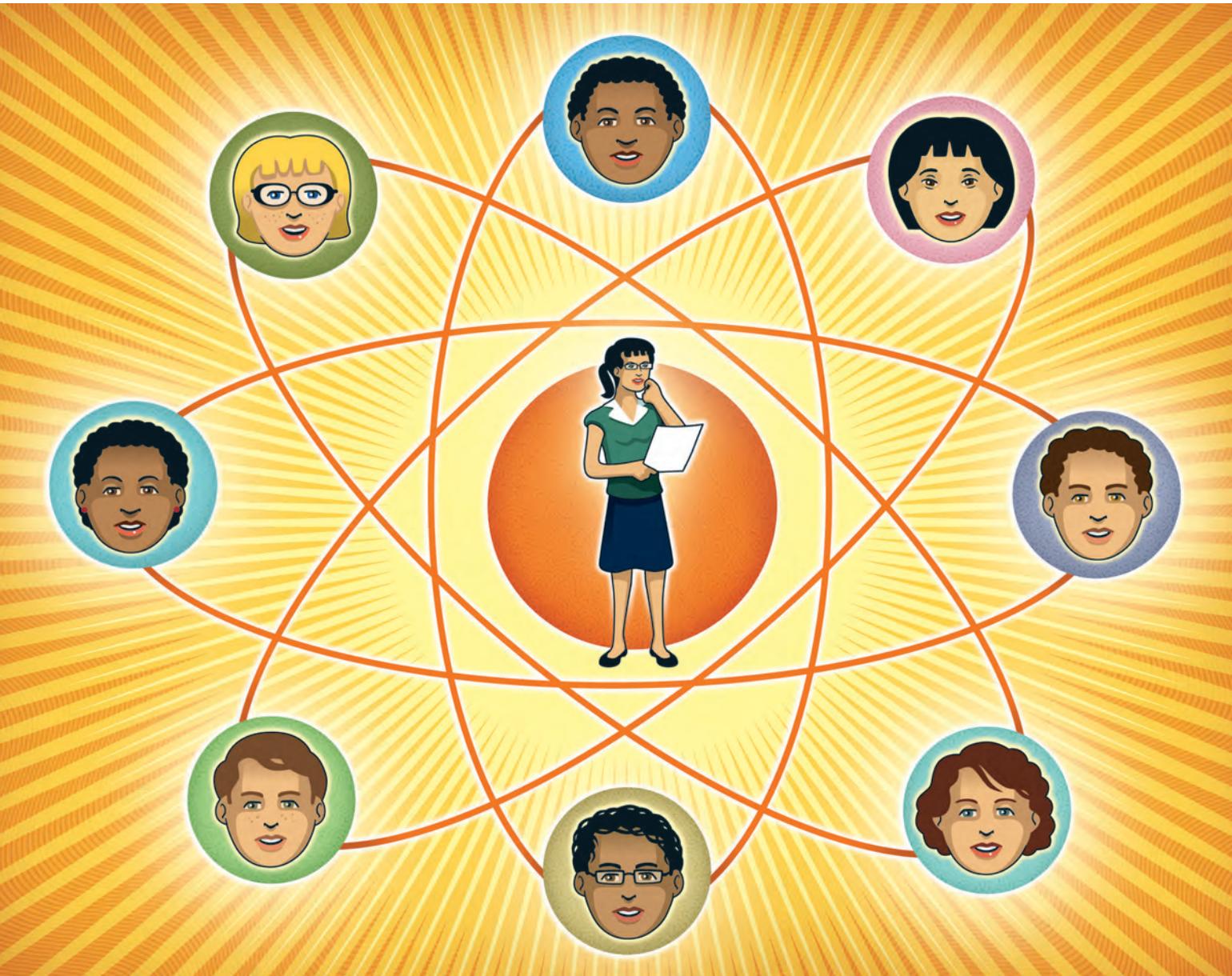
globalonenessproject.org

Google’s **Latino Cultures in the U.S.** showcases the influence of Latino figures through art archives, biographies, exclusive editorial features and other resources from universities, museums and cultural institutions.

g.co/uslatinocultures

Words Without Borders Campus, the education offshoot of the international literary magazine Words Without Borders, offers a searchable library of global writing and ideas for bringing the literature into classrooms.

wwb-campus.org



How to Be an Ally

Being an effective ally requires significant self-reflection and a strong sense of self-identity. Any educator can become an ally, but the journey might look different depending on one's identity, experience and familiarity with issues of power and privilege.

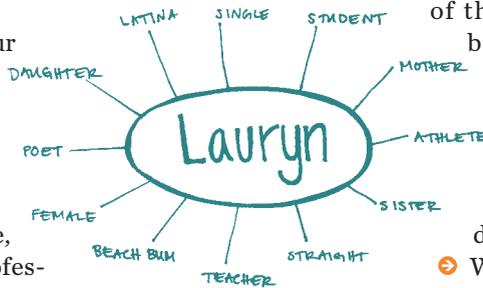
➤ *Ally*

(noun) someone who stands with or advocates for individuals and groups other than their own

Identity Mapping

Step 1

To start, create your own identity map. List your identity group memberships, which may include gender, ethnicity, race, familial roles, professional roles and religious affiliations. Keep in mind that these identity group memberships are complex and should not be considered in a strictly binary fashion (e.g., black *or* white, male *or* female, gay *or* straight). Thinking of identity as either/or is limiting and can be harmful to individuals whose identities fall between or outside of these binaries.



of this group membership? Note: For some group memberships, you can experience both privilege and disadvantage.

➔ Which of these memberships are visible, and which are invisible?

➔ Which of these memberships are most fundamental to who I am?

Step 3

Now that you have created your own identity map, have your students map *their* identities. Encourage them to be as descriptive and nonbinary as possible. For example, you might say, “Think about the identity groups you belong to. Groups can include nationality,

ability, race, gender, sexual orientation or other identifiers. Remember that people are complex and unique. Someone who is gender nonconforming or multiracial, for example, may fall in between or completely outside of those categories.” After they map out their group memberships, ask students to identify which characteristics are most fundamental to who they are.

Step 4

Consider your own identity as well as your students’ identities. Ask yourself:

- ➔ Are my students privileged or disadvantaged because of their group memberships? Or both?

- ➔ Am I acknowledging both the visible and invisible group memberships of my students?

- ➔ Am I valuing the social groups my students value or just the ones that are important to me?

Privilege

(noun) a special benefit or advantage that may be earned or unearned

Note: A person may or may not be aware that they are benefiting from privilege!



SOCIAL JUSTICE ALLIES

“Members of dominant social groups* who are working to end systems of oppression that give them greater privilege and power based on social group membership.”

*DOMINANT SOCIAL GROUPS CAN CHANGE DEPENDING ON CONTEXT.

—Broido, E.M. (2000). *The development of social allies during college: A phenomenological investigation.* Journal of College Student Development, 41, 3-17.

Want to learn more?

Check out these resources!

Anatomy of an Ally
t-t.site/anatomy-ally

Ally Yourself With
 LGBT Students
t-t.site/ally-yourself

Why Talk About Whiteness?
t-t.site/talk-whiteness

How to Be an Ally in
 the Classroom
t-t.site/ally-webinar

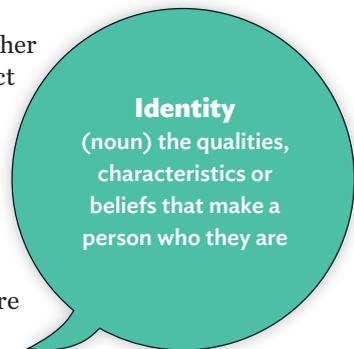
Decentralizing and Distributing Dominant Identities

If not acknowledged, dominant identities like whiteness and heterosexuality can overshadow other identities in the classroom and automatically represent “the norm.” There are three distinct ways educators can deal with dominant identities in the classroom.

Centralize Ignore the fact that certain traits (e.g., whiteness and heterosexuality) are dominant and fail to acknowledge those traits, leaving them centralized.

Decentralize Acknowledge that each student is unique, but view students through the lens of socially dominant groups or your own values.

Distribute Allow equal space for all identities and encourage students to tell you which core identities are most valuable to them.



Read the following scenarios, and identify whether the educator has centralized, decentralized or distributed dominant identities in the classroom.

Scenario 1

Students walk into class on the first day, and the room is almost completely decorated. Students fill out a short survey answering questions about themselves, their likes and their dislikes. The teacher notes that there is space for one or two more posters on a wall based on the interests and passions of the class. After reading the surveys, the teacher will decide what to put up. When students arrive the next day, they see two posters reflecting some of the students’ interests. The same applies for the classroom library. The teacher has selected and organized books into many different genres, but there is limited room for the library to grow based on students’ input or recommendations.

- A. Centralized
- B. Decentralized
- C. Distributed

Scenario 2

Students walk into class on the first day and notice that almost all the people depicted in the room are famous people from dominant groups—male, white and straight. The teacher gives out an assigned reading list that offers no room for deviation.

- A. Centralized
- B. Decentralized
- C. Distributed

Scenario 3

Students walk into class on the first day, and the room is not decorated. The teacher circles everyone up and leads a few icebreakers and group-building activities. Then the teacher presents her own identity map as a way to introduce the activity for the students. The teacher says they will work on these over the course of the next week, and students will share their maps as they feel comfortable. At the end of the week, students will decorate the classroom to reflect the identities and interests within their new class community. The room’s decorations will guide class discussions and reading selections for the year.

- A. Centralized
- B. Decentralized
- C. Distributed

Allyship in Action

Adapting curriculum to reflect student interests and identities can be time consuming and, if your curriculum is scripted, may feel impossible. Try looking for ways to highlight and elevate diverse perspectives in the curriculum you are required to teach. Teach about a minor character, discuss the absence of certain voices in the text or bring in an analysis of the text from a different point of view. You might also give students opportunities to analyze texts from the perspectives of their own identity group memberships.

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

RECOMMENDED
FOR GRADES

9-12

AN OUTRAGE

A FILM BY HANNAH AYERS AND LANCE WARREN

VIEWER'S GUIDE NOW AVAILABLE

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

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

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

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



School and community gardens can be emancipatory spaces—if they’re built around culturally responsive practices. Get to know three gardening activists who have learned to ask the right questions—and listen to the answers.

BY JEY EHRENHALT ILLUSTRATION BY JILL DE HAAN

“MENTION FOOD AND SOCIAL JUSTICE NOW, and you’re in the in-crowd.” This is how Karen Washington, urban farmer and community activist, characterizes the school garden movement. “It’s the hip thing to do now,” she says.

The statistics support Washington’s view. The number of school garden programs in the United States doubled between 2007 and 2013, according to research by the Bridging the Gap program—and numerous school-aged youth have purportedly benefitted. In her article “Serving Up Food Justice At School,” school garden advocate Michele Israel traces a virtuous circle: “When students eat vegetables

they’ve grown in a school garden and then share their experience at home by requesting certain vegetables at meal time, they nurture a healthy curiosity about nutrition and food politics that may increase their food sovereignty significantly.”

As the popularity of the school garden movement surges, however, some educators and community stakeholders have experienced pitfalls. Many short-term staff enter communities with which they are unfamiliar, fulfill their requirements to kick-start a school garden, and move away. Washington labels this phenomenon, common in many school intervention projects, as “parachuting.”

Programs not based in the communities they serve may also inadvertently trigger students of color—for example, when workers don't take the time to investigate a potentially complicated relationship with agriculture. In Grace Bello's article in *The Atlantic*, "Farm-to-Table in Communities of Color," D.C. farmer and food activist Natasha Bowens reports that some immigrant youth say, "Why would I go back to the farm that my immigrant parents worked so hard to get us off of?" In this way, Bowens says, the movement can feel like a step backward.

For African-American youth in particular, agriculture may call to mind a troubled historical memory of enslavement and racialized oppression. At an Edible Schoolyard site, for instance, educator Claire Stanford overheard a student remark, "This is some slavery sh-t." When Bowens spoke with young people of color about farming and food sovereignty, one youth responded, "Why would I want to go back to picking cotton?"

Without adequate equity training, school garden programs may be ineffective at best or, at worst, unintentionally reinforce structural inequity and systemic racism. But when educational gardens directly address (rather than sidestep) issues of race and class, they can become a platform for partnership, healing and meaningful action. The following three profiles feature culturally responsive school gardeners who model these strengths.



FOR JESS BLOOMER, deputy director of Groundwork Somerville, listening is a core tenet of her anti-bias garden programming. Bloomer runs the program's Green Team, a youth employment program focusing on urban agriculture, environmental justice, civic engagement and job skills. As a white-identified, middle-class woman, she cites the danger of falling into a "charity work" trap with her students. "To think that school garden programs are just about nutrition education is to fall into the 'savior' dynamic and miss a wealth of opportunities," Bloomer says.

Bloomer warns white school gardeners to beware of the phenomenon that environmental sociology professor Julie Guthman labels "universalism": the assumption that values held primarily by members of largely white communities are "normal" and widely shared. Bloomer steers clear of the false assumption that her racial and socioeconomic privilege afford her authority on any issue. Instead, she shifts the paradigm of her work toward one of partnership and cultural humility.

To enact this equity mindset, Bloomer suggests doing some research

before planning even begins. She and her students conducted community surveys in four languages about which vegetables local families wanted to see at the Green Team's mobile farmers' markets. They then created their crop plan based on the community's responses.

Bloomer also recommends finding the experts living in the community and partnering with them. After creating the crop plan, she and the Green Team identified three mentor farmers in Somerville: one from Bangladesh, one from Brazil and one from Haiti. These mentors taught workshops on how to grow specific vegetables like *callaloo*, the edible leafy greens from amaranth plants popular in Caribbean cuisine. The team also incorporated *jiló*, a type of eggplant popular in Brazil, into the crop plan. The three mentor farmers spoke with the youth about why these crops were valuable.

Bloomer thinks about food as a health benefit that goes beyond scientific nutrient value and fat content; it's also a way people show they care about each other, tell stories, and find identity and connection. When she served as the program director and garden educator with Edible Schoolyard in New Orleans, for example, her team designated part of the garden space for the community to heal itself after Hurricane Katrina. Here, kids could engage therapeutically with nature, curiosity and beauty.

Following the success of Edible Schoolyard's healing space, they decided to designate one of the gardens for holding restorative justice circles—structured mediations to address interpersonal conflict and build community. Bloomer says these gardens functioned as building blocks for discussing power and how our decisions impact all living beings—whether we know it or not. "Before talking about academic integration and nutrition, we asked, 'How can this be a place for social emotional learning and support, for forging healthy community bonds?'" she explains.

SHORLETTE AMMONS, equity in food systems associate with the Center for Environmental Farming Systems at North Carolina State University, gardens to heal and reclaim her agrarian African-American identity. “Young people of color, especially black youth, sometimes get stuck relating to the slave labor experience and they don’t want to go back to it,” she says. “I want to put a different lens on the experience. Agriculture is an innate part of who I am, and having the opportunity to do it differently is really important.”

Ammons recalls growing up working for a white farmer with her entire family. “It was a lineage thing,” she says. “It was me and my twin sister and my cousins and my aunts and uncles. We were committed to the family every summer, this white farm-working family that was only slightly better off than we were. The relationship to land and the agrarian spirit was muddy for us in a way that it may not have been for them, but it was a shared experience that was a part of both of our heritages.”

Alongside many other local organizations and volunteers, Ammons recasts that experience in the light of self-determination. “I found home in

the garden again, and it was very freeing,” she remembers. “That is what sovereignty feels like.”

While working as a children’s librarian and garden coordinator, Ammons and a group of dedicated individuals built a garden to reflect every ethnicity represented in their county. After researching 33 different ethnicities in Wayne County, they interviewed community members about foods popular in their home cultures. They built gardens with “funky geometrical designs,” dedicating each bed to a particular racial or ethnic group’s food culture. “Its purpose wasn’t just about food,” Ammons recalls. “It was about using food as a tool to rebuild an inclusive narrative and reclaim public space.”

Additionally, Ammons sees gardening as a ritual for healing the relationship between people of color and the land. She cites the work of Ruby Sales, civil rights icon and spiritual activist, as influential to her agricultural philosophy. “Children aren’t born biased,” she asserts, referencing Sales’ work. “It’s rituals that indoctrinate them. We can offer different rituals that support their being anti-racist, their awareness of what an inclusive society looks like.”



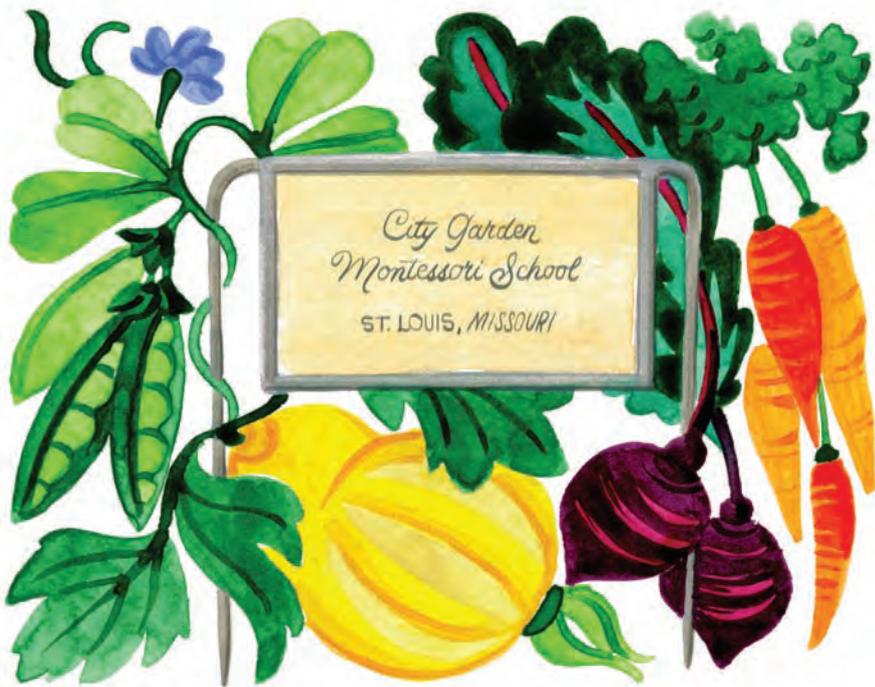
UNPACKING “PARACHUTES”

Parachuting perpetuates two major myths of white supremacy. First, it bolsters the problematic mentality that white people are called upon to “save” underserved neighborhoods of color. While individual actors often possess good intentions, entrenched structural racism means that these intentions can be tainted by this “savior” mindset. The result? White-led organizations try to “fix” communities without consulting its members about their needs or recognizing the expertise of the people closest to the issues.

Second, “parachuting” relies on white supremacist ideology similar to Manifest Destiny: the notion that whites not only can, but are destined to, explore and settle any region of their choosing. White privilege, in other words, comes with a sense of entitlement to enter into any culture that, to the “explorer,” is not native, and then leave again as they see fit.

Karen Washington notes how this phenomenon is similar to colonization, exploiting people and land for profit.

“That’s using people for something under the auspices of social justice,” she says.



FAYBRA HEMPHILL, director of racial equity, curriculum and training at City Garden Montessori School, sees her position as a call to action.

At City Garden, staff members incorporate the four core goals of anti-bias education—developing identity, appreciating diversity, recognizing injustice and taking action—into all of their professional development. Each teacher is asked to apply a racial equity lens to every decision and action made for the school community.

The school curriculum combines these goals with the Montessori theory of development, which emphasizes that in order to educate the whole child

“You have to make sure you’re connecting with the people this will directly affect. Ask them what they want. Care about what they want and do what they say.”

and nurture human potential, students must experience the outdoors in a safe and meaningful way. To effectively assemble these pieces, students learn how to garden and grow their own food.

City Garden regularly recalibrates its evolving equity lens by participating in regional caucuses, attending multi-day anti-racism trainings, and hosting an intergroup dialogue series called Colorbrave. Each meeting in the Colorbrave series explores one manifestation of systemic racism, including environmental racism. In its last session, the group discussed food access, food deserts and the ways in which spending time outdoors can improve quality of life.

Following this training, Hemphill and her colleagues strategized about how City Garden could disrupt the environmental quality-of-life gap between “black and white people, between the Latinx community and white people.” They opened the City Garden grounds to the community on weekends, removed any signage restricting access, and designated a rotating on-call volunteer to respond to any incidents, concerns or questions.

City Garden also designed its own Racial Equity Impact Assessment or REIA. A REIA systematically examines how different racial and ethnic groups will likely be affected by a proposed action or decision. The assessment uses quantitative and qualitative questions to ensure that the school’s culture, processes and procedures—including the school garden program—match its commitment to anti-racism.

For the school’s Garden Night, for example, the outdoor coordinator and the volunteer coordinator referred to the REIA to ask questions such as “What is the content of this program? What is the purpose? How does this event relate to our mission? Who’s involved in the decision making? Were students of color invited to make decisions about this program?” The REIA aggregates the data and assesses it according to a set of equity standards.

“If the findings show that the program doesn’t relate to our mission and commitment to racial justice, then maybe we shouldn’t have it,” Hemphill says. “We don’t need more programs and events just to have them. Everything that we have should be grounded in our commitment as a neighborhood school with an anti-racist, anti-bias focus.”

Hemphill emphasizes that people have to be trained to use an anti-bias lens in order to make informed decisions that will affect entire populations of people. “You have to make sure you’re connecting with the people this will directly affect. Ask them what they want. Care about what they want and do what they say.”

Finally, says Hemphill, be willing to compromise. “We don’t want to continue doing what we have done as large institutions,” she says. “We want to stop ignoring the people we were allegedly built to serve.” ♦

Ehrenhalt is the grants and school programs manager for Teaching Tolerance.

DEBUNKING THE MOBILITY MYTH



Black children are more likely to be downwardly mobile than their white peers. But, as this scholar discovered, breaking the bad news might be one key to changing that trajectory.

BY ROBERT L. REECE ILLUSTRATION BY CARLOS BASABE

BOTH MY PARENTS were born on plantations in the 1960s Mississippi Delta, years after the history books claim that sharecropping had ended in the South. That means that I, born in 1988, was of the first generation on both sides of my family not to be born on a plantation. After a decidedly working-class upbringing in rural Leland, Mississippi, I—the child of former sharecroppers—ended up earning a doctorate from Duke University and working as a sociology professor at the University of Texas in Austin.

On its face, my trajectory from Leland to Austin epitomizes the American Dream—proof that upward mobility is available to anyone willing to work hard and make the right sacrifices. Parents work for a better life for their children who, in turn, go on to perform slightly better in life than their parents. But despite the United States being dubbed the “land of opportunity,” my story is atypical—particularly for black Americans. Research consistently demonstrates that

upward social mobility is uncommon for families like mine. Indeed, among middle-class black Americans, downward mobility is the norm.

Yet, research also shows that formal education can weaken the barriers black people face can. Taken together, these facts raise vital questions for the teachers of black children about the best ways to help black students navigate a world of discrimination.

The Myth of the American Dream

Despite what we’re told about the American Dream, upward mobility for black Americans is relatively rare. According to the Brookings Institution, 51 percent of black Americans born into the bottom 20 percent of income earners remain there as adults. By comparison, only 23 percent of white Americans born into the bottom 20 percent of income earners remain there.

Even more alarming are the rates at which black Americans experience

downward mobility. Black individuals born into middle- and upper-middle class homes fall into lower income brackets as adults at much higher rates than white Americans born into those same income positions. Furthermore, a 2017 study by economists William J. Collins and Marianne H. Wanamaker shows that differences in upward mobility between black and white Americans have remained consistent since 1880; they suggest that the lack of upward mobility for black Americans may be primarily responsible for the ongoing income gap between racial groups.

Confronted with these facts, teachers of black students, particularly lower-income black students, face a tall task. Not only must educators explore ways to help students survive and thrive despite their individual challenges or limitations, but they also must seek to deconstruct the barriers students face—and empower students to join in that process of deconstruction.

DIFFERENCES IN UPWARD MOBILITY BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE AMERICANS HAVE REMAINED CONSISTENT SINCE 1880.

PERCENTAGE OF AMERICANS BORN INTO THE BOTTOM 20% OF INCOME EARNERS WHO REMAIN THERE AS ADULTS.



The Importance of Engaging With Race

One of the first steps toward changing an unfair system is to recognize its existence, and to share that recognition with students. It may feel harsh or unkind to tell black students that they won't be afforded the same opportunities as some of their fellow citizens. But honestly engaging them about the limitations of their social positions can help them understand that the barriers they face are real. More importantly, it shows that these barriers are not of their own construction. And evidence shows that addressing these issues with students can make a difference for them in the classroom and beyond.

A 2017 study by Erin B. Godfrey and colleagues published in the journal *Child Development*, for example, shows that middle schoolers of color acted out more when they were taught that society was fair. They exhibited lower self-esteem, more delinquency and overall worse classroom behavior. These students were lashing out at a system that denies them success even if they work hard. And when adults insisted on the fairness of that system, they were implying that the students themselves were to blame for struggling—an attitude that can easily breed fatalism and hopelessness.

Kate Gluckman, executive director of the Sunflower County Freedom Project in Mississippi, says that when her students learn how their lives and communities have been shaped by racism that is outside their control, they seem to feel as if a weight has been lifted from their shoulders.

"I think that they maybe get some satisfaction out of knowing ... there's an explanation of the struggles they see in their communities," she says. "It's not

just that your community is bad and people are lazy ... but to say, 'No, this is a result of deliberate action, and let's talk about that.'"

Incorporating discussions of race into the curriculum not only frees black students from the burden of feeling as if their struggles are a result of their own internal shortcomings; it also engages them in topics that pique their interest. They perform better when they discuss ideas that affect their lives in ways that are recognizable, immediate and significant. Cortez Moss, principal of Mississippi's Quitman County Middle School, told me that when black

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It may feel harsh or unkind to tell black students that they won't be afforded the same opportunities as some of their fellow citizens. But honestly engaging them about the limitations of their social positions can help them understand that the barriers they face are real.
////////////////////////////////////

students take time to understand the concepts in lessons about race and racism—even if what they learn makes them angry—their academic performance seems to trend upward.

"[T]hey struggled initially with being able to decode the language in *Invisible Man*, but after some analysis work, the students became very enraged and very frustrated with the text and what was happening in the text and later started moving to a place of questions," he says. "Not only does the research tell us when students are engaged in high-interest texts, they have a tendency to perform better, but I saw that firsthand.

... Students perform better when their education is situated within the context of their communities or their culture or their background."

The spark that this type of engagement ignites in students can have a massive positive effect on their long-term success. I still remember my first encounter with Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. It was the first text I'd read (outside of Black History Month lessons) to deal frankly with America's racial reality. Like Moss' students, I battled with the content of the book. I was fighting my own resistance and a lifetime of being told that my generation had overcome the violence of racial

oppression. Eventually, like Gluckman's students, I realized that characteristics of my hometown I had always viewed as benign—the dilapidated housing, the racial homogeneity of my high school—were, in fact, markers of persistent and pernicious racial and economic stratification. This awakening, prompted by a single text given to me by an educator, carried me through college and graduate school. Ultimately, it led me to pursue a career studying race and inequality.

Changing the System

Like the teacher who slipped me the copy of Ellison I still own, some educators have developed effective strategies for helping black students occasionally achieve the type of upward mobility supposedly valued in this country. But these strategies are only stopgap solutions and, while well-intentioned, they fall short of our ultimate goal as educators and as a society: to repair a system that forces students of color to work harder than their white counterparts.

This is, of course, easier said than done, and not only because of the



inherent difficulties of changing large institutions. Change requires resources, and too often educators are forced to devote many of their best resources to simply preventing students from slipping further and further behind.

At Life Academy, a small public school in Oakland, California, teacher Lisa Kelly considers how the day-to-day rigors of teaching limit educators' ability to enact large-scale changes in a system that she says was "never meant to serve all American students." To best serve black and brown students, Kelly says, educators need to "actually create a new system that is meant to serve."

"So often, we're bogged down by the, 'well my sixth-graders can't write sentences, and ... I have to get their grade reports out, and I have to call this parent about that, and I have to do this,'" she says. "I can't ever get my head above water to see how screwed up the system is and to imagine how the system could be different."

Another challenge is the sheer size of the task at hand. What does it mean to "create a new system"? The ambiguity itself makes the idea seem too big to handle.

One answer is to maintain focus on the students themselves. In Mississippi, Moss was able to push his school district to begin important systemic changes in their interactions with students, including hiring a number of mental health professionals and

offering training for their teachers to help them better work with students who have experienced trauma—racial and otherwise. Such new policies represent important, concrete steps to closing the persistent resource gap between schools that serve primarily black students and those that primarily serve white students. But it is only a start.

Black schools continue to lack the resources—such as funding for foundational courses like chemistry and advanced algebra—to offer their students a fair chance to compete in college. (I recall instructing my high school classmates in chemistry because our school's chemistry teacher was not certified in the subject.) Closing this gap requires the type of tenacity and innovation that teachers are denied the opportunity to pursue day to day. Also, activists, administrators and community members must be prepared to share the burden of finding ways to permanently offer black students the resources they need to succeed.

Empowering the Students

Finally, we can encourage students to be their own advocates and become agents of change. Students do not idly accept inequality. Gluckman reports that her students are often moved to activism and express a willingness to take on large challenges in their communities.

"I feel like there's a cycle of gaining this understanding and being empowered through that understanding.

Then, there's this period of wanting to do action," she says. "OK, I know you want to desegregate your town, but how can you do that within your community? Who can you reach out to across those lines?" ... When we have the right balance, students can be motivated through that investigation of both the history, but also the current evaluation of their communities and schools."

This type of student empowerment brings discussions of inequality full circle. Not only do students become more engaged with their work; they become more engaged with their communities. In this way, teaching race in the classroom compounds positive effects by helping students navigate their oppression *and* helping them combat it.

A fair amount of good fortune and the right attention from the right teachers at critical times in my life allowed me to overcome the challenges of a childhood in one of the poorest places in the nation. But good fortune is labeled as such because it is uncommon; most black children from similar circumstances won't have my luck. Until the opportunities that now present as "good fortune" are the norm for black students, we have a long way to go, even in simply offering them equitable educational prospects—and in debunking the myth of the American Dream. ♦

Reece is an assistant professor in the sociology department at University of Texas at Austin.

States' Rights and “Historical Malpractice”

After witnessing the rise of the “alt-right,” this social studies teacher doubled down on debunking Confederacy myths.

BY TYLER MURPHY ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL WARAKSA



THERE ARE TIMES IN OUR HISTORY when cataclysmic moments are propelled into the classroom: The attack on Pearl Harbor, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the September 11 attacks are obvious examples. There are other times, however, when subtle tremors that teachers may notice in the classroom are suddenly and dramatically magnified into cataclysmic moments outside the classroom. The deadly “Unite the Right” white nationalist rally that shook the city of Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 is one such moment.

The event sparked self-reflection and action across the country, including in my home state of Kentucky. In the aftermath of the incident, leaders in Lexington decided to remove two Confederate statues, including one that loomed on the site of an auction block once used to buy and sell enslaved people. But our Commonwealth—a state that Lincoln struggled to keep in the Union—continues to grapple with the presence of another statue, one that stands in Kentucky’s Capitol Rotunda: that of Jefferson Davis, the first and last president of the Confederate States of America.

Although Davis still stands (for now), Kentucky’s Historic Properties Advisory Commission did vote unanimously to remove a plaque on the statute that deems him a “Patriot, Hero, Statesman.” As DeBraun Thomas, an organizer of the movement to remove the Lexington statues, notes, “someone who defects from their country” most certainly does not warrant those descriptors.

What we cannot remove, though, is the reality that Davis presided over a political system rooted firmly and resolutely in the institution of slavery. As much as revisionists would like to reframe the Civil War as a battle for the elusive idea of states’ rights, the historical evidence makes it clear that the

Confederate cause was synonymous with racial subjugation. Alabama’s constitution under the Confederacy explicitly refers to the “Southern Slaveholding Confederacy.”

The states’ rights argument has lingered for decades, in part because many Southerners don’t want to believe their relatives fought for slavery, but also because of the propaganda efforts of white nationalists and Confederate sympathizers who have rebranded the Confederate cause to make it more palatable to a contemporary audience. But the painful reality continues to bubble to the surface—as it did in Charlottesville—and it exposes this argument for what it is: a smokescreen for a white supremacist ideology.

Teaching a Contested Truth

Those of us who teach our nation’s history and perspectives on it should see the current political context as an opportunity and assess our role in addressing tremors of hate before they threaten to shake the foundations of our society. Indeed, the mindset that gave birth to the Charlottesville incident is not foreign to anyone who teaches history. This is especially true of teaching the Civil War—an era in U.S. history that foments discord even today, particularly in the South.

When I asked my students what they knew about the Civil War at the start of the school year, one replied that he was aware of it. When I pressed him for more, he replied, “It was a war between people who liked slavery and people who didn’t.” That was a proverbial “from the mouth of babes” moment.

Another student, however, immediately balked at this characterization. “No, no, no! It wasn’t just about slavery. There were other issues ...” I braced for what I knew his next words would be: “It was also about states’ rights.”

That student is not alone. A 2015 McClatchy-Marist Poll revealed that 49 percent of Southerners believed that slavery was “not the main reason” for the Civil War. The number was high nationally as well: 41 percent.

Over the course of every school year, I watch as my students slowly realize that slavery was at the heart of the Civil War. This isn’t an effort to “brainwash” them or foster “white guilt” (a common refrain of white nationalists). Rather, students reach this conclusion as they analyze various primary sources from the time period and carefully examine the evidence.

To the extent that the rebel states advocated for their right to act independently, the students find, such language was couched in arguments specifically defending a state’s right to preserve slavery, even as abolitionist causes swept the rest of the country. Each of the 11 states that seceded from the Union composed sternly worded declarations or proclamations, all of which explicitly mentioned the desire to maintain the institution of slavery in their states. Several declarations expressed frustration that the fugitive-slave laws were not being sufficiently enforced in the North. They bemoaned the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln. South Carolina’s General Assembly declared his election had been based on “open and avowed hostility.” Georgia’s secession document labeled Lincoln’s newly formed Republican Party the “anti-slavery” party. Former South Carolina Representative and delegate to South Carolina’s secession convention Laurence M. Keitt argued that the state had arrived at its decision to secede “on the question of slavery.” Jefferson Davis himself declared black people to be “our inferior, fitted expressly for servitude.”

If we truly want to honor our country's history, we must recognize both the progress we have made and the work that remains undone.

Revealing the Monster of Slavery

Writing poignantly from the perspective of an observer at Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, a student last year compared the issue of slavery to a "monster" that "was being built up [while] all of the people in power claimed they could not see it." The monster grew so massive, the student surmised, as the issue was ignored by leaders (including, at first, Lincoln himself) until eventually it was "released to wreak havoc on the U.S.A." The student's fictional character found comfort that "we still [have] hope to tame that monster." Allowing our students to draw such conclusions empowers and equips them to spot modern-day monsters and intervene before the consequences of indifference make those monsters nearly impossible to wrangle.

It is true that, in the beginning of his presidency, Lincoln's priority was preservation of the Union and not the abolitionist cause. But as the war dragged on and became much deadlier than anticipated, his views evolved. Lincoln came to believe that preservation of the Union was dependent on the dissolution of slavery. Extending that idea even further after the bloodiest battle of the war, in his iconic Gettysburg Address he framed the war as a fight over the very ideals and values upon which the country was founded—casting the bloody conflict as a test of whether a nation "conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" could even survive. This moment marked a shift in the widespread interpretation of our country's founding values and principles.

A close reading of the Gettysburg

Address makes it very difficult to argue that the values and views of the Confederacy could be reconciled with the values and views that became widely accepted after the speech was delivered. To argue otherwise is historical malpractice; it ignores the ideals that define, if not the true character of the country, what we aspire to be as Americans.

The Power of Symbols

Symbols of the Confederacy, be they flags or statues, don't just represent a heritage or a romanticized past. They represent a system whose values and tenets run counter to the very freedoms that generations of people have struggled—and still struggle—to make manifest in the United States of America. And there are few places where being informed of that struggle is more important than in the realm of education, where a society is given its life, its merit and its guiding principles.

Symbols are important to Kentuckians—and to people in general—especially when housed in the quintessential temple of our Commonwealth's democracy. We can no longer ignore the imagery created when Jefferson Davis' statue looms in the corner even as Abraham Lincoln's takes center stage in Lexington's Capitol Rotunda—a place that should be reserved, as DeBraun Thomas says, for the celebration of our shared history.

The Union and its values of liberty and freedom survived a brutal civil war, but the hate, bigotry and terror of that divide still hover in our democracy's shadows, and they threaten the values we claim to espouse. The struggle for justice did not end with the Union's

victory in the Civil War. That struggle endured through Reconstruction, Jim Crow and the civil rights era, and it endures today. Until we grapple with that reality inside and outside the classroom, the people who carried torches in Charlottesville will continue to be empowered by our indifference or by our willingness to perpetuate a false narrative—a narrative that allows our public spaces to house symbols that dehumanize so many of our citizens. And our students will be denied an opportunity to develop the prerequisite skills for maintaining a healthy democracy: critical thinking, perspective taking and discerning fact from fiction. If we truly want to honor our country's history, we must recognize both the progress we have made and the work that remains undone.

The New Birth of Freedom

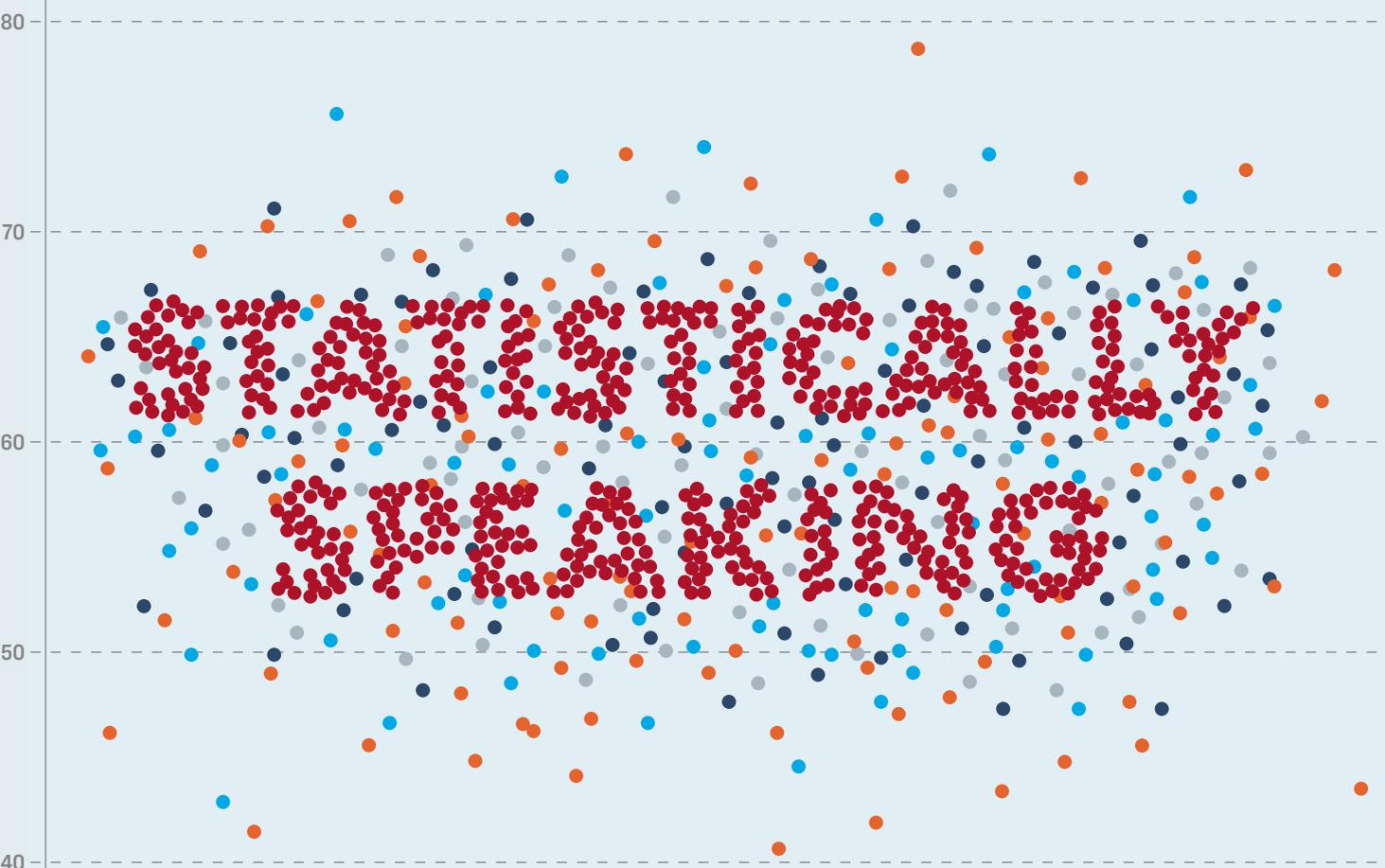
Lincoln spoke, over 150 years ago, of the "great task remaining before us" involving a "new birth of freedom." And, as Howard Zinn reminds us, that new birth was made possible by the countless black abolitionists—many unnamed and unnoted in our history books—who "won their freedom because for 30 years before the Civil War, they participated in a great movement of resistance."

But the monster looms and we, too, must heed those abolitionists' examples of resistance.

Today, such is our "great task," and the fight for freedom endures: It is the responsibility of each successive generation (and those of us who teach them) to preserve the Union, stoking not the flames of hate but nurturing the eternal youth and vigor of that freedom. Are we up to the task? ♦

Murphy is a social studies teacher in Woodford County, Kentucky.





Teacher bullying is a real phenomenon,
but it's always been hard to quantify—until now.

BY ALAN MCEVOY & MOLLY SMITH

STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS and administrators seem to accept it as an unfortunate but inevitable feature of school life. There is a knowing shrug of indifference or resignation when it happens. Even when there is a complaint, it is rarely addressed.

The “it” in question refers to bullying behavior by teachers toward students.

Nearly all schools, to their credit, have embraced policies and protocols intended to address how students treat one another. The appellation “bullyproof” is routinely applied to programs schools adopt to reinforce civil behavior. Such programs focus almost exclusively on student interactions with their peers, while a pall of stony silence shrouds the phenomenon of “teacher as bully.”

Although there is scant empirical research examining bullying by professional educators, anecdotal evidence abounds. Teachers who bully students often have a reputation within the school system. Colleagues who are bystanders often are aware of problematic conduct, but little is known about exactly what these bystanders observe, how often they observe it, how the school administrators respond, or how bullying behaviors by teachers affect school climate.

With the assistance of Teaching Tolerance, we at Northern Michigan University conducted an online survey of 1,067 educators during July 2017. To our knowledge, this is the first significant survey of its kind.

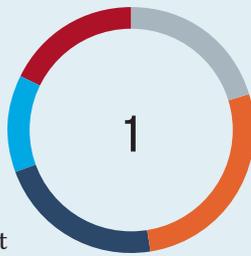
Our survey defined teacher bullying as “a pattern of conduct, rooted in a power differential, that threatens, harms, humiliates, induces fear or causes students substantial emotional distress.” We then listed behaviors that reasonably conform to this definition and asked teachers to indicate how often they observed such behavior by colleagues during the past year. We also asked about how schools attempt to address this concern.

The survey data presented here lead us to conclude that the phenomenon of teachers who bully their students is something every school needs to consider. A small number of bullies can do enormous damage to a school’s effectiveness. Bullying contributes to a harmful, discriminatory and hostile climate in which learning is undermined and intolerance flourishes. It may also cause a *contagion effect*: Mean behavior by a teacher encourages students to be mean as well. We also find that marginalized students may be especially vulnerable as targets of this expression of behavior. For the sake of students, educators and larger communities of learning, we must do better.

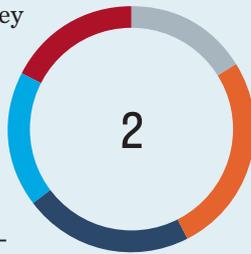
We hope the results presented here, though disturbing, will serve as a basis for thoughtful discussion and action.

Bullying Behaviors Observed

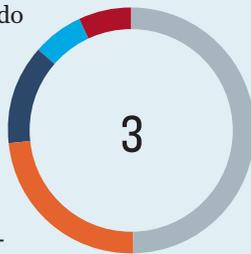
Bullying is most often expressed as the hostile, often repeated, ritualized humiliation of another person in public. Teacher codes of ethics emphasize that such behaviors are antithetical to the educational mission of the school. For example, the National Education Association’s (NEA) *Code of Ethics of the Education Profession* states that educators must strive “to help each student realize his or her potential as a worthy and effective member of society.” This includes two fundamental obligations: (1) The educator “shall make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning or to health and safety”; and (2) “they shall not intentionally expose the student to embarrassment or disparagement.”



HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU OBSERVED A TEACHER DISPLAYING EXTREME EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS TOWARD A STUDENT (E.G., YELLING, BERATING, SWEARING)?



HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU OBSERVED A TEACHER UNNECESSARILY EMBARRASSING A STUDENT IN FRONT OF OTHER STUDENTS OR TEACHERS?



HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU OBSERVED A TEACHER PUBLICLY SUGGESTING THAT A STUDENT IS STUPID?



Our survey identified examples of bullying behaviors by teachers that stand in opposition to the NEA’s *Code of Ethics*. These include embarrassing students unnecessarily, displaying extreme emotional outbursts toward students and publicly suggesting a student is stupid. Graphs 1, 2 and 3 (above) illustrate the frequencies of these behaviors by teachers toward students as observed by other teachers in the last year.

The data suggest that public displays of humiliation by teachers toward students occur regularly. In fact, *never* observing problematic conduct toward students—the ethical ideal—seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Even the extreme of publicly suggesting that a student is stupid was observed by more than half the respondents. One early childhood teacher reported that, “[Some teachers] are unreasonably judgmental and have a lack of respect for children as human beings.”

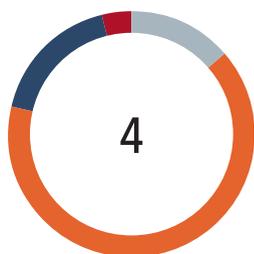
Particularly troubling are observations at high-end frequencies. Our conclusion is that significant numbers of students—both bystanders and targets—experience bullying microaggressions by some teachers as a commonplace aspect of school life. This raises two questions: What percentage

of teachers behave like bullies? Which students are selected as targets and why are they selected?

When asked to specify what percentage of teachers in their school bully students, 65 percent of respondents indicated “less than 10 percent,” and just under 14 percent indicated “none” (Graph 4). These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests the presence of a few teachers who bully is common in most schools, though they constitute a minority of the teaching

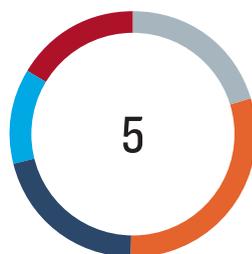
at their private, religious, suburban high school “want to maintain control of the classroom, but do not know how with challenging students, esp[ecially] those who are not high achievers in this age of high stakes tests that teachers get judged on.”

Teachers who bully can justify to themselves and to others that their conduct is appropriate because, after all, the student needed to be “disciplined” or “motivated” to perform. In fact, offending teachers may claim they are *obligated* to



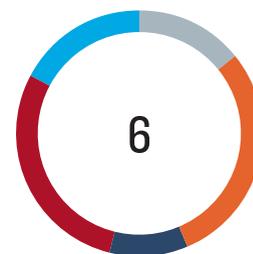
WHAT PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS IN YOUR SCHOOLS WOULD YOU IDENTIFY AS BULLIES OF STUDENTS?

- NONE
- LESS THAN 10%
- 10-29%
- MORE THAN 30%



HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU OBSERVED A TEACHER EXCESSIVELY REPRIMANDING ONE STUDENT FOR BEHAVIORS THAT MANY STUDENTS ARE DOING

- NEVER
- 1-2 TIMES
- 3-4 TIMES
- 5-9 TIMES
- 10 OR MORE TIMES



IF YOU OBSERVED ANY OF THESE BEHAVIORS, WHICH TYPE OF STUDENTS WERE TARGETED? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

- STUDENTS WITH:
- BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS
 - COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS
 - LOW ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
 - POOR ATTENDANCE
 - OTHER

staff. Several respondents indicated this in their comments, reporting that “I only encountered one teacher in all of my years of teaching who was unkind to her students,” and “[Certain students] are often targeted by a few of my colleagues.” Yet even these small few can do enormous damage to students and to a school’s instructional mission. Their conduct adversely affects school climate and the morale of colleagues.

Especially troubling is the finding that one in five respondents identified *more* than 10 percent of the teaching staff in their school as bullies. When asked if teachers who bully students also bully their colleagues, 63 percent of the respondents said yes.

The survey data do not offer a full understanding of the process of “target selection” by teachers. The data suggest, however, that students who pose behavioral challenges, lack motivation or possess immutable characteristics that are not valued by the school are more likely to be targets of bullying. One respondent stated that the teacher bullies

use aggressive tactics with “difficult” students. A teacher who works at a public urban elementary school explained, “I think they are scared of being seen as less powerful or authoritarian, and so they overreact to minor infractions.”

Our data also suggest one student may be singled out and excessively reprimanded for behaviors that many students are exhibiting (Graph 5). This raises the question: What student characteristics are the basis for being singled out?

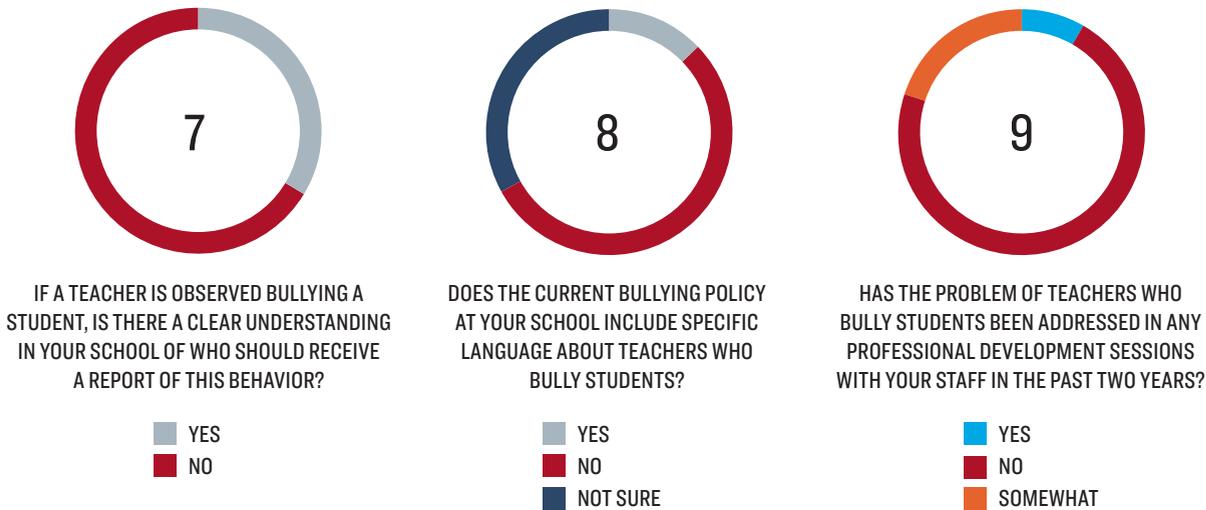
Respondents identified low-achieving students and students with behavioral disorders as the most targeted by bullying teachers, followed by students with poor attendance (Graph 6). Open-ended comments from respondents indicated that teachers feel frustrated when dealing with students who misbehave, who lack motivation or who seem poorly prepared for school. Such frustration, they suggest, is part of the reason why some teachers may lash out at students in unprofessional ways.

Open-ended responses to the “Other” category

in Graph 6 reflect another concern. Eighty-four respondents in this category, almost one-third, indicate that students of color and students from other nondominant groups (e.g., LGBT students and English language learners) are targets of bullying by educators. According to one urban public high school teacher, stereotypes are exacerbated by “a lack of cultural connection, authoritative practices, racism, power dynamics and patriarchal biases.” A teacher at an urban public elementary

often emphasize the need for bystanders to report what they observe in order to activate appropriate interventions. There is a normative message of responsibility coupled with a protocol for students to follow. But what is the protocol for teachers who observe bullying conduct by a colleague?

The principle of bystander activation relevant to peer-on-peer bullying should also apply to professional educators. As Graph 7 indicates, however, two-thirds of the teaching staff do not have a



school also noted that students of color were the primary targets of teacher bullying, referring to them as “the so-called ‘usual suspects.’”

In some schools, students of color may become scapegoats for a teacher’s inability to connect with members of the class. In addition, when the teacher’s race differs from that of his or her students, it may create a level of discomfort that becomes an excuse to bully students into forced cultural assimilation. When asked why some teachers bully their students, nearly 9 percent of respondents volunteered that students of color are the *primary* targets. A teacher at a suburban public middle school explained, “They [teachers] can get away with it when it is done with students of color.”

School Response

Given the unfortunate reality that a minority of teachers behave in unprofessional ways toward students, how do schools respond?

Programs that address peer-on-peer bullying

clear understanding of where to report—or if they should report—instances of a colleague bullying a student. A suburban public middle school teacher admits that teacher bullying “is handled however the observer feels it should be: not at all, talk personally to the teacher, report to administrator or gossip with another teacher about the situation.” This range of responses suggests there is a compelling need for schools to establish protocols to guide bystanders when they observe such behavior. The absence of guidelines for reporting unprofessional conduct is a recipe for inaction.

The absence of reporting guidelines is compounded by the absence of teacher-specific language in existing school bullying policies. Less than 13 percent of respondents can say, unequivocally, their school’s policy indicates that bullying could involve teachers as well as students (Graph 8). This points to the need for broader policy language that sends a clear message: Everyone in the school is accountable when it comes to bullying behavior.

WHEN ASKED WHY SOME TEACHERS BULLY THEIR STUDENTS, NEARLY 9 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS VOLUNTEERED THAT **STUDENTS OF COLOR ARE THE PRIMARY TARGETS.** A TEACHER AT A SUBURBAN PUBLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL EXPLAINED, “TEACHERS CAN GET AWAY WITH IT WHEN IT IS DONE WITH STUDENTS OF COLOR.”

Although reporting guidelines and policies that address bullying by teachers are positive steps, formal policies alone are unlikely to reinforce codes of professional conduct. Intentional dialogue about professional norms is an essential element in creating a prosocial school climate. Most teachers, we believe, are upset when they observe a colleague say and do things that undermine student well-being. Unless schools provide a safe forum for educators to discuss how best to handle such observations, it is unlikely that bystanders will risk speaking up.

Graph 9 indicates that intentional dialogue about teachers who bully students, in the form of professional staff development, is absent in most schools. It may be that discussing problematic conduct by colleagues is outside the comfort zone of many educators. This is where administrative leadership providing ongoing in-service training is essential.

Recommendations

Although the phenomenon of teachers who bully exists in many schools, most teachers do not abuse their power over students. If schools embrace proactive measures (e.g., changing policy language and providing professional development), we believe the frequency and severity of bullying will abate.

A closer examination of the data reveals two important findings. First, teachers are somewhat less likely to observe bullying behaviors when their school’s policy includes specific language about teacher conduct. At schools where such language was included, nearly 35 percent “never” observed bullying behavior, compared to 22 percent without such language. In other words, the existence of a policy does not eliminate teacher bullying entirely, but it does lessen the prevalence.

Second, in schools that provided a professional development session in the last two years about

teachers who bully students, respondents were more likely to report they never observed the bullying behavior. Approximately 39 percent of those with training had “never” observed bullying, compared to 26 percent without training. Training teachers about unprofessional conduct reinforces professional codes of ethics and lessens punitive treatment of students. Even if bullying teachers aren’t motivated by a schoolwide shift in culture, they may at least realize that a training means their behavior can no longer fly under the radar.

Bullying constitutes a form of educational discrimination that demands active intervention rather than passive acceptance. It is not, nor should it ever be considered, an inevitable feature of school life. Bullying by even a few teachers is a corruption of the teacher role that harms students and undermines the ability of nonoffending teachers to educate our youth. Of particular concern are vulnerable populations, including ELLs, students of color, students with disabilities and LGBT students, who disproportionately may be the targets of bullying based on negative stereotypes or devalued immutable characteristics.

For all students to thrive as learners and citizens of a community, the school must be a place where their physical and emotional safety is not in question. Most educators are appalled when confronted with a colleague who is mean and abusive toward students. Yet they feel powerless to act or are otherwise frustrated into silence by bureaucratic indifference. For the sake of our students—and for the sake of our shared sense of justice and fairness—it is time to speak up. ♦

McEvoy is a professor of sociology at Northern Michigan University.

Smith is an education researcher and elementary special education teacher.





GENE LUEN YANG'S APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LITERACY PUTS STUDENTS IN CHARGE OF HOW THEY EXPERIENCE CONTENT

AWARD-WINNING GRAPHIC NOVELIST and cartoonist Gene Luen Yang has had a busy couple of years. Not only did he just wrap up his tenure as the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, but he also teaches creative writing in Hamline University's Writing for Children and Young Adults MFA program. In 2016, he received a MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant."

Yang hit his big break in 2006 with his trailblazing graphic novel *American Born Chinese*, in which he explores themes that he personally grappled with as a youth reconciling his cultural identities. Yang talked with Teaching Tolerance about growing up on comics, teaching high school for 17 years and amplifying diverse identities in his work.

A REMOTE CONTROL FOR LEARNING

How did identity play into your consumption of comics as a kid and beyond?

I love superheroes. I loved superheroes as soon as I read my first superhero comic. It was a *Superman* comic. In part, I think it's because at the heart of every superhero is this idea of dual identity—that Superman has to live both as Superman and as Clark Kent. He kind of has to hide one identity when he's inhabiting the other one. All that just felt very familiar to me.

I actually think the immigrant story is embedded in the superhero genre, because almost every major superhero out there was created by the children of immigrants and created by these children of Jewish immigrants from Europe. That's true of Superman, of Batman, of Captain America, almost everybody out there. Spiderman, the X Men, Hulk, Iron Man, all of them.

I think the other thing that I loved about comics is the bar of entry was just so low. Anybody, even a kid in the '80s, could create their own comic.

What led to your shift from teaching to writing comics for a living?

I taught for a long time. I really liked it. I was actually very reluctant to leave. For the second half of that, I was part-time. We were on a block schedule, so I would go in one day to teach and the other day I would be at home working on comics.

I started making comics and I started teaching around the same time, but comics I always saw as a side gig. I never really expected to make a full-time living at it. When I was starting in the '90s, the American comic book market was just not very healthy.

In the beginning, I was a self-publisher. Every time I would put out a comic, I would lose money. The turning point was when *American Born Chinese* came out in 2006.

Do your education and comic worlds ever collide?

Absolutely. In a concrete way. My most recent graphic novel series with First

Second Books is called *Secret Coders*. It's a middle-grade series that teaches kids the fundamentals of computer science. It's basically me taking the lessons that I used to teach in my computer science classroom and translating them into comics.

I feel like I've learned a lot about teaching through comics by doing this series. I want to keep trying to figure that out. I first used comics in an Algebra II class. ... I think, in t h a t

AMERICA FROM THE VERY BEGINNING WAS DESIGNED TO BE A COLLECTION OF SUBCULTURES. I WOULD ENCOURAGE KIDS WHO MIGHT FEEL LIKE OUTSIDERS IN THEIR IMMEDIATE VICINITY TO GO AND LOOK FOR THAT SUBCULTURE WHERE THEY BELONG.

class, within math, there's certain topics that are algorithmic, where you basically have to go through a series of steps. First you do this, then you do this, then you do this, and then you do this. That sort of content worked really well with comics. Instead of reading those steps as text, you actually get to see a visual of what each step looks like. When a student has to recall that, they're recalling a set of pictures. As a species, we've only dealt with words for—I don't know—in terms of history, it's the blink of an eye, whereas we've dealt with images for much, much longer. For things like memory, images just work better. Comics leverage that aspect of the human mind.

You mentioned in your TEDx Talk that comics became a way for you to give your students a kind of remote

control for their learning. What did you mean by that?

There are these different visual storytelling media to convey information. There's comics, there's animation, there's film. Out of all of these different visual media, really the only one that is not time dependent—that is time independent—is comics. When you're watching a film, when you're watching a YouTube video, the rate at which that information is transferred to you, the way that story is told to you, is determined by the creator of the content. That is not true for comics. For comics, the rate at which the information flows is firmly in the hands of the reader. A reader can determine how quickly or how slowly she wants to read the comic.

It seems like a really small thing, but I think in educational settings, that control can make a huge difference for certain kinds of content and for certain readers.

What is your Reading Without Walls Challenge, and what inspired you to choose it as the platform for your national ambassador role?

Every national ambassador chooses a platform. About three months before my ambassadorship started, the Republican [presidential primary] debates were going on, and there was a lot of talk about walls in the media. I think that was kind of on our minds. We ended up settling on the idea of reading without walls, and that centers around a challenge. The challenge that I've been issuing kids during my ambassadorship is to do one of three things. It's to set a due date for yourself—you can either do this as a community or individual reader—and by that due date, either read a book about a character who doesn't look like you or live like you, or read a book about a topic that you might not know anything about, or, three, read a book in a format that you don't normally read for fun.

If a kid normally only reads chapter books for fun, I want him to try a graphic novel or a book of poetry. If a

When Gene Luen Yang isn't writing award-winning graphic novels, he's challenging young people to "read without walls."



kid normally only reads comics and graphic novels, then I want them to try something with no pictures in it.

Why those three things in particular?

I think I'm interested in diversity in every sense of the word. For the first challenge, to be perfectly transparent, I want to find a way of maybe driving some demand for books that feature diverse characters, that feature characters from non-mainstream backgrounds, from non-mainstream cultures and religious groups.

For topics, I think there's something about reading a topic that you don't know anything about, but by the end of that book you know something. That is empowering. That's happened to me over and over and over again. If I don't know something and I read a book about it, that book is a way of conquering fear for me about that topic.

How do you think that comics in particular might help to work toward that goal of learning new things and perspectives in today's divisive climate?

I have this theory. I have no research to

back this up. This is a cockamamie theory that I came up with out of the top of my head: that comics are an incredibly effective way of bridging cultures. For instance—we're still kind of in the middle of it—there's this craze for Japanese manga. Japanese manga in America is incredibly popular, right?

I think some of that is because comics translate very well from one language to the other. If I were to watch a Japanese live-action movie, it might be subtitled or it might be dubbed. In both of those cases, the experience that I'm getting as an American is kind of different than the original audience gets. If I read a novel that was originally written in Japanese and then translated into English, the experience that I'm getting is filtered through a translator. If I'm reading a Japanese comic, the words are filtered through a translator, but the actual drawings are not. I'm still seeing the movements of a Japanese artist's hands on a page. I think there's something very personal and powerful about it.

I really think the fact that we have so

many Japanese manga fans in America is sort of the tip of a larger iceberg that comics can be a way of bridging cultures.

What would you say to young people out there who, like you did, might be struggling with their identities?

Something that was very powerful for me—and this didn't happen till I was older, till I was in college—was realizing that America is not a single monolithic culture. There's no such thing, really, as American culture. America from the very beginning was designed to be a collection of subcultures. Just because you don't fit in with the subculture that you find yourself in now doesn't mean that there's not a subculture out there, that is truly a part of America, where you'll fit. I would encourage kids who might feel like outsiders in their immediate vicinity to go and look for that, to go and look for that subculture where they belong; look for that subculture that calls to them. ♦

Bell is the senior editor for Teaching Tolerance.

PHOTO BY ALBERT LAW



WHEN HATE CAME TO CHARLOTTESVILLE ...

WE WERE READY



BY CORY COLLINS ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL MARSICANO



*ONE MONTH AFTER THEIR CITY BECAME
A HASHTAG, STUDENTS AT MURRAY HIGH
SCHOOL IN CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA,
ARE BUILDING BIRDHOUSES.*

For some students, it is the first time they've built something with their hands. The process requires care—and time. The students all start with the same raw materials, but each shelter is unique; different birds require different kinds of habitats to thrive.

The birdhouses bear messages intended for the individuals who sought to bring hate into their community. Painted on one: "Humans are born to love."

The naked display of hatred in Charlottesville sent shock waves across the United States. Educators scoured the web for resources to answer the question burning in torch-borne flames: How

do we address this within the classroom? How do we address this within ourselves?

It just so happened that one of the school districts most ready to respond to the crisis was at its epicenter.

On Saturday, August 12, the rally marched past the offices of Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) administrators. The offices were empty, but the staff still felt the presence of the marchers.

"There were tears in my eyes," says Superintendent Pamela Moran, recalling seeing her building on television. "It was almost as if they were insulting the work of the people who are in this community trying to do the very best that we can do for our kids."

That work has been a decade in the making—the result of a districtwide commitment to culturally responsive education led by the Office of Community Engagement and its executive director, Bernard Hairston. Although shaken by the visceral images on the news, ACPS officials found strength in this foundation.

School leaders exchanged phone calls. Long-established plans went into motion.

According to the district's strategic communications officer, Phil Giaramita, this made all the difference.

"There was a value in having these things in place around the issues of diversity and openness and responsiveness," Giaramita says. "And those things, in a crisis situation, really provided a good foundation so we didn't need to do anything special."

That’s because, in Albemarle County, Hairston and others know that building a shelter for all students requires care—and time. The raw materials must be malleable, because the mission calls for it: Different students require different resources to thrive.

“If you don’t have that kind of mindset in place, frankly, there aren’t enough resources anywhere that you can go out and find when the situation is blowing up,” says Student Services Officer Nicholas King. “It’s long-term work.”

And it’s replicable.

The House That Care Built

The work, according to Hairston, began in the early 2000s with an emphasis on Glenn Singleton’s call for courageous conversations about race. But in 2008, the elimination of a district-level position focused on equity and diversity catalyzed a broader movement centered on culturally responsive teaching. Now, instead of one person tasked with promoting equity, the responsibility is shared across a team of trained educators and bolstered by professional development and collaborative meetings focused on best practices.

Each of the district’s 25 schools employs one or more diversity resource teachers (DRTs), and—since the 2015-16

school year—equity teams of various sizes surround those teachers. These teachers meet monthly and evaluate their efficacy at the end of each year. DRTs create workshops and provide supports for teachers in their respective buildings. These supports are tailored to the needs of the students in their schools. The district incentivizes teachers to take a deeper dive into culturally responsive pedagogy by offering a rigorous, one-of-a-kind certification program.

“Part of a culturally responsive teaching model is to make sure that people are able to talk about these issues,” Hairston explains. “And now we’re coming back to those courageous conversations.”

Knowing their students and how to talk to them served teachers like Murray High School’s Catherine Glover well. Her students experienced August 12 in a variety of ways. Some were shielded, taken out of town. Others attended the rally. Most students could put names to faces on the news. For one boy, Marcus Martin is not just the man famously photographed, midair, after saving his fiancée from the oncoming car. He’s “the man who works with Dad.”

Murray High is Albemarle County’s nontraditional school. An underlying mission informs the culture there. As

Moran puts it, “if we really want to effect change and positivism in our communities ... we really have to learn how to shift power from the teacher to the kid.”

At Murray High, unique identities and needs are honored. Conflicts are handled through mediation. The bird-houses now hanging in the hallway are a metaphor for the building around them, itself a microcosm of the district’s goals.

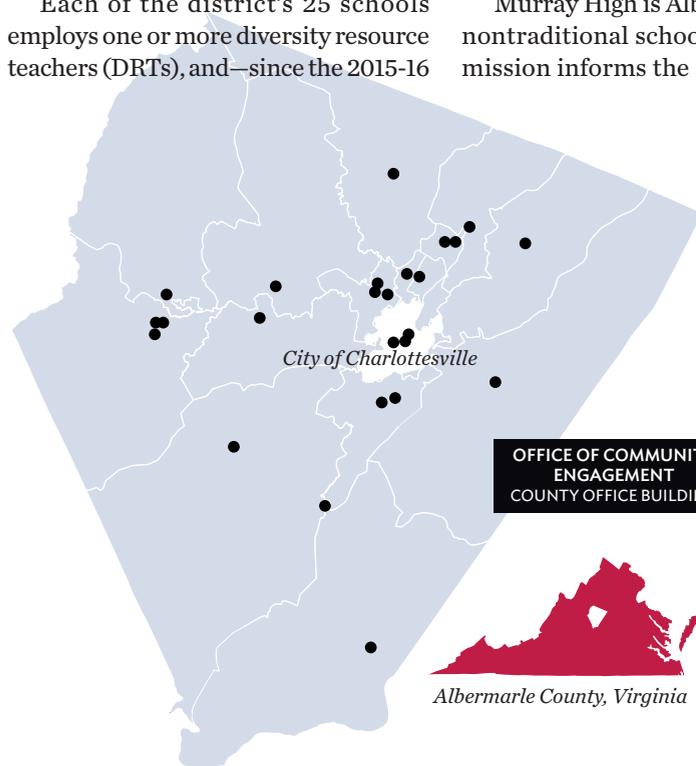
And so—in a nontraditional classroom featuring armchairs and dim lighting—students are talking about what happened on August 12 and the ways to cure what ails a divided United States.

The students start to talk about solutions: modeling behavior and having empathy for how environmental factors can shape people’s perspectives. And you can see the rewards of culturally responsive teaching work in real time.

“Stop hiding from uncomfortable conversations,” one young woman offers. “We’re all one race, the human race; that’s lovely. But we have to address times that everybody isn’t true to that. We can’t let it slip by.”

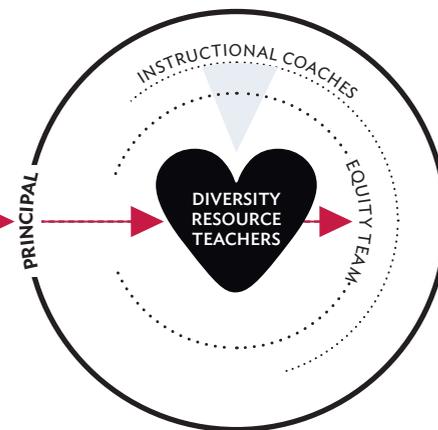
Another student says, meekly, “I wonder if it will ever go back to normal.”

His peer challenges him. “But what is normal?”



Albermarle Equity Model

Culturally responsive practices are infused into each of the district’s **25 schools** in a symbiotic, circular relationship.



The Office of Community Engagement encodes its mission and works with administrators. Each school has at least one diversity resource teacher to enact that mission. Those DRTs have Equity Teams of allied colleagues to help carry it out. And instructional coaches help facilitate PD and monitor teachers adopting culturally responsive practices.

When Nicholas King held a virtual meeting with principals on August 18, he understood that the events of the previous weekend would have a lasting effect on the way students interacted with leadership, activism and politics. School leaders embraced the opportunity to talk about their fears and how to address them.

“We’ve not been one of those places that has had our head in the sand,” King says.

Over the 10 years of equity initiatives, ACPS has responded to many challenges and changes, both in its population and in the surrounding community. Today, students from 95 different countries of origin attend school in the district. The enrollment of English language learners has increased tenfold as compared to student population growth. The district is recognized for its high graduation and low dropout rates, and for its innovative programming. But it keeps going.

As Principal Lisa Molinaro says of Woodbrook Elementary—where the majority of students are children of color and nearly half experience economic disadvantage—“I believe that if we can do it here, we will send a message everywhere else to say it can be done.”

Support at Every Level

Years of advocacy and conversations have created a unified front in Albemarle County, and the ramifications are huge. Equity is the lens through which all decisions are made.

Most importantly, classroom and school leaders engaging in equity work receive support instead of pushback.

“You can’t both hold the power close and also give it away,” Moran says. “It’s the people who try to consolidate power that end up probably having the least influence.”

Instead, district leaders like Hairston, Moran and Deputy Superintendent Matt Haas use their positions to codify the mission of equity into the policies (and budgets) of Albemarle County Schools. The district is even working to make sure all policies pass an equity test.

“It’s kind of a point of departure,” Haas explains. “If you don’t address what your vision is through policy, it is kind of a Wild West where people do whatever they want.”

This approach has helped reduce suspensions across the district and increased the number of social emotional learning specialists in schools with the highest populations of marginalized students. But perhaps the most influential district-level mission is the one that allows teachers to lead the way: Hairston’s credentialing program for culturally responsive teaching.

“When you push something out like culturally responsive teaching, that’s a carrot,” Haas explains. “It’s a program that you can get involved in, feel passionate about.”

The program isn’t easy. Only eight teachers, thus far, have completed the certification. But the positive results are already obvious, as evidenced by the leadership by teachers like Lars Holmstrom, Leslie Wills-Taylor, Brandon Readus, Monica Laux and others; they are spreading the word—by design.

“Everybody’s a teacher and everybody’s a learner,” Moran says. “How [can] the work that Dr. Hairston has put in place with a team of people ... start to go viral?”

That “ever-expanding group” was key to many teachers finding their way forward when #Charlottesville went viral.

“There was an open wound in our town,” Wills-Taylor says. “If I go to the downtown mall, it feels different to me.”

Wills-Taylor spent much of that weekend finding solace in her colleagues, knowing they shared a commitment to providing students a safe, but engaged, space.

After August 12 ...

Albemarle County Public Schools was ready because they had response plans in place. This timeline summarizes the actions district leaders took in the days immediately following the deadly “Unite the Right” rally.

AUGUST 14 ACPS Superintendent Pamela Moran and Charlottesville City School superintendent Rosa Atkins release a joint statement, declaring, “Our schools are where we make acquaintance with civic responsibility.”

AUGUST 15 Instructional coach Lars Holmstrom and TT Award Winner Leslie Wills-Taylor lead professional development sessions, helping teachers in the district to unpack the events of Charlottesville, then bring that conversation into their classrooms.

AUGUST 17 Bernard Hairston, ACPS executive director of community engagement, sends resources to his colleagues. He reiterates the focus on “aligning classroom activities with our core values, excellence, young people, respect and community as well as the benefits that come from culturally responsive teaching strategies.”

AUGUST 18 Nicholas King, ACPS student services officer, holds a virtual meeting with all district principals stressing how staff should respond to personal and student needs after August 12. “It is our responsibility to respond to student needs in a way that is measured, supportive and non-judgmental,” he says.

THE THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING at Albemarle County Public Schools

Communicating and practicing high expectations to empower all students, with an awareness of differing cultural lenses.

Acknowledging and incorporating the relevance of cultural heritages of students into instructional strategies and design.

Building positive relationships with and among students in the context of culture and their communities.

“I had a refuge,” she says. “I had people that I could call and reach out to and figure out how we could use our pedagogy, how we could use our discourse among teachers, to begin to heal.”

So when Wills-Taylor and Holmstrom led professional development sessions the following week, they gave their fellow educators a chance to unpack.

“Before we teach, we reflect,” Wills-Taylor says.

Confronting the fear of addressing August 12 in class helped teachers repack their own reactions and find a comfort zone—because they had to.

“As tragic as this event was,” says Wills-Taylor, “I’m incredibly enthused and excited about what our division has in place to press that ‘activate’ button.

“The tools are here.”

Flattening the Hierarchy

The Office of Community Engagement offers resources to district teachers, including the work of Zaretta Hammond, Teaching Tolerance, EduColor and more.

But Hairston’s work has gone far beyond dropping resources into at-risk environments. A nonprofit he founded helps recruit young teachers of color to Albemarle County, and he offers learning and leadership opportunities to young, culturally responsive teachers so they can more quickly become recognized in the district.

“I think one of the most important things that I really believe in is, how do

you flatten the hierarchy?” Moran says.

Even an abridged tour of Albemarle County’s schools reveals a company of principals and teachers recruited to enact a districtwide commitment to equity *and* to shape and evolve what that commitment looks like.

“I feel confident that I can be put on record to say, yes, that does make my work easier,” says Lisa Molinaro.

And Molinaro’s work isn’t easy. When she became Woodbrook’s principal in 2010, Molinaro encountered a school with kids of color sitting in the hallways and a full-size trailer serving as a suspension center out back. A dozen or more kids spent their entire days there, silent.

“I had arrived to a school that really had its culture stripped,” Molinaro says.

Seven years and an almost entirely different staff later, Woodbrook is barely recognizable. There is no suspension center. There is no classroom with traditional, industrial seating. Across the building, staff share a collective mission to serve a diverse student population responsively.

“It’s no longer a single voice,” Molinaro says of the culturally responsive teaching effort. “I have, I don’t know, 18 classroom teachers, a staff of roughly 45 and our diversity resource team is 20 people. And they’re there because they want to be there.”

Before moving into an administrative role, Wills-Taylor taught at Woodbrook. After the events of August 12, she wonders how the school and district might have

responded without the current support system in place.

“I honestly can’t imagine it,” she says, explaining the domino effect that spreads best practices from professional development to diversity resource teachers to instructional coaches to schools across the district.

That network of educators empowered Catherine Glover to respond to the events of August 12 with urgency.

“I felt more strongly than ever that ... the fact that we are a community is going to sustain us,” Glover says.

Looking Forward

At ACPS, they now call the “Unite the Right” rally “what happened on August 12”—an attempt to disempower white supremacists and nationalists by omission.

“When people hear the term *Charlottesville*, their immediate association with that is intolerance and divisiveness,” Giaramita says. “It’s not representative of our school division. And we don’t want to be defined by that.”

The work of educators in Charlottesville is helping the next generation define their values and the types of schools they want to attend. When they go out into the community, when they listen and empower diverse voices, when they emphasize the importance of context and empathy—it trickles down.

And so the students at Murray High have ideas as to how they can halt hate before it marches again.

“Taking ownership of your community,” one girl says.

“Care,” another boy adds. “Just do small things. Make sure people are cared for.”

Different students have different ideas about how to inoculate their community against hate. But outside in the hallway, the birdhouses communicate a common message: Hate does not belong in Murray High or in ACPS or in Charlottesville—because humans were born to love. ♦

Collins is the senior writer for Teaching Tolerance.

RESPONDING TO HATE AND BIAS

If a hateful event happened in your school or community, would you be ready? Create a plan with our resource, *Responding to Hate and Bias at School*.





Why *Mendez* Still Matters

Meet the school desegregation case that still affects ELL instruction today.

BY JOSH MOON

THE STORY OF SOLEDAD VIDAURRI and her brother, Gonzalo Mendez, should have had a happy ending. That might explain why it's almost always given one when it's mentioned in American history classes.

In the mid-1940s, Vidaurri went to enroll her three children and her brother's three children in a California elementary school. Her children, with their light complexions and French surname, were enrolled easily. But Mendez's children, who had darker skin and a Spanish surname, were relegated to the school for Mexican immigrants.

Vidaurri refused to enroll any of the children. Mendez identified four other fathers in similar circumstances, and together they filed a federal lawsuit against the district, alleging it was in violation of state laws prohibiting school segregation based on race. The district quickly folded and offered Mendez a compromise: We'll enroll your kids—and only your kids—if you drop the lawsuit. Mendez turned it down.

In 1947, a full seven years before *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, Mendez and the other plaintiffs struck one of the earliest blows against school segregation

when a federal court in California ruled that the segregation was illegal.

It was a great victory, a precursor to the *Brown* decision and a landmark triumph in the fight for Mexican-American civil rights. At least, that's the simplified synopsis—one that, as Michigan State University Professor Maribel Santiago puts it, fits nicely with our country's collective tendency to view the civil rights movement as a model of constant progress instead of acknowledging the starts, stops, stutters and backward steps that slow any movement toward equality.

► *Gonzalo Mendez Jr.'s second-grade class picture from the 17th Street School in Westminster, California. Gonzalo was allowed to enroll in 17th Street after his father (along with Thomas Estrada, William Guzman, Frank Palomino and Lorenzo Ramirez) brought suit against the city of Westminster.*

The Legacy of Mendez

While the *Mendez* case was certainly not a step backward, neither was it the analogue of *Brown* it's sometimes understood to be.

For one thing, the ruling applied only within the boundaries of the Ninth Circuit. While the *Mendez* decision was referenced in later court cases, it did not hold the national authority of a Supreme Court decision like *Brown*. More significantly, the court did not ban racial segregation with *Mendez*; it only determined that Orange County officials had imposed a form of segregation that California law did not allow. The court ruled against the district because, in California at the time, Mexicans were considered white. Had the Mendez children been Asian, for example, the outcome might have been different. The constitutionality of racial segregation in schools—the larger question the U.S. Supreme Court would have to answer in *Brown*—was not under scrutiny in this case. (California did pass a law shortly after *Mendez* outlawing racial segregation in schools.)

To recognize the limits of the *Mendez* ruling is not to suggest that the case is unimportant. On the contrary, a key reason to study *Mendez* today relates to *another* persistent means of school segregation: language-based separation. After *Mendez*, schools in the Ninth Circuit could no longer segregate children on the basis of their Mexican ancestry. Left unanswered was the question of whether those same children could be segregated based on specific learning needs, such as English language learning.

Many state and school officials at the time argued that Mexican-American students who struggled to understand English needed special training. While Spanish-speaking students *did* receive focused language training, they were also isolated from their peers and unable to consistently attend the classes in math, science and history that would allow them to stay



Top Left: Lorenzo, Ignacio, Josephina and Silvino Ramirez of El Modena, California, in 1935. Lorenzo Ramirez (far left) was one of five plaintiffs in the Mendez case. Top Right: Gonzalo Mendez Sr. and Felicitas Mendez with their son, Gonzalo Mendez Jr. Bottom Left: Arthur Palomino, age 7, son of Mendez plaintiff Frank Palomino.

on grade level. Over time, they fell further and further behind their English-speaking classmates.

The question the *Mendez* ruling failed to address still challenges schools—and courts—today: How can schools ensure equal education to non-English-speaking students without segregating them?

“All of these years later, we know what the research says, but the law has not entirely caught up with the research,” said attorney Zoe Savitsky, a deputy legal director at the Southern Poverty Law Center who has litigated several cases on behalf of English language learners (ELLs). “Education researchers know that it is not just possible but *better* for ELLs to teach them in settings where they interact regularly with their English-speaking peers. I think it speaks to the complexity of the issues that there were all of these really

progressive victories in the 1940s and we’re still litigating these issues today.”

Litigating Toward Equity

Beginning in the late 1960s, states with high numbers of Spanish-speaking students witnessed an endless string of lawsuits, all aimed at either expanding or diminishing programs that helped English language learners better assimilate (the assumed goal for ELLs at the time). Those lawsuits and the resulting rulings didn’t provide perfect answers, but they shaped the basic expectations of what public schools need to provide when it comes to educating ELLs.

One of the earliest was the 1974 U.S. Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols*, which originated in San Francisco. Several Chinese-American students filed a lawsuit because the school district had implemented no language courses for ELLs. The district, on the

COURTESY OF THE LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION, ORANGE PUBLIC LIBRARY, ORANGE, CA (RAMIREZ FAMILY); COURTESY OF THE MENDEZ FAMILY (MENDEZ FAMILY); COURTESY OF THE FRANK M. PLEASANT LIBRARY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES, LEATHERBY LIBRARIES AT CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY (PALOMINO)



other hand, took the position that by *not* offering special classes, they were treating Asian-American students equally.

The Supreme Court disagreed: “[S]tudents who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education,” Justice William Douglas wrote for the majority. “We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful.”

The *Lau* opinion had lasting influence and, years later, resulted in the U.S. Department of Education establishing a number of ELL guidelines requiring schools to identify English language learners, establish a timeline for leveling and placing students, identify teachers’ standards and determine a best course of action. *Lau* also resulted in the Department of Education’s Civil Rights Division updating its anti-discrimination policy to include discrimination based on language.

“Basically, *Lau* made it clear that you couldn’t just sit a non-English-speaking student in a classroom and pretend that all is OK,” Savitsky said. “There had to be a good-faith effort to educate the students.”

But what the *Lau* case didn’t—and couldn’t—do was establish clear ways for districts to meet the new guidelines. After all, it’s one thing to say that all ELLs must be educated properly. It’s quite another to juggle the educational needs of hundreds or thousands of students, especially in high-poverty school districts.

Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, New York, California and other states have dealt with federal lawsuits over the ambiguity that has lingered since the *Mendez* and *Lau* rulings. There have been lawsuits over the availability of ELL courses, the degree of segregation imposed by ELL programs, the quality of instruction, the effectiveness of the programs and the state resources devoted to them.

In some of these cases, courts have recognized fundamental requirements for ELL instruction. Most derive from *Castaneda v. Pickard*, a 1981 case in which the Fifth Circuit held that, at a minimum, ELL programs had to be based on sound



The Importance of Teaching *Mendez*

Mendez v. Westminster has gone largely unrecognized in history instruction. If it is mentioned at all, the case is often tagged as a precursor to the civil rights movement or as the Mexican-American version of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

“We have a tendency in the U.S., especially in our classrooms, to believe that the country is always moving forward, always improving, always getting better,” Michigan State University Professor Dr. Maribel Santiago says. “That isn’t always the case, as we see with our current climate. Teaching the *Mendez* case as if it’s the Mexican-American version of *Brown* fits that narrative nicely. It makes people feel good. It’s easy to understand. But it is not accurate.”

Santiago is on a mission to do two things: 1) Get the *Mendez* case into the lesson plans of history teachers, and 2) make sure the case is taught properly, with all of the nuance left in.

The *Mendez* case definitely has nuance to spare. In addition to the court unintentionally endorsing the legality of language-based segregation, the plaintiffs’ lawyers appealed to laws that, at the time, classified Mexican-American students as white people. In other words, a case that is often characterized as a blow against racial segregation is actually an example of a case that staked its success on a claim of what we now call white privilege.

The details of the case, Santiago believes, can draw in Mexican-American and other Latinx students.

In her paper “Erasing Difference for the Sake of Inclusion: How Mexican/Mexican Americans Construct Historical Narratives,” Santiago encourages teaching more specific lessons about Mexican-American history and including the nuanced account of those events as a way to increase relevance and spark engagement.

Santiago’s goal is to provide teachers with lessons that dig into the complexities of the *Mendez* case.

“This has to start with the teachers, because otherwise it’s up to state legislatures and state laws, and that ship just moves too slowly,” she says. “Even in California, a state with a large Latinx population, it took nearly 20 years to change the curriculum. We have to stress this to teachers, to impress upon them the importance of this history.”

“Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the educational program, he must already have acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education.”

—Justice William O. Douglas on behalf of a unanimous United States Supreme Court in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974)

educational theory *and* had to work in practice. Many courts across the country have adopted this twofold standard for ELL programs in their own states.

Some of the programs that end up in court are implemented and taught by talented and well-meaning administrators and teachers. Often referred to as “immersion programs,” they generally require that students spend up to five hours per day essentially segregated from their English-speaking peers.

This segregation can be traumatic for immigrant students, who are already more likely to experience both racial and economic segregation. Because they are missing instructional time in their other subjects, students in these programs can also fall behind in their courses. Described by University of Texas Professor Jennifer Keys Adair as “multi-layered discrimination,” the segregation enforced by these programs could dramatically lower students’ self-worth and result in serious academic and behavioral issues later in their education.

In her work on migration policy, Adair also points out that the segregation and discrimination experienced by some ELLs is *not* the unfortunate result of well-meaning teachers and administrators.

“A 2003 class-action suit on behalf of poor children in California highlighted the state’s use of inferior facilities and curricula, and poorly designed assessment instruments to teach ELL children,” Adair writes. “Studies of children

of Latino immigrants have found they are more likely to attend elementary schools in high-poverty areas that struggle with less-experienced and less-skilled teachers, fewer resources, and lower-than-average academic outcomes than their white, U.S.-born peers.”

There is no indication that a uniform solution is likely in the near future. Several border states are currently dealing with at least one lawsuit over ELL courses, and across the United States more lawsuits are popping up regularly. As recently as July 2017, for example, a Thai student sued St. Paul Public Schools in Minnesota, alleging that he had been placed in regular high school courses despite being able to read at only a second-grade level.

Toward a Culturally Responsive Solution

Nearly 75 years after Soledad Vidaurri and Gonzalo Mendez attempted to enroll their children in school, questions about language segregation remain unresolved. The legal battles, however, have made one thing clear: The courts might be able to determine the minimum threshold for services, but they are *not* the most effective system for establishing best practices.

Culturally responsive educators who work with English language learners have long held that, while these young people need differentiation, they also need to learn alongside their peers. The Teaching Tolerance publication *Best Practices for Serving English Language Learners and Their Families*

offers the following suggestions for how to balance social inclusion with robust language learning opportunities:

Limit pull-out instruction time. Pulling ELLs out of class for separate instruction limits contact time with peers. Students who spend a significant amount of time outside of the classroom are put at a disadvantage for forming new friendships and learning new skills.

Level the playing field. Provide leveled reading material in a student’s native language, and be sure to give ELLs the same curriculum that everyone else is using. English language learners may need additional scaffolding or alternative texts, but everyone should be given access to the same essential questions, learning targets and enduring understandings.

Make the curriculum relevant. Embed stories, readings and perspectives that focus on history, immigration and community into the units you teach. This will create opportunities to bring personal stories to the classroom. Including these perspectives shows students how their lives can also be read as a part of a larger American story of the history of shifting borders and movements of people.

Use a variety of teaching modalities. Movement, call-and-response, claps, stomps, chants and cheers are all ways to get—and keep—the attention of students who may not understand every word. These approaches also offer opportunities to make memorable connections to the curriculum.

The same solution may not work for every school or for every ELL population, but equitable solutions *are* possible. Through research, ingenuity and conversations with students and families, the equal educational opportunities Soledad Vidaurri and Gonzalo Mendez once sought for their children can one day become a reality. ♦

Moon is an award-winning columnist and investigative reporter working in Montgomery, Alabama.



CELEBRATE MAYA ANGELOU!

IN OBSERVANCE OF WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN HER 90TH BIRTHDAY, TAKE A MOMENT TO INTRODUCE YOUR STUDENTS TO **LEGENDARY WRITER AND ACTIVIST** MAYA ANGELOU.

Who Is Maya Angelou to You?

Ask five people who Maya Angelou was, and you're apt to get five different answers. Over the 86 years of her life, she pushed the world toward a more equitable future through her work as a poet, civil rights activist, essayist, director, editor, playwright, dancer, singer, actor, composer and historian.

In April of 2018, Angelou would have celebrated her 90th birthday. What better time to introduce your students to a woman who overcame tremendous obstacles to become a leader in the fight against injustice and inequity?

Still I Rise

Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.



The Power of Poetry

When Amanda Jensen saw her third- and fourth-graders struggling to process feelings of fear and uncertainty during the 2016 election, she decided to get them thinking and talking about power and agency. Armed with a shelf full of books about diverse leaders, Jensen set out to teach her students about people who have made a difference in times of adversity.

In the process, she found that kids were particularly drawn to one person—Maya Angelou. “There’s something about that poem, ‘Still I Rise,’” says Jensen. “Once you find its meaning and make connections with it, it’s a poem that stays with you forever.”

Knowing that her class had engaged well with art projects in the past, Jensen decided to use art to help students connect with the message of empowerment in Angelou’s poem. She asked students to read a portion of the poem, explain what they thought the passage meant and how it made them feel, and then illustrate their thoughts.

Jensen says the reactions to Angelou’s poem were inspiring. “I think what she is trying to say is that nothing can stop her. And whatever

happens, she will keep on going and going,” wrote one student. “This makes me think she’s saying she won’t give up. It makes me feel confident. She makes me feel strong,” wrote another.

The project became collaborative as students took the concepts from their personal illustrations and added them to a large class mural featuring Angelou’s poetry in both English and Spanish. By the time everyone had contributed to the painting, it was almost too heavy to hang, says Jensen.

The mural still hangs in the hallway outside Jensen’s classroom where it can continue to help students to see themselves as “active members working toward an inclusive, empowering, affirming and safe world for all.”

EDUCATOR
SPOTLIGHT

“The poem makes me feel stronger than I am right now. It also makes me feel that I can do more than I can right now.”

— ELEMENTARY STUDENT



A GRANDSON'S PERSPECTIVE

COLIN JOHNSON, Angelou's grandson, was at his grandmother's side at just about every event she attended during the last 25 years of her life, he says. She—and her friends—called him “The Grand.”

In celebration of what would have been Angelou's 90th birthday, Johnson spoke to Teaching Tolerance about who Angelou was when she was outside of the public eye.

What would you like people to know about your grandmother that can't be gleaned from a biography citing her work and awards?

There are plenty of people who have gotten the individual awards she has gotten. ... But the difference for me is the way in which my grandmother did it and her style and spirit while doing it. She had an amazing laugh and a singing voice that was full of life. And after the tough life she lived, it's just amazing the spirit that she kept.

We talk about my grandmother finding her voice twice: first after her mutism and then, once she grew up and had the number of experiences that she had, the voice that rose in her that would never be quieted. She felt like injustice and inequality were just not right for this world. ... And she believed even before this phrase was popular that art is action, that you can move mountains, and you can move people, through your art form and giving truth.

Angelou is well known as both a poet and activist, but perhaps less well known as an educator.

How did she turn art into action in the classroom?

What she said is that she thought for a long time that she was a writer that could teach, and eventually she realized that she was a teacher who could write. ... My grandmother believed that books were freedom from ignorance and that they could transport you anywhere. And in that very moment, when you transfer someone to West Africa or Egypt or Rome or London, you are taking action in that kid's life and exposing them to something and somebody else's ideas and the beauty that comes from everywhere and everybody's writing.

What would you say to students to help them realize the world your grandmother worked to create?

I would say that if you live with an open heart and you trust your gut and you love hard, you're probably going to live an amazing life. And the only problems in life really come when you become calloused and you start to be jaded about what the opportunities in this world are and that people are innately great. Period. Everybody is innately great. Things might happen to them and make them worse people, bad people. ... But in the heart of everybody is a really great person and everybody wants about the same thing you do. They want to eat, raise their kids, be successful, laugh a little bit, love a little bit. That's it. ♦

Pettway is a freelance writer and poet. She lives in Shanghai, China.



THE LIFE OF A LEGEND

1928 Maya Angelou is born Marguerite Annie Johnson Angelou in St. Louis, Missouri.

1935 Loses her ability to speak after being sexually assaulted by her mother's boyfriend, who is subsequently killed.

1940 Regains her voice with the help of mentor Bertha Flowers.

1945 Graduates from George Washington High School in San Francisco and gives birth to a son; becomes the first black female street car conductor in the city.

1954-1955 Tours the country as a cast member in the musical *Porgy and Bess*.

1959 Becomes the northern coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

1961-1962 Becomes associate editor of *The Arab Observer* in Cairo, Egypt.

1964 Helps found the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).

1964-1966 Moves to Accra, Ghana, and becomes feature editor for *African Review*.

1969 Publishes her memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

1972 Becomes the first African-American woman to have a screenplay produced (*Georgia, Georgia*); *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diie* is nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

1973 Receives Tony Award nomination for *Look Away*.

1974 Returns to the United States.

1977 Is nominated for an Emmy Award after working on the TV miniseries *Roots*.

1982 Receives a lifetime appointment as Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University.

1993 Reads “On the Pulse of the Morning” at Bill Clinton's inauguration.

1998 Directs *Down in the Delta*.

2000 Receives a National Medal of Arts.

2005 Receives NAACP Image Award for *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table*.

2009 Receives NAACP Image Award for *Letter to My Daughter*.

2010 Receives Presidential Medal of Freedom.

2014 Maya Angelou passes away at the age of 86.



Teaching Hard History

EDUCATORS TALK ABOUT HOW TO TEACH AMERICAN SLAVERY

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY **ADRIENNE VAN DER VALK** ILLUSTRATION BY **SAM WARD**

A terrible legacy of slavery and white supremacy undeniably influences life in the United States today. It is present in the U.S. system of mass incarceration, in police violence against black citizens, and in white society's acceptance of poverty and poor educational opportunities for people of color. Learning about this country's history of slavery and white supremacy is essential if we are ever to bridge the racial differences that continue to divide our nation.

Unfortunately, even as more and more teachers rise to the challenge of teaching about racism and racial justice, many struggle to teach effectively and responsibly about slavery—the institution that poured racism into our national foundation. The subject material is undeniably complex and difficult; when we talk about slavery, we are talking about hundreds of years of institutionalized violence against millions of people. Their descendants—and those of the people who benefitted from their forced labor—sit in our classrooms. And even though educators may strive for robust conversations about this topic, they are poorly served by state standards and frameworks, popular textbooks and their own history instruction. Compounding these factors is the reality that there is no consensus among experts on how to teach about slavery,

plenty of questionable lessons online, and only a patchwork of solid advice offered by interpretive centers, museums and professional organizations.

Teaching Hard History

How can we fill this void? Teaching Tolerance recently conducted a review of available materials and asked thousands of teachers, students and researchers to tell us what they knew and what they needed to know about this critical topic. Based on this research, we developed a collection of materials titled *Teaching Hard History*, rolling out in February of 2018. The collection features a library of texts, a set of inquiry design models and a podcast, all focused on best practices for effective and responsive teaching about slavery and white supremacy, and all vetted by an advisory board of leading scholars in the field. The

As a result of our investigation, we identified several guiding principles for teaching about slavery:

Teach that slavery is foundational.

Slavery defined the nature and limits of American liberty; it significantly influenced the creation and development of major political and social institutions; and it was a cornerstone of the American prosperity that fueled our industrial revolution.

Acknowledge that slavery existed in the North and the South.

Slavery was legal in every one of the colonies that declared independence in 1776. Fewer than half (44 percent) of the high school seniors we surveyed knew that.

Talk explicitly about racism and white supremacy.

White supremacy provided the oxygen slavery required to persist—yet none of the 15 sets of state standards we reviewed for this report mentioned racism or white supremacy in the context of the history of slavery.

Rely on responsive pedagogy that is well suited to the topic.

When we asked teachers to tell us about their favorite lessons when teaching about slavery, dozens described classroom simulations, which are inappropriate for teaching about the deeply traumatic events surrounding enslavement.

Center the black experience. Our tendency is to focus on what motivated the white actors within the system of chattel slavery. But, whether discussing the political, economic or social implications, the experiences of enslaved people must remain at the center of the conversation to do this topic justice.

Connect to the present. Teach about the influences of African culture that still surround us. Point to examples of structural racism that can be traced back to slavery and white supremacy. Students must understand the scope and lasting impact of enslavement to gain a complete understanding of this history.

materials hinge on an original framework for teaching about slavery and white supremacy—the first of its kind—that we hope will influence textbook publishers, state standards and anyone who writes or teaches about this history.

Teachers Talk

Meet four secondary educators whose teaching about slavery reflects the principles of *Teaching Hard History*: Laura Baines-Walsh of Brookline, Massachusetts; Jackie Katz of Wellesley, Massachusetts; Ryan New of Danville, Kentucky; and Kevin Toro of Arlington, Massachusetts.

We assembled these innovative educators to discuss how they teach about slavery with their predominantly white students. (As part of the *Teaching Hard History* initiative, we'll be publishing a series of similar discussions with teachers who teach predominantly African-American students and teachers who teach in racially diverse classrooms.)

As you've gained experience as an educator, how has your approach to teaching about slavery changed?

RYAN: I've found that using sources, especially with an inquiry, forces students to have to figure things out for themselves. They have to deal with the fact that the source says this thing and there's nobody else telling them what to think. I was finding that students had a hard time distinguishing between my thoughts on something and what the history was. And so by pulling back, becoming much more of a facilitator, and allowing the sources to speak for themselves. I can then be a person who's going to prod them with questions or introduce new sources that will challenge their points of view.

KEVIN: Getting a clear and precise history I think is so important to teaching this. We teach the economic reasons for slavery when we start out, and the reason why it started being this massive agricultural need and how that compares with a sort of narrative going out now about

workers coming over to this country. We talk about all those things so that my students feel prepared to discuss this, I think as all of our students want to, as historians at the end of the day.

Jackie: A huge shift for me has been shifting from teaching slavery as victimization to agency and trying to find ways to incorporate ways that enslaved people tried to change their own situation, so that I wasn't just presenting negative stories where they're just the victims all the time. [Without that shift] it becomes problematic; it almost seems like, "Well then it's white people's jobs to save black people. Because they're the victim."

Can you describe one of the most challenging moments you've had while teaching about slavery?

JACKIE: A challenging moment that comes up frequently is when students say, "Oh, well it doesn't sound that bad." Because I think the double-edged sword of teaching about agency is all of a sudden, kids are like, "Oh, well then they can run away." Or, "Oh, they can collect coins." Or, "Oh, they sing songs, so everything's fine." I have kids all the time who say things about how, "Oh, well this wasn't so bad. See how Douglass was able to get away."

So I think trying to predict how kids are going to respond to the primary and secondary sources and be able to have enough strategies that you can redirect them toward what was a horrible institution is really important.

LAURA: One of the things that keeps coming up is this idea of, "This is so awful, it can't possibly have happened. Why didn't they just realize this was wrong and stop?" Or, they want there to be the good master. "Was Jefferson nice to his slaves? What about Washington?" Like they're looking for some sort of good guy in this. And trying to find a way to talk to them in a developmentally appropriate way, so we're not overwhelming them, but also bringing them to the awful truth that, even if a master wasn't whipping their slave, they

are depriving them of bodily autonomy. And there is not a kind way to do that. So bringing them to that is a very difficult thing, while also, like Jackie, looking for places of agency. Slaves were more than just property. They were wives and husbands and children, Christians and Muslims. And so trying to get that wide variety of slave experience.

What you have noticed that your African-American students need from you? And, for the white teachers in the discussion, do you feel like that's different for you as a white teacher?

RYAN: Because we have such a large white population and such a small black population, oftentimes I have one or maybe two black students in my class. There's always a difficult moment where I have to pull the student aside and be like, "Look. We're going to be talking about some issues and everybody's going to look to you, and you don't have to speak on behalf of everybody else." That's always an issue. ... So the biggest, biggest issue for me is figuring out how to disrupt the narrative in a way that's effective, but also safe for all of the students.

JACKIE: My mom's from the Philippines. I identify to my students so that they know where I'm coming from and where my perspectives lie when I start off the year.

I've made mistakes where I've put feelings on to [students of color]. Like I've said, "You might be uncomfortable because we're going to be learning about slavery," instead of just posing more open-ended questions, like, "Do you have any concerns as we approach this unit? Are there things you might

be worried about?" Students need to have a lot of space to have so many different reactions. And that they need their teachers to just be accepting of any reaction that they have.

KEVIN: It's super interesting because I was that kid for a while, sitting in class, and now I'm obviously a teacher of color.

[I]n Arlington we have a lot of white students. A majority, by far. But I have had students of color in my room while I'm teaching these subjects. And it hasn't come up as a problem to me so far, but ...



it may be because I am the black teacher in the room and they're looking to me for that, instead of the students themselves.

I also preface these standards, when we have discussions, speaking from the *I*, not speaking for *everyone*. I do preface [with] a lot of my own personal troubles with race as I've gone through my life, so we do talk about these sometimes-awkward moments when I was asked to talk or speak for all black people or speak for all Hispanics.

What groundwork do you lay before

broaching this topic with students?

RYAN: I show them all these beautiful cities, and I sa[y], "Tell me the name of this city and if you can't get the name of the city, maybe where it's from, maybe a continent or something like that." And every single one of [the cities], of course, is in Africa. And no student in the 20 students that I have, none of them identified the continent of Africa for any of the cities. And we had a conversation about this. And I think that you're never going to be able to talk

about slavery in a very meaningful way if people don't see Africans as people first, and that they were just as equally capable in every single way.

JACKIE: I'd say some of that groundwork happens with just talking about issues of power and privilege and equity and hierarchy with things that are super safe and innocuous. I talk initially about how hierarchies were set up in the colonies. Because kids don't have a lot invested in that. But if they can understand that those hierarchies existed early on, if you start with stuff that's

not heavy, it takes the defensiveness away from kids. When you get to stuff that's like, "This is a legacy that you are living in," it feels a little safer than if you just start with, "You live in a racist country, it's been racist since its founding."

KEVIN: By the time we talk about [slavery] in my class, they've gone through the ideas of inequity, inequality, and the fact of the matter is, even though they know that people will use other people, the greed, all these bad things that people do throughout history that we're all so well acquainted with, so that when

the time comes to get to slavery, and we're talking about how that leads up to civil rights, they are equipped to talk about how someone could feel like they own someone else and then breed a certain race for agricultural means and profit off of that and really stick to that.

LAURA: My groundwork begins in the summer, with their summer reading book. They read *Hang a Thousand Trees With Ribbons*. It's a historical fiction about Phillis Wheatley, the first black woman published in the New World for her poetry. She's great for my school because she's 13 years old, she's a black girl, a slave, and she's living in Boston. What I like about this book is it introduces us to Africa, that people in Africa had families and they loved each other. It introduces us to human evil that is everywhere. And it teaches the girls that, here is this black girl who's like you, who has the same wants, needs, desires, academic ambitions that they do, but that her life is being defined in some ways by this incredibly evil institution. Even as her owners are kind to her, she still has to deal with oppression. That's one of the things that I try very hard to do, is to make everybody that we study human.

What advice do you have for teachers who are uncomfortable teaching about slavery?

LAURA: Because my students are so young and they're northerners, they often want to think [slavery was] a Southern problem. Or they're really curious about "How could Northerners allow this to happen?"

And so one of the things I like talking about is the fact that most of them own clothes that were made in Bangladesh or an iPhone that was made in a sweatshop in China. Did they consider that? Did they worry about that? Are they writing their elected officials or boycotting Apple? And again, not to put white guilt onto them, per se, but to have them look at the complexity of these issues. And at the end of the day, they probably bought the T-shirt that was cheapest, without

"Get drenched in the content because, once you're in it, it is so clear how so many of the problems that we face in the United States stem from our founding period as a slave nation."

worrying about where it was made. So that's one of the ways I try to connect it to current social justice issues.

JACKIE: There's a lot at stake if your discomfort with teaching about slavery makes you not do it or do it in a way that's really superficial. The disservice that you're doing to students is greater than the mistakes you might make when you try teaching it and sometimes fail. We're all going to make mistakes teaching, but be reflective about where is your discomfort coming from.

I would say get drenched in the content because, once you're in it, it is so clear how so many of the problems that we face in the United States, not only with race, but also with how we treat women and how we deal with labor, stem from our founding period as a slave nation.

KEVIN: We see a legacy that lasts, and is so prevalent in just everything that we are doing today. I see it less as pieces of history that are separated than [as] chapters in the same book. You can't mention a time in this country where racism and the effects of slavery haven't been full force. We come out of [slavery]; we get Jim Crow. We come out of Jim Crow; we get the prison-industrial complex. Some would argue that the civil rights movement is still going on today. This is just the next chapter in this book that we're in. And so, in talking about slavery, the connections to today, for me, are so obvious.

When teachers ask me about this stuff and how to teach about it, I feel like the best way to really start is to really, just like Jackie said, dig in and learn everything there and then get ready. Get

ready for the struggles, right? Even I've had struggles as a black teacher teaching about slavery. Sometimes I feel like I'm almost militant in class. Which I feel like I've scared away some students from the subject. And not to be an apologist, but there is a certain balance there that I need to check, especially when teaching to white students who may not open up to me because they feel like I'll yell at them because of it.

RYAN: [T]he advice I would give to teachers is to make a clear distinction between heritage and history. And this is something I do at the very beginning of my year for all my classes. So that heritage is the celebration of, the unquestioning of, it's exactly what it is that we *don't* want to do. That history is very critical, it's full of questions, it's filled with discomfort.

[W]e just had a monument that was removed in Lexington; it was a big deal. We actually have a Confederate monument down the street here at Centre College. No one's made a big deal about it yet, but being able to have [conversations] about, "Well, that's not really history. That's more heritage. Let's talk about heritage. Where are all the ... monuments to slaves who had to endure this? Martin Luther King Jr. marched on Frankfort, which is our capital, but there's no monument to Martin Luther King Jr." So it's getting into this larger conversation about how it is that we're going to view what we view. I think it's very important for teachers to do this, specifically, being able to cleave between what heritage means and what it represents and what history's about.

JACKIE: You need to be comfortable talking about race, and it's OK to say *black* and *white* and talk about skin color—and those things matter. And I think that if you're going to be uncomfortable talking about that, you're not going to be effective talking about slavery. So get comfortable with naming skin color, naming race, because it does matter. ♦

van der Valk is the deputy director for Teaching Tolerance.

An illustration of a classroom. In the foreground, the back of a Black woman with a large afro hairstyle is shown, wearing a brown and orange striped dress. She is looking towards a group of white students seated in rows of wooden desks. The students are depicted in various poses, some looking towards the front, some looking away, and some with neutral or thoughtful expressions. The background features abstract yellow and orange curved lines. The text "I've never experienced white guilt" is written in white, with "I've" in a cursive font and "never experienced white guilt" in a sans-serif font, all set against the woman's afro.

“I’ve
never experienced
white
guilt”

How does a black woman teach her all-white class about racism and racial privilege?

BY SARAH L. WEBB ILLUSTRATION BY LOVEIS WISE

“IS THAT, LIKE, white guilt?” asks a student in my sophomore writing class. The small class is composed of only white students. I, a dark-skinned black woman, look around the circle, throw my hands up and say, “I don’t know. I’ve never experienced white guilt.” My students and I get a good laugh from this and continue with our discussion.

I return to that moment now as an example of the question I had asked myself since the day I began planning the class: How does someone like me teach a class of white students about racism and racial privilege?

In discussions about this topic, I most often hear such questions posed by or for white teachers. The assumption might be that, as racial minorities, teachers of color are naturally better prepared to talk to students about racial issues. It’s not often enough that we examine the difficulties educators of color might face in teaching about race, ethnicity and privilege, particularly in predominantly white settings. While I don’t speak for all teachers of color, there is a set of unique challenges we often face. These are the challenges as I see them—and my general approach to clearing those hurdles last school year.

Anticipating Bias

All teachers must learn to effectively position themselves within the learning environment, but our white and/or male colleagues do not have the added burden of combating certain negative cultural stereotypes that discredit their intelligence and overall professional competence. As women of color, we have to climb the additional hurdles of



racial and gender stereotypes in order to reach and connect with students in meaningful ways.

Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith write in their introduction to *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* that “our oppression as Black women can take on forms specifically aimed at discrediting our intellectual power.” Other writers, such as Jacqueline Jones Royster and Karla FC Holloway, have written about the common skepticism and disbelief of black women’s testimonies, arguments and general credibility.

These biases are likely to exist regardless of the race or ethnicity of the students and regardless of the subject matter of the course. However, these challenges become more complicated when racism and privilege are the subjects, as was often the case in my class. The bias itself is one thing, but the mere anticipation of bias, for some teachers who are women of color, is a challenge in and of itself. Why do I anticipate this bias in the first place? Where do my doubts stem from?

My anxieties as a teacher come from my experiences as a student, particularly in college and graduate school.



prepare for class feeling empowered instead of anxious (although the butterflies never really go away).

Letting White People Talk About Race

While white teachers sometimes say they struggle to relate to racial oppression and certain lived experiences of their students of color, as a black teacher, *I can't relate to white privilege*—or “white guilt,” as my student’s question revealed last year. My own experiences may limit, though not entirely inhibit, the support I’m able to offer white students in their processes of understanding racism and racial privilege.

My approach was to bring in white people, in person or via their writing, who have done useful work on race and racism. Some might find this counterintuitive, and there are certainly people who would disagree with this tactic. But I think it works, particularly when you are trying to address an aspect of the racial reality that white people live in—a reality that certainly includes white privilege and may include white guilt as well.

No Hidden Agendas

In addition to general racial stereotypes, when black teachers talk about racial issues, others might assume a high level of racial bias on the part of the teacher. White students who have not engaged in critical discussions about race and racism might assume that black teachers are being “too sensitive” or that we cannot be objective about the issue. While no racial or ethnic group is “neutral” in discussions about race, people of color are typically the ones suspiciously viewed as having personal agendas.

I recall overhearing white male classmates at a public Mississippi university openly discussing their disapproval of an architecture professor who taught about global systems of oppression—as if *she* couldn’t possibly know and understand the facts of history. I recall seeing some of my black women professors at public universities in Louisiana and private colleges in California under threat of losing their jobs due to the dissatisfaction of their white students. I recall two cisgender white men in my Shakespeare class, after a semester of their building resentment for the queer woman

professor, erupt in a loud and abusive temper tantrum. Painfully, I recall feeling unheard, patronized and dismissed by my peers, most often white men, in spaces ranging from academic seminars to my own Facebook page. And I subconsciously carry all of these memories with me when I step into the classroom.

My coping strategy was to embrace my anticipation of bias as a planning tool. In planning for the day-to-day activities of the class, I strategized against bias the same way we teachers strategize against boredom or a lack of prior knowledge. That way, I could

In response to this challenge, I prioritized transparency. No *hidden* agendas. I openly and directly positioned myself in the classroom. I spoke about the various dynamics of being the instructor, a Ph.D. student, a black woman, able-bodied and so forth, explaining the various aspects of my identity that have historical significance and social meaning. I did this partly to model how one might examine their own position in social settings and in society as a whole, and to dispel the myth that any position is the neutral, objective position. It was also a way to very clearly establish the fact that, in this classroom, we *do* see color and all other various parts of people's identities—not to reinforce hierarchies, but to correct for them.

Since my class was a social justice focused class, it was also quite fitting that we dispel the myth that anyone or any entity is agenda-free. In fact, we learned to embrace agendas, as long as we were ethical and transparent about them.

A Freire Lesson

Finally, the notion that teachers of color are naturally better prepared to teach lessons about race and privilege is a myth. As author Paulo Freire illustrates in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, those oppressed within a society do not automatically have the perspective, tools and skills to critique the oppressive nature of that society. Such perspective and skills must be learned regardless of one's identity, role or social status.

As a result of this challenge, I found myself expanding my own understanding of race, racism and related issues. In my efforts to provide students with diverse content, I had to dig deeper into the histories and contemporary realities of other races and ethnicities.

My coping strategy was to embrace my anticipation of bias as a planning tool. In planning for the day-to-day activities of the class, I strategized against bias the same way we teachers strategize against boredom or a lack of prior knowledge.

The knowledge I thought I already had no longer seemed sufficient when preparing to teach my students. I needed to learn more, so I did.

It's Not About Me

Ultimately, what allowed me to overcome the obstacles was a commitment to student-centered pedagogy, reminding myself that my primary objective is not my own comfort but my students' growth. I worked hard to dethrone myself as "the professor."

This was a writing class, so I gave a couple of lectures about writing skills, but I never lectured on social justice, race, privilege, etc. I always approached these topics as discussions, which I prompted and guided with questions and passages from class readings. I consciously phrased everything as a question, even when offering "corrective" feedback: "Is there sufficient

evidence to support that opinion?" "What is the counterevidence?" These general questions meant to challenge ideas about race connect directly to the general research and analytical skills we hope all students learn.

Before class conversations, I usually provided prompts or questions to which students had time to respond. In fact, I devoted significant time to students' individual and personal reflections on the topics and readings. Students completed reflections after discussions, assignments and activities to help them integrate and synthesize new information or to explore lingering questions. I believe I kept my students so busy in self-reflection that they hardly had time to think about me.

What the Students Said

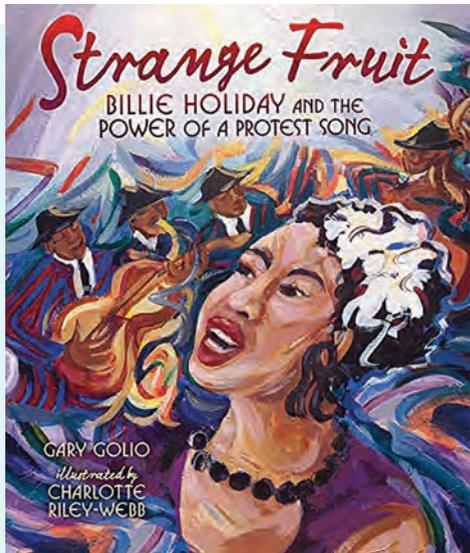
Based on my students' reflections, I am confident we had a successful class despite the challenges I've described here. Students expressed gratitude for an eye-opening and transformative class. However, they still had some big questions and concerns about racism that had not been fully worked out, namely: *Although racial discrimination is still happening, is it still possible that some people are too sensitive or finding new ways to be offended?* and *What can we do about all of these issues?*

The variables can seem infinite, so there's no guarantee that using the same approaches with another class will produce a similar result. However, this experience showed me that, with intention and diligence, educators *can* make significant strides in teaching racial justice—even if our racial identities and experiences do not match those of our students. ♦

Webb is a Ph.D. candidate who focuses on literacy, colorism, race, gender and media.

What We're Reading

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



Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday and the Power of a Protest Song, written by Gary Golio and illustrated by Charlotte Riley-Webb, tells the story of Billie Holiday's haunting, iconic song "Strange Fruit." A young and prominent jazz singer, Holiday had been unsure of how her audiences would respond to the song's vivid lyrics. But she chose to sing it anyway in protest of racial injustice in the United States, particularly the lynching of African Americans in the South. That choice came with a hefty price, but she continued to sing it to voice the suffering of her people—and helped galvanize the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

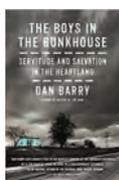
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

"Explore the power of music to challenge injustice."

—Gabriel A. Smith



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Juárez Girls Rising: Transformative Education in Times of Dystopia by Claudia G. Cervantes-Soon



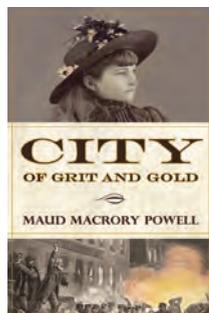
HIGH SCHOOL
The Boys in the Bunkhouse: Servitude and Salvation in the Heartland by Dan Barry



MIDDLE SCHOOL
As Brave As You by Jason Reynolds



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Step Up to the Plate, Maria Singh by Uma Krishnaswami

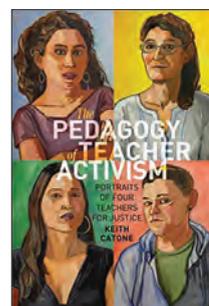


Maud Macrory Powell's **City of Grit and Gold** vividly portrays the harshness and uncertainty of immigrant life in 1886 Chicago during the Haymarket Affair. Addie, a 12-year-old Jewish girl, struggles to keep her family intact as her beloved uncle joins laborers' protests for fair treatment while her father tries to assimilate in hopes of achieving the American Dream. This book provides a clear connection to the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards as it explores the themes of family, nationalism and standing up to injustice.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

"A powerful story guaranteed to get students talking and making connections to current events."

—Hoyt J. Phillips III

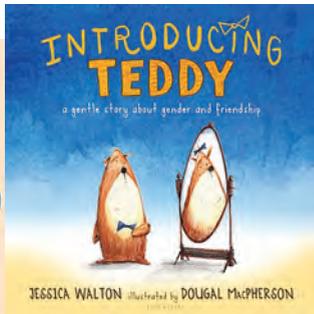


Michael Jackson once said, "The greatest education in the world is watching the masters at work." In his book **The Pedagogy of Teacher Activism: Portraits of Four Teachers for Justice**, author Keith Catone gives readers the opportunity to watch teaching masters at work as he paints dynamic portraits of four teacher activists. Each portrait shows an educator's unique journey to activism and education, as well as their daily classroom ideologies and practices. In each vignette, readers will understand that becoming a teacher activist is complex, continual and—most of all—possible.

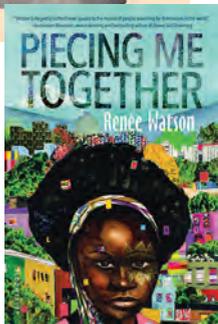
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

"An excellent resource for educators committed to changing the world."

—Jarah Botello



“A tender story of acceptance and love for readers young and old.”
—Laurn Mascaréñaz



Billy Merrell’s *Vanilla* gracefully chronicles the twists and turns of the emotional chemistry between two male high school lovers who inhabit an environment where they are more or less allowed to be who they are. Even still, a wrinkle in the boys’ romance develops: One of them isn’t yet ready for sex. An ingenious work of prose poetry, this story realistically captures the internal worlds of adolescents as they inquire into homosexuality, asexuality and nonbinary gender identity.

HIGH SCHOOL



“A coming-of-age story by a young author with firsthand knowledge of what it takes to navigate school as someone with a physical disability.”

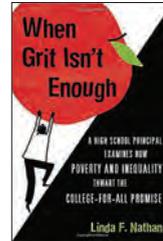
—Adrienne van der Valk

This touching, simple story about a boy named Erol and his teddy bear is sure to leave a mark on your heart. After a few days of feeling down, Teddy reveals to Erol that she feels more like a girl than a boy. But her fear of speaking up is quickly turned into self-confidence, as Erol and his friend Ava embrace the newly-named Tilly just the way she is. Through author Jessica Walton’s delicate verbal gestures and Dougal MacPherson’s beautiful artwork, *Introducing Teddy: A Gentle Story About Gender and Friendship* evokes empathy and joy.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Mia Lee is *beyond* ready to take on her sixth-grade year. Her goals? Make new friends, convince her mom to give her more freedom and become president of the video club. But Mia faces some challenges—some typical and some specific to her life as a girl with Charcot-Marie-Tooth, a form of muscular dystrophy. Despite the embarrassment of a socially awkward best friend and the antics of a competitive classmate, Mia keeps her eyes on the prize as she shows middle school what she’s made of. Find out how she does it in Melissa and Eva Shang’s *Mia Lee Is Wheeling Through Middle School*.

MIDDLE SCHOOL



“A sharp, well-researched and thoroughly convincing read.”
—Jey Ehrenhalt

Just once, Jade would like people to see her as someone who doesn’t need “an opportunity,” but instead as someone who can give and doesn’t always need to receive. But it seems like so many adults in her life think otherwise. As Jade navigates the intricacies of living in a low-income household, being one of very few black kids at a private school, and becoming friends with Sam (a white student who doesn’t always understand her), she owns her voice as an artist and develops a fuller sense of herself. Dive into Jade’s journey in Renée Watson’s *Piecing Me Together*, and use this free discussion guide to explore the book’s themes of race, class, gender and intersectionality with your students: t-t.site/piecingtogether.

HIGH SCHOOL

In the book *When Grit Isn’t Enough: A High School Principal Examines How Poverty and Inequality Thwart the College-for-All Promise*, author Linda F. Nathan debunks the five foundational beliefs on which our college-access “myth of meritocracy” is built: money is no obstacle; race doesn’t matter; just work harder; college is for everyone; and if you believe in yourself, your dreams will come true. While persistence may pay off and determination can generate success, Nathan argues that these attributes do not account for the structural barriers that black and brown and low-income students face daily. She presents a piercing critique of the exaltation of “grit,” which “no-excuses” schools push as an imperative to success and which they allow to absolve educators of the responsibility to examine unjust sociopolitical systems.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



What We're Watching

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

The Talk: Race in America, a Sam Pollard film, conveys the gut-wrenching reality parents of color face when they speak to their children about what to do if they are stopped by police. In six segments filmed in different cities, the documentary explores critical conversations occurring nationwide among families, police, activists and community members about policing and race. The film's strength lies in its ability to give necessary voice to the fundamentally unjust, disproportionate policing that young people of color can face from an early age. While the spotlight on this harsh truth may be difficult viewing for those still unaware, the conversation—across all communities—is long overdue. (114 min.)*

**This film contains content that students may find disturbing. TT recommends that educators preview the film before deciding whether to show it to students.*

pbs.org/video/talk-race-america-talk-race-america/
HIGH SCHOOL

First Daughter and the Black Snake, a film by Keri Pickett, provides a unique look into the present-day struggle between indigenous peoples and the petroleum industry. In this film, Winona LaDuke leads the charge against Enbridge Inc.'s plans to route an oil pipeline through the

sacred wild rice lakes protected under the Ojibwe tribe's 1855 treaty with the U.S. government. The pipeline poses the threat of irreparable damage, not only to the land's ecosystems but also to the tribe's traditional ways of life and individuals' physical health. In addition to examining the challenges of protecting sacred indigenous lands from corporations, this film examines the intimate connections between Native peoples and the earth, heritage, tradition and family. (94 min.)

amazon.com/dp/B07451JV97
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

Youth in Motion, a project of Frameline, offers to educators a library of films reflecting LGBTQ experiences. The collections cover diverse topics, from LGBTQ history and activism to unapologetic and humanizing portraits of what it's like growing up queer in communities across the United States. The 2018 Youth in Motion collection features two films centered on trans youth experiences, including **Deep Run**, an intimate documentary featuring Cole Ray Davis's life in rural North Carolina, where his identities as a trans man and undocumented immigrant cause tension in his quest for faith, work, acceptance and love. The current year's collection is

free for middle and high schools. Most of Youth in Motion's previous collections are available for \$25.

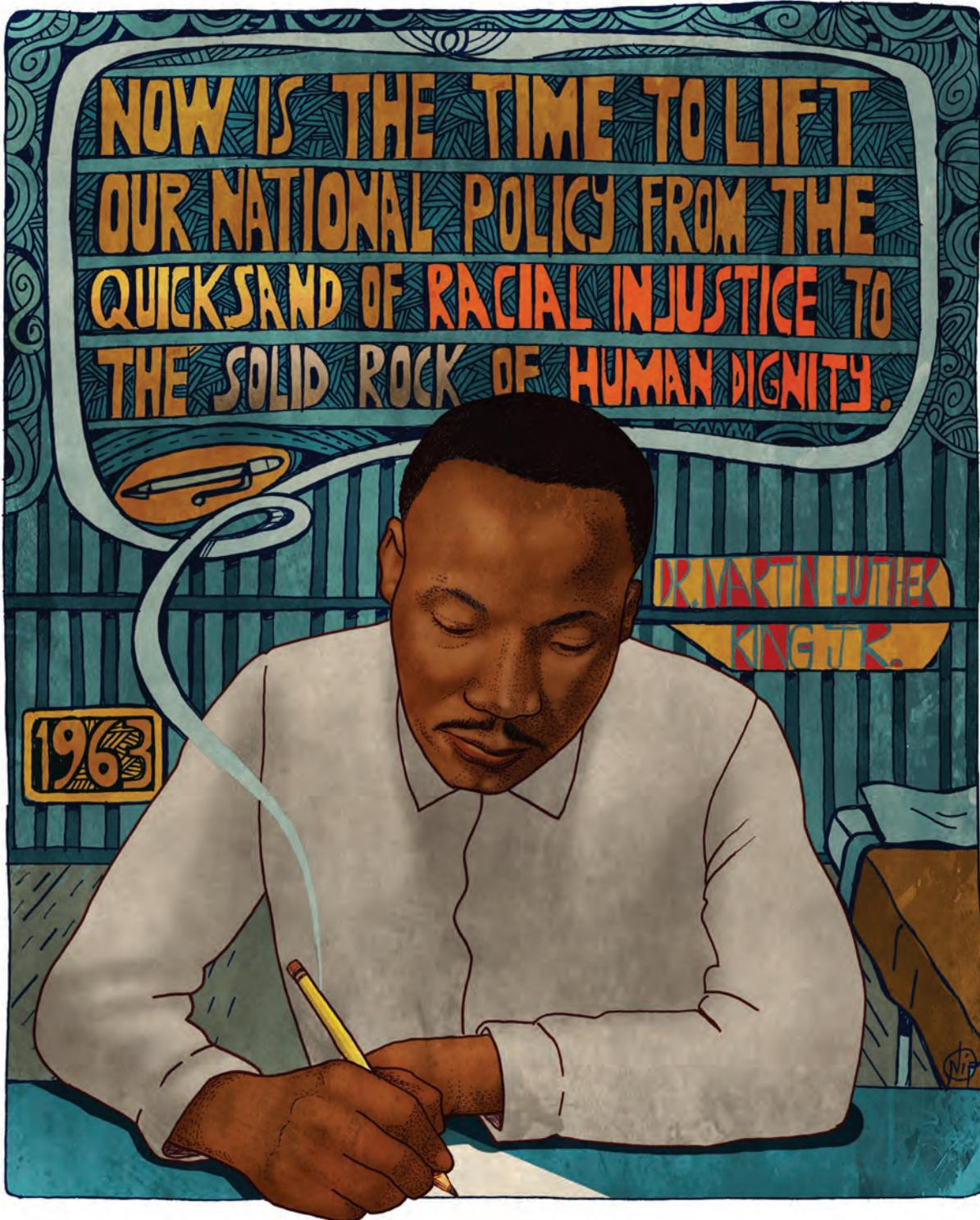
frameline.org/distribution/youth-in-motion/collections

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL // PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How Does Fake News Become News?, a short film from Teaching Tolerance, takes a humorous look at the journey of an inaccurate tweet that ended up becoming a mainstream news story. Fun animations and a quirky host help students understand digital literacy vocabulary like *filter bubble* and *signal booster*—concepts they need to be familiar with to create and consume high-quality material on the web. This is the first of five films rolling out over the course of the year to support the Teaching Tolerance Digital Literacy initiative, a multi-faceted project including K–12 lessons and professional development. The films support teaching of the Digital Literacy Framework, which presents the key knowledge and skills that students need to be safe, engaged and productive members of their online communities. (7 min.)

tolerance.org/magazine/how-does-fake-news-become-news

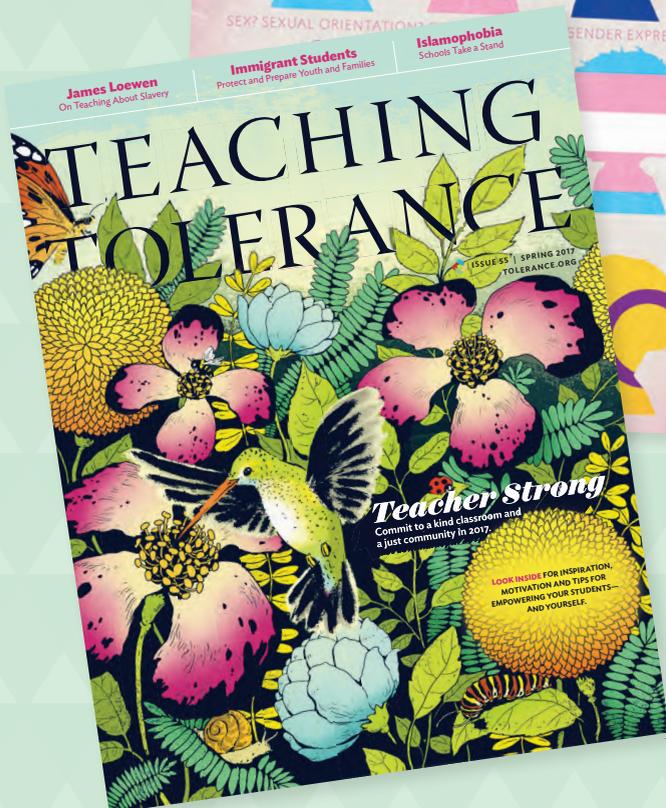
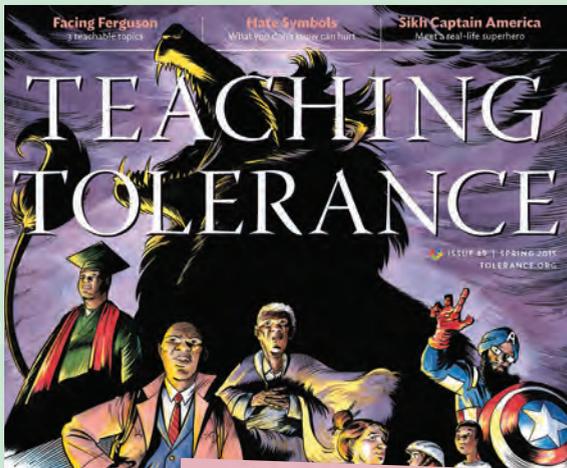
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL



This quote is drawn from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter From a Birmingham Jail." Written as a response to local clergy's "call for unity" during the protests of 1963, the letter's defense of nonviolent resistance and its insistence on justice for all have made it a foundational text of both the civil rights movement and history classrooms.



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