PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE: USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO DISCUSS RACE, IDENTITY, AND BLACK EXPERIENCES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM

by

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore and produce educational material for teaching about race, racism, and identity in the elementary school classroom. In this work, I combine two Honors thesis options and present both a project and an academic paper. The curricular resources I created are informed by my research. My guiding research question was: how can elementary school teachers effectively teach students about race? In order to answer this question, I surveyed scholarly literature on teaching and then created publicly-available teacher resources.

I began by researching pedagogical approaches to teaching about race in elementary school, specifically for grades three through five. The research consisted primarily of reading articles, books, and reputable websites to find information about instructional strategies for approaching critical classroom conversations connected to race. Based on this research, I created curricular resources for teachers including a set of guiding questions for evaluating literature, a text set focused on Black experiences and identities, a series of in-depth analyses of books in my text set, a lesson plan, and a website that compiles all of my work. My aim is to equip myself and other teachers to engage students in restorative conversations about identity and race.

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Process and Inspiration

My thesis started with the question faced by most Honors students: *What should I write about?* I knew that I wanted to focus on education because it is my specialty area, and I wanted my work to be useful to myself and others. However, education is a broad field, and there are many avenues of research that can be explored. In order to narrow my thesis topic, I drew from various topics addressed in my education classes. I took a class my freshman year of college that inspired me to think about the intersection of social justice and education. My professor guided us through discussions inspired by important resources such as Peggy McIntosh's (1989) "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," work by Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo (2012), and a film, Precious Knowledge (2011) that documented the positive impacts of using culturally-responsive pedagogy. These conversations inspired me to think about how I could use my platform as a teacher to bring about justice and healing for underserved groups. (As I will explore in greater depth later, I understand that my position as a White woman complicates the authenticity of my voice in this work. However, I have done my best to avoid participating in any sort of "White savior" thinking patterns.)

During the summer of 2020, both the news and my mind were inundated with Black Lives Matter protests and conversations in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others. I spent countless hours listening to podcasts about people's experiences as Black Americans as well as the complex realities and histories of race and racism in America. My heart became attuned to the plight of Black Americans who face racism personally or communally. I felt called to think about how I could use my unique experiences, goals, privilege, and platforms to advocate for those who are marginalized due

to the color of their skin. I entered into the fall of my sophomore year with these thoughts swirling around my brain.

That fall I took a course, World Literature for Children, in which I completed an Honors contract project that involved creating a text set for upper elementary school students about voting. The idea of a text set was new to me, and I was drawn to the way text sets allow for more comprehensive units and conversations about topics. Many perspectives and aspects of a subject can be explored through a variety of books across genres. As I began to formulate a plan for my thesis project, these two interests (race as a topic and text sets as a medium) unified. I decided to research teaching about race in the elementary school classroom, use my findings to create guiding questions by which to evaluate children's literature that discusses race, and then to evaluate literature to form a text set to aid teachers in teaching about race in upper elementary classrooms. Lastly, as a way to encourage teachers to adopt these books, I wrote a lesson based on a book in my text set that could be directly implemented. This project will be useful to me as I step into my own classroom in a couple of years and will hopefully also benefit other teachers looking to teach about race and the experiences of Black Americans in their own classrooms. The goal of this anti-racist work is to actively work for justice and equality for students. Yes, we want to avoid being racist and teach our students to do the same, but on a higher level, we want to explore what it means to teach with anti-racist practices. We want to teach with anti-racist practices and principles that show a commitment to restorative justice in our classrooms and achieve equity for our students and all people. That is the intellectual and practical work this thesis seeks to do: plunge into the world of anti-racist education by taking a deep dive into the principles and pracices of teaching students about race.

Who I Am

The nature of this thesis about race and teaching means that my identity affects my role in the work as the researcher and creator. In order to establish the intersectional identity with which I have approached this project, I want to give the reader insight to my experiences and defining characteristics. In short, I am a straight, cisgender, young, White, aspiring bilingual (Spanish-English), American woman who grew up in Texas in a middle class home with my nuclear family of four. I am currently enrolled in a public university in North Carolina with the goal of becoming a bilingual elementary school teacher. Understanding who I am and what experiences I bring to this work may give readers insight to the information I have chosen to approach and the ways I have chosen to approach it. This context may also give readers insight to my potential blind spots, misunderstandings, and biases despite my efforts to understand and account for these in my process and product. I am still learning and growing in my knowledge and perspectives as this thesis represents a part of a lifelong learning process to which I have committed myself. If there are components of my work that you as a reader would like to augment, critique, or contextualize, I would welcome that feedback. Growth happens within a community, and I desire to learn and grow within this community of educators.

Most pertinent to this project: I am White. I am a White woman hoping to walk into a diverse classroom and speak with children about race and racism. My whiteness places me in the cultural majority in America, which is a limiting phenomenon because I have never personally experienced the negative effects of systemic or individual racism. I can speak about research and ideals around race and diversity, but I will never fully understand what it is like to be Black in America and personally feel the pressures of racism systemic or

otherwise. I have worked hard to educate myself, both in university courses and beyond, by reading and listening to articles and podcasts from the perspectives of people of color in order to attempt to understand the lives and perspectives of those who walk through life looking different and being looked at differently than I do. I am committed to continue learning about the experiences of and advocating for equality for people of color in America. I am also committed to forming mutli-racial alliances with colleagues and community members alike to work for justice for my students and to gain deeper, more nuanced understandings of others. While my whiteness is complex and maybe even potentially limiting, I see the privilege that comes with the color of my skin as a tool to be harnessed and used for the justice and betterment of others' lives. I am not seeking to be any type of White savior. Chris Edmin defines the White savior complex in the context of education as a phenomenon in which White teachers enter classrooms seeking to be the saving hero for students of color (Downs, 2016). This idea implies that White teachers believe that students are inherently broken and need their help to be fixed. I do not see students as needing to be saved, rather made aware of forces and factors that affect their lives. I want to enter into student spaces and communities and to facilitate conversations rather than press information onto my students. I know I cannot solve racism, but I can learn, grow, build community, and ultimately engage my students in similar conversations to widen the circle of people who are able to recognize, resist, and remove racism, one classroom, one student at a time.

I am young. My status as an undergraduate student enrolled in a teacher education program means that I have no real classroom experience beyond structured internships. I have not walked a group of students through a full year of community building, gained their trust, or facilitated hard conversations. I have not worked under a principal or communicated

with parents. However, I have done extensive research and am mentored by two university professors both with classroom experience and doctoral degrees that can combat my potential ignorance.

I am a future educator. I have wanted to teach since I was in kindergarten, but my thoughts about and heart for elementary education have matured and grown so much from its beginnings as a five-year-old fantasy. Throughout my K-12 schooling, I enjoyed school and learning. I found order and love in my classrooms. I was drawn to the school environment and idolized my teachers. However, my K-5 education was lacking in some areas that I see now but did not identify as a student. I cannot recall a time that one of my teachers took time to explicitly address race in the classrooms that had students of diverse racial identities. We talked about slavery, participated in Black History Month, and were discouraged from being explicitly racist, but the nuances of the present and past realities of racial inequalities were not addressed. I recognize that this was part of my experience as a privileged White person who attended a primarily White elementary school. Both my appreciation for my positive school experiences and acknowledgement of its failings fuel my desire to teach. I attended a much more diverse Title I high school where I participated in an internship program where I spent several hours a week interning in local elementary school classrooms which had become more diverse in the decade since I attended elementary school. I fell in love with the students, school environment, and work of educating young minds. These experiences solidified my youthful fantasy of teaching by proving that I could legitimately see myself spending the rest of my life in a classroom.

My adult desire to teach transcends a simple love of children, though I certainly do love children. My hope is to create a space within my classroom where every single child

feels safe, affirmed, listened to, and valuable. I want my future students to learn the academic material, but more than that, I want them to learn that they are human beings worthy of love and that they can, in turn, move about the world valuing other people. That overarching desire is the inspiration for this thesis work. I want to be equipped to serve my students of color by affirming their identity as well as educating all students about how to move in society in loving and restorative ways. I believe that this work starts with examining and engaging my own identity. It is crucial that I am able to name the aspects of my own identity, such as White privilege, that could hinder interactions and effectiveness with addressing and including students in my classroom. Alongside digging into my own complex identities as a White teacher, I am also working to educate myself about race, gaining insights into perspectives with which I may not personally be familiar as a result of my own privileged experiences. It is only after this reckoning that I can begin to facilitate conversations about race in the classroom, which leads into the critical question driving my thesis project: How can teachers effectively discuss race and racism with children in grades K-5?

My Aims as a Researcher, Scholar, and Future Teacher

This thesis aims to prepare teachers, like myself, to begin to discuss race and racism with children in the classroom. I am an aspiring elementary school teacher with big dreams of educating students' minds and hearts. I want to validate their existence and teach them (through instruction and example) to value one another, their classmates, and fellow humans across the nation and world. This thesis is my first act in my educational practice of actively fighting for equality in the lives of my Black students and Black people in America. I refuse to be complicit in systems that endanger the lives of other people such as the school-to-prison pipeline, by which “students are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and

criminal justice systems" ("School-to-prison," n.d.). Schools and the educators within have potential either to be complicit in racist practices like profiling students that unwillingly confine students of color to a disadvantaged starting place or actively to fight against them. I refuse to stand by and watch. I feel called to stand up and seek education for the benefit of all. To heed this call, I need to educate myself, introduce my students to restorative ideas and practices, and seek transformative theories and practices with my students, colleagues, and stakeholders such as families and community members in a collaborative effort. People who do not identify as people of color are also impacted by racism as they are present in a society that perpetuates inequality and injustice. Depriving people of the opportunity to empathize and seek restoration is also hurtful. Therein is the root of my topic choice: I firmly believe that humans matter – equally and unequivocally – and I will do everything in my power to value and teach people to value the lives of others.

If I teach students who identify as people of color who have been systematically disenfranchised and discriminated against, I want them to understand that they are beautiful in my eyes. I see them, I love them, and I am standing with/for them. If I have students who are White, I want them to understand the shared humanity yet different experiences of people from various races. White Americans have a responsibility to learn to value and treat people of all backgrounds and colors equally in the interest of creating a more equitable society for people of every color, ethnicity, and background.

I chose this topic because I wanted to learn more about as well as contribute to the available knowledge base. I am no better equipped to do this work than any other aspiring teacher, but I am passionate and deeply interested. I cannot yet bring unique, sage experience and knowledge to the table, but I can synthesize and seek to apply research of others in an

accessible and practical format for current and future educators. This thesis will thus have practical applications in my future classroom and, I hope, in the classrooms of others.

My topic is also timely as the need for education about race is pressing in unprecedented ways in light of recent events such as the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others, the BLM summer 2020 protests around the country, and the visibility of White supremacy during the January 6, 2021 Capitol riots just to name a few examples. These external pressures on the classroom demand appropriate, intelligent conversation within classrooms at all levels to educate students in knowledge and empathy. My thesis project has allowed me to research effective ways of achieving a critically-minded, yet welcoming classroom environment and then equip other teachers to do the same.

Contextualizing the Contributions of My Thesis

There are a few qualifications worth noting as I present this work to the reader. The subject of race is complex, political, and often controversial. I do not claim to have unifying, all-inclusive answers to questions about race. Quite the opposite actually. I view this study as my initial, though in-depth, foray into the world of race education. I am imperfect, and thus my work has inherent mistakes and biases. For these problems, I humbly invite readers to reach out in order to help me continue learning. I understand this thesis to be a small first step and that my learning in these areas will continue developing throughout my teaching career. Below I identify four specific limitations of my work.

First, this thesis culminates in a single text set that makes up just one section of material to study for a class. I understand that discussing and teaching about race takes much longer than one instructional unit. One text set, one lesson, and one thesis about race may appear to be problematic as they may seem to fit into a schema of Black History Month

books and lessons that are untouched for the other eight months of the school year. This reductiveness is not my intention at all. I present this text set as a starting point for discussing race in the classroom. My intention is for teachers to use this text set and these tools to intentionally start conversations about race in literature and life, and then to continue the conversations across genres and units throughout the year. Teaching these books should not be a box to check for teaching about race and diversity for the year. It should be one part of our classroom process of cultivating inclusive, anti-biased minds.

Second, the topics of race and racism around the world offer a lifetime of learning, so I have not embarked on that impossible mission. This work is designed to focus on the experiences of Black Americans as a lens through which to discuss inequality, race, and racism as it affects other people of color as well as Black people. I chose to focus on Black Americans because they have a unique history in America that situates them in a uniquely disadvantaged position due to our country's complex history. I was to engage in equitable practices by lifting the voices of those who have been directly silenced in the past. Given this focus, it may seem that this work is only useful for teachers teaching in classrooms with a majority of Black students, but this assumption is simply not true. This study specifically addresses the experiences of Black Americans, but all students can benefit from learning about those who may be different from them and more importantly, learning how to restoratively love those who have experienced pressure and pain that other students may not have. Students of all skin colors see racism in action in America and deserve a safe space to learn and discuss what they see and feel. It is the responsibility of each teacher to learn and teach about other identities and societal groups and then include restorative lessons around identities other than Black Americans as well. This thesis has a narrow focus on Black

Americans and their unique experiences, but sites such as Learning for Justice (www.learningforjustice.org) have resources that include and apply to people of all backgrounds and identities.

Third, this work is limited in its realm of effects. It will not solve racism. It will not be the best or last word on how to teach about race. I am a young, White, woman with no classroom experience who attends a primarily White institution; yes, my perspective is limited. These words and lessons will not speak to or be useful for every teacher. But, I encourage readers to commit to (re)learning how to be anti-racist in the classroom; I certainly will be engaged in this education continually. In order to continue learning, I intend to pay special attention to the work of Black educators such as Jamilah Pitts, an educator and advocate, and Neal Lester, a professor, who provide expert insight and perspective to the ways that Black people are affected by racial injustice as well as practical ways to fight the injustice. Additionally, the Learning for Justice website will undoubtedly be a resource that I return to again and again because of its relevant, evolving material.

Fourth, I am not trying to indoctrinate anyone. I understand that not every teacher shares my commitment to anti-racist teaching. I understand that all parents and guardians will not be thrilled about or open to their students having intellectual conversations about race with classmates. The goal of this thesis is not to indoctrinate students to my way of anti-racist teaching, learning, and being. The goal is to engage children in classrooms where inclusivity, love, and empathy are centered. These lessons do not seek to tell students what to think but rather guide them into their own deep thoughts about important topics such as the lives and worth of others. Students are not to be taught what to think but rather taught how to think, that is, to be presented with facts and given the opportunity to consider them critically

through the lens of various perspectives. Unity, respect, and love are the ultimate goals of this project along with cultivating students' abilities to think critically and empathetically about the people in their world.

Some well-intentioned educators claim that they do not "see color" and therefore view and treat all of their students equally. These teachers are hoping to ignore racial differences in students and thus treat them all the same. However, our students are not all the same. Our students have unique histories and identities that are tied to many aspects of their realities and experiences. Race is one factor that plays into the identities and experiences of our students. It is not effective to simply ignore racial differences because racial differences have helped shape our students in the same vein that socioeconomic status or unique family dynamics shape students. Educators readily recognize, for example, that students living in poverty have experiences, needs, and challenges unique to them. Likewise, students who identify as people of color also have unique needs, experiences, and challenges that need to be addressed rather than just ignored.

In light of recent divisions over the intersection of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the classroom, it is more important than ever that teachers recognize and address race in their classrooms rather than choosing to be colorblind. Many states (e.g., Texas, Oklahoma, and Tennessee) and districts have sought to constrain how teachers can talk about current events and America's history of racism in the classroom by eliminating curricula that places emphasis on historical and contemporary influences of race in American life. The irony of schools banning instruction related to CRT is that elementary schools have never taught CRT. CRT is a theoretical framework developed by law scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw that foregrounds the inherent racism of U.S. social institutions whose embedded laws,

regulations, and procedures lead to differential, unequal outcomes by race (Sawchuk, 2021). While CRT involves far more than talking honestly about race or racism, the practice of honestly addressing ideas around race and racism in classrooms is now under attack in some states. For example, HB 324, a bill in North Carolina passed by both the House and the Senate but ultimately vetoed by the Governor, sought to ban teachers' discussion in classrooms that "an individual, solely by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive" (Granados, 2021), yet acknowledging the possiblity of presence of systemic racism must allow for an analysis of individual and collectively culpability that results in structural disadvantages based on race. This thesis does not directly use or address CRT, but the topics here are influenced by and adjacent to current conversations about CRT and education (Sawchuk, 2021).

Finally, this thesis is written for an audience of practitioners rather than a purely academic audience. My goal is to share research-based, practical instructional strategies, recommended children's books, and culturally-responsive vocabulary with teachers and preservice teachers like myself. My writing style intentionally echoes and is modeled after educational practitioner writing such as that featured in Learning for Justice's articles and those in journals like the *Social Studies and the Young Learner* or *The Reading Teacher*. This style is less formal than conventional academic writing as I modulate between first and third person, but my observations, analyses, and recommendation are rooted in research. I want this work to be accurate and academic, yet also accessible and immediately useful to teachers.

Introduction of Key Terms

In this section I define and clarify key ideas and terms that are involved in this conversation about race and the classroom. Race is a complicated topic, and so knowing exactly what is meant by various terms is crucial to effective communication about race so that misunderstandings are avoided.

Race

Race is a way of grouping humans based on their skin color alone. It is true that people have different colors of skin, but the other characteristics that society associates with skin color are socially constructed groupings and not rooted in scientific evidence (ROCRestorativeTeam, n.d.; "Measuring Genetic Variation," n.d.). We recognize that people have different skin colors, but it is a fact that the color of someone's skin has no bearing on that person's abilities, intellect, or anything other than the amount of melnin in one's skin cells. The socially-constructed concepts of race have historically been used to oppress people of a certain race by people of a different race ("Looking Closely", n.d.). Skin color does not define people, however individuals can choose for race to be part of their identity. Every person identifies with their race in different ways. Some people find it to be a major tenant of their identity. Some feel that their lives and the ways they are treated are comprehensively impacted by their race. Some never think about their race or anyone else's in an intentional way. As discussed throughout this thesis, teachers must seek to directly address the concept of race with students to open conversation and provide multiple perspectives as all students will have different experiences with race.

Racism

The dictionary defines racism as the attitudes and actions that prioritize one race over another based on differences in skin color (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). People naturally and from a young age detect differences between people of different races because their skin is different colors (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2018). While it is good to recognize differences and celebrate diversity for all the joy it adds to the world, sometimes seeing differences can be harmful, and people are discriminated against or oppressed based on their race. As discussed in the definition of "race" above, historically, race was emphasized as a means of oppression ("Looking Closely", n.d.). Racism is historically rooted in our country and has had lasting impacts on our society today. In particular, the legalization of slavery prior to its abolition in 1865 and the subsequent legalization of racial segregation in the Jim Crow era depend on one group, White people, oppressing and dehumanizing other groups (namely Black people). This history still has effects on society today. For example, when was the last time you drove past a confederate flag? That flag celebrates White supremacy. Racism did not disappear with the Emancipation Proclamation or the Civil Rights Movement. Black Americans have been and continue to be oppressed in our country, and we must address this oppression and work for continued, restorative justice. Cory Collins (2018) unpacks racism in his article "What is White Privilege?" and cites sociologists Clair and Denis's (2015) definition of racism as "individual- and group-level processes and structures that are implicated in the reproduction of racial inequality" (p. 1). Collins (2018) goes on to explain that difference between racial bias and racism: "Basically, racial bias is a belief. Racism is what happens when that belief translates into action" (para. 8).

Systemic Racism

Systemic racism is when groups and institutions in power historically and actively perpetuate inequality against one or more races based on differences in skin color (Collins, 2018). The idea is that racist practices are built into the formation and action of societal structures such as the justice system, school systems, and housing markets. One major example of this systematic disenfranchisement is the principle of "redlining" where the US government intentionally segregated neighborhoods and kept Black families from buying homes in certain areas (Gross, 2017).

Privilege

Privilege can be defined as the personal, occupational, or social "built-in advantage" that often comes from appearing to be a certain race (Collins, 2018). In the context of a discussion about race in America, privilege most often refers to the societal perks that White people have from simply appearing to be White (Chiariello, 2016). Being White is rarely, if ever construed as a disadvantage. Part of the aim of this thesis is to affirm all racial identities, but due to the racial history of US colonialism, many institutions in modern American society were designed to prioritize White people. It is important to acknowledge privilege even though it is really uncomfortable for a lot of White individuals to do so.

Marginalization

The idea of being marginalized is the state of being forced to the outer circles of dominant society based on race, class, gender identity, and other such markers of difference. Such differentiation is tied to systemic racism and societal oppression. There are some people that different societies have deemed lesser and essentially pushed out. In India, marginalization has been historically based on the caste system and cruelly neglects the

people of the lowest classes. In America, our society often overlooks and ostracizes people who are not White, those who are already in poverty, and others who do not fit our superficial mold of a successful, contributing society member.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality acknowledges that people exist at the intersection of identities (race, class, gender, ability, age, and other markers of diversity) and cannot be grouped or defined on the basis of any single identity. Black people are not just defined by their Blackness but rather by their holistic personhood. Even though we are focusing on race in this conversation, we must be careful not to make it the only identifier we use for people. People have the opportunity to define themselves by the things that they view as most central to their identity. That might be race, but it also could be gender, ability, or something else. Consider how you describe yourself. What are the characteristics that you use when you introduce yourself or notice about yourself most frequently: race, relationship status, gender, religion? Most likely it is an intersectional combination.

Bias

Biases are personal known or unknown preferences (prejudices) against someone or a group of people based on their perceived identity which affect the way someone interprets events, experiences, and people (Collins, 2018; Kim, 2016). Biases are often unconscious but have very real impacts on other people. Having biases, unconsciously or consciously, can negatively affect the ways people interact with each other and can do harm. Biases must be identified and addressed in both the minds of students and teachers in order to avoid the potential for prejudice or discrimination (Pitts, 2016). Moon (2011) created a resource for identifying personal biases, which can be found on Harvard's "Project Implicit" website.

Once biases are identified, individuals must take action to combat their negative effects. A great first step is self-reflection and then intentional education about the people that you may have a bias against.

Prejudice

Prejudice is an internal choice to distrust or not favor a group of people. Prejudice is in one's mind (Kim, 2016). People have opinions about many aspects of life (e.g., I like pasta, but not salad; I prefer to be greeted with a smile when I check out at a store; I find dogs gross). Opinions are fine unless they perpetuate hate towards another person or group of people. Teachers must seek to identify and engage in discussions with children about prejudices. This thesis seeks to give teachers ways to address students' prejudicial thinking through direct discussions about race and the beauty of differences rather than judgement based on differences.

Discrimination

Discrimination is treating someone worse than others due to their perceived identity ("Let's Talk," 2019). Discrimination differs from prejudice in that prejudice is a thought, and discrimination is an action (Kim, 2016). Discriminations stems from the belief that someone is lesser or different and therefore deserves lesser or different treatment than another person. People are deemed lesser for many reasons such as age, ability, gender, or race, which is the focus of this thesis. This work seeks to call out past and present societal and personal discrimination and then give teachers tools to share with their students to work collaboratively to stop discrimination.

Stereotype

Stereotypes are generalizations about an entire group of people that are almost always wrong and harmful. Stereotypes lead to the dehumanization of people and the categorization of humans by caricatures or qualities that are not representative of a whole person (Kim, 2016). Believing lies or caricatures about people leads to biases. When you know diverse people personally and holistically, your opinion of them is grounded in relationship and reality. However, when all you know about a person is based on broad, harmful, inaccurate generalizations about an entire group of people, your perceptions of that person or those people will be inaccurate, incomplete, and harmful. The conversations I suggest fostering in classrooms and the literature I suggest including, work against stereotypes by presenting holistic representations of people and connecting humans to discover shared experiences and realities. When we see each other as whole and beautiful, more than just a stereotype, we can begin to reconcile relationships and societal wrongs.

Black vs. African American

I use the term Black instead of African American to include Black people who live in America who may not identify as American due to immigrration status, heritage, or other reasons. (See this website for more information; "How to Write," n.d.) I do not use the term "Blacks" or "Whites." Rather, I use "Black people" and "White people" because humans are not defined by their skin color. First we are people, and then we have different skin colors. I want to intentionally prioritize the humanity of each person. Throughout this thesis, I capitalize the adjectives "White" and "Black" in accordance with APA's 7th edition recommendations ("Racial and Ethnic", 2019).

Equality vs. Equity

Equality is the state of affairs when all people have the same rights and opportunities. Equity is giving people more or less assistance according to demonstrated need in order to help them achieve a position of equal outcome. Equity is technically unfair because everyone does not get the same assistance; each person gets what that person individually needs to have an equal opportunity to succeed. The idea of equity is central to conversations about lifting up Black voices and perspectives in the classroom. Some may argue that there are already books about Black people and that Black history is taught in schools, but the idea of equity applied to this conversation suggests that Black voices need extra uplifting rather than the same uplifting to bring them to an equal platform. In order to achieve equal representation and appreciation for White and Black lives, exceptional effort needs to be exerted to highlight Black life and perspectives.

Anti-Racism

Being anti-racist means to work intentionally against people and systems that seek to oppress any group of people based on their skin color. Anti-racist people strive for a society where everyone is treated totally equally (Bell et al., 2020). Educators and people who are anti-racist are not just actively avoiding racism in their own attitudes, words, and actions, but also actively working to change and better society at large. The focus goes beyond personal instances and relationships, though the personal level is certainly part of being anti-racist. Anti-racists also work to flip the narrative and honor and center Black lives and voices. Part of being anti-racist is leveraging equity for equality. White anti-racists are willing to move our White voices over to make space for Black voices. Being anti-racist is an active mission (Simmons, 2019).

Scholarly Literature Review: Race and Racism in the Elementary School Classroom

This thesis is built on taking up an anti-racist approach to teaching and specifically teaching about race and racial justice. "Anti-racist education" is currently a highly politicized buzz phrase, so I want to clarify what I mean when I use it (see this article for an example of this politicization: Knott, 2021). Building off of Jamilah Pitts' (2020) ideas, anti-racist education is intentional, loving, holistic, honest, and restorative. With this project and my existence as a teacher, I seek to individually value the experiences of students who have been marginalized. The goal of anti-racist work is *not just to avoid* being racist and presenting racist ideas to students, though that is a part of it; the goal is to actively work *for* justice and equality for students. Anti-racist teaching includes intentionally lifting Black voices and lives. It means orienting classroom life around valuing every single student, especially those who have experienced racial harm (whether generational, personal, physical, emotional, or intellectual). This focus does not mean that I will ignore other aspects of marginalization such as poverty, family instability, or learning challenges. Of course I will work to include all students and elevate each of their voices based uniquely on each of their lived experiences and backgrounds. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I am focused on students who include Black as part of their intersectional identity and working against the ways American racism has affected them. Anti-racism is about restoring dignity and joy to a group of people that has traditionally experienced harm and equipping others to do the same.

The Necessity of the Conversation

Teaching about race and racism is important in my life, the lives of my future students, and the lives of my fellow educators. I think that talking about race with kids really matters. I am not alone in this thinking. Many others also view these conversations with

children to be necessary for their holistic education, personal growth, and societal preparation (Learning for Justice Staff, 2014; Pitts, 2016). Three of the main reasons why we must talk to students about race and racism in our classrooms are that: 1) White educators must use their privilege to push back; 2) students are paying attention to the societal discussions of race; and 3) and teachers are in a unique and powerful position to educate their students about society's racial injustice and what they can do about it. Each of these reasons is explored in more depth below.

Using Privilege to Push Back

White people in America have a societal advantage over people of color simply because our skin is lighter. This country was built for the White person, more specifically the White man, and the White men who set up the institutions and structures of society set them up to favor those perceived as White. America has made amazing progress, though fitful and inconsistent, toward racial equality since 1776, but Black and White people are still working from different societal starting places. Simply put, White people often have privilege that Black people do not. Two major historical factors in this present reality are the racist beginning of America and slavery. It was "found" by White Europeans, but there were already Indigenous people living here. The dehumanizing narrative that White people have the right to control started at the beginning. Secondly, in 1619 slaves were brought to the US to work in a system of chattel slavery where Black people were viewed and treated as less than human. These are some of the hard realities that the monetary and power success of our country are built on. This history does not mean that all White people are more successful or get things they do not deserve simply for looking a certain way. White people can also be oppressed due to poverty, class, immigration status, and other reasons, but Black Americans

have an added layer of oppression. Here is an analogy that might make it easier to understand. Imagine 20 people standing spread out over a basketball court. Each person is handed a ball and asked to shoot a basket. Technically everyone has the same opportunity to shoot the ball at the same basket, but the person standing across the court is far less likely to make it in, to succeed, than the person right in front of the basket. Well, imagine the people on the court are all Americans looking to make the basket of financial, social, and societal success. No person of color starts anywhere closer than half court because of overt discrimination: the biases of employers, law enforcement, teachers, cyclical poverty. Of course there are also White people on the opposite side of the court, but almost all of the Black people are there. A few White people who also struggle do not negate that almost all of the Black people are systemically forced to start at an unjust place. Individual stories of White folks who are struggling or Black people who have overcome the hurdles racism presents do not disprove the holistic theory of systemic racism. It is important to consider the majority when writing theories and generalizations while giving credit to individual experiences as well. One can imagine how this general difference in opportunity affects the ability of Black people to achieve upward mobility and societal success. I believe that it is the responsibility of the empathetic White person to actively work to break down the systemic racism and oppression that push people of color to the margains.

In Dr. Neal Lester's (2020) article "No, I am Not Okay. Thanks for Asking," he implores people of all races to not be okay with the way that Black people are treated in America. He argues that all Americans should be informed about past and present circumstances of discrimination and unsettled by what they find. White people should not expect Black people to do all of the work of educating and preparing White people to be

successful allies. Yes, White allies should listen to Black voices, but they must take initiative and fight racism without hand-holding that places even more pressure on Black people because many Black people often already feel a lot of pressure to fight for their rights. Jon Greenburg (2015) supports Lester's argument and compares racism to a large boot worn by the White majority that is squashing people of color. People of color should not be solely responsible for pushing the boot up from underneath when the White majority wearing the boot can stop the pressure from above. It is our job as White educators to work to lift pressure on our students who identify as people of color and lead other students to do the same. We can be part of the change from above that lightens the load of the oppressed. Yes, this is going to require sacrifice from the White majority. Power must be given up and shared (Collins, 2018). There must be a transition of privilege so that everyone can have equal opportunities and societal worth. Going back to the basketball analogy, some of the White people in the front of the court are going to have to scoot back or move over to allow people of color better access to the goal. They might even have to walk over and invite someone to join them up front or ask their White friends to scoot over to make room, too.

These principles apply to the classroom. White teachers, like myself, should not rely on Black educators to teach them and their students about race, racial inequality, or how to be anti-racist. White teachers must advocate for our Black students and communities (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2018), and do everything possible to elevate the lives of Black people holistically and accurately in lessons, modeling, and literature (Meier, 2015). White educators must do the work of educating themselves as they seek to build allyships with and center the experiences of their Black colleagues. In the United States, where 80% of teachers are White females (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2018), White teachers must be a large part of the

change. There must be humility: a willingness to learn, to try and fail, to ask for help when necessary, to give up some power. White teachers must not push this burden off on students, White or Black, to try to figure out how to be anti-racist and to stand up for themselves and others. It is the responsibility of the White teacher to be actively involved in anti-racist practices because they have the platform and power to make change. Elementary teachers are modelling social interaction and ways of moving together in the world for their students all the time. We should also be modelling how to learn, grow, and respect one another as colleagues and humans. Our students learn from our instruction as well as normal actions.

Students are Paying Attention

Some argue that students, especially elementary-aged students, are too young to see and understand race (Michael & Bartoli, 2014). Thus, they argue that race-related conversations do more harm than good. This "color blind" perspective is a complete fallacy as academic studies have proven that children do in fact comprehend and respond to racial differences starting at a very young age (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2018). Just because someone might not remember being aware of race when they were a young child, has little bearing on whether or not children actually are aware of race. In fact, studies show that they are. Children as young as ages three, four, and five have been proven to "exhibit racial bias and a preference for Whites" (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2018, p. 523). To have bias and preference, one must comprehend differences, which consequently affects how children perceive and interact with others. This is reason enough to discuss race in the classroom in order to help students become members of their community who seek equity and justice inside and outside of the classroom. How are children to develop unbiased views of others when they have naturally occurring biases if they are not taught to think critically? Children see racial differences and

have preferences, so we must address those racial differences in a positive way to help our students work to see others as equal individuals rather than someone defined by their perceived membership to a particular racial group.

Furthermore, we are currently situated in a time of heightened awareness around race, racial discrimination, and the history of race in our country. Children do not exist in a vacuum where current events fail to reach them. They see the news on TV at home, on social media, and on their family's devices. This is a globalized, information-heavy moment in history with a twenty-four hour news cycle that we are all feeling the effects of, even children. Their eyes and ears are not shielded from harsh news of Black lives being taken, the controversy of Black Lives Matter protests, and the scary rise of White supremacy. Because they are aware of these events, they are going to talk about them (Kamenetz & Hagopian, 2020). Many students experience these events and their effects firsthand. If schools do not work to create safe, controlled spaces for conversations about race to take place, these conversations are inevitably going to happen on the playground, in the cafeteria, on the bus, and in other places where there is not an adult present. If teachers want to prepare their students for life and more than just standardized tests, they must help and equip students to process current events and the experiences and feelings that accompany them. Students' minds, hearts, and futures are at the center of this need to discuss race within classrooms.

Teachers Matter

Teachers have the unique position of having the greatest influence on children's lives apart from their caregivers. What teachers say and do, or do not say and do, influences the way our students learn to move in the world. Teachers exist in the context of institutions, schools, that are traditionally, and often still, racially unjust. They must refuse to be complicit

in the systems that are further marginalizing students who identify as people of color by failing to address race and the societal implications of racial differences (Learning for Justice, 2014). When teachers fail to speak up about injustice, they one, allow the injustice to continue harming students and two, model to students that it is okay to allow injustice to continue. Some might argue that racial conversations are part of moral education which is the job of the parent, but parents, particularly White parents, often choose not to talk to their children about race at all (Michael & Bartoli, 2014). This lack of conversation about race can lead children to think that talking to or about people of color is bad or that stereotypes are true (Vittrup, 2015). Furthermore, children may grow up without knowing the difference between racial (existence of skin color differences) and racist (harmful view of superiority) (Michael & Bartoli, 2014). Children with incomplete views about race will be unwilling or unable to productively discuss race.

Silence is certainly not the answer to society's racial problems. Because students' home lives are often perpetuating and normalizing silence about race, schools must become the places where those complex conversations happen guided by a trusted teacher. Many students get to high school with incomplete knowledge of race relations, racism, and racial justice (Melville, 2014), but this is not simply reflective of problems with secondary education. *All* teachers, from preschool to high school, have a role to play in changing the ways students in the United States engage with issues of race, racism, and racial justice. A lack of addressing issues such as racism is, in essence, taking a stance of neglect. There is no neutral teaching. The things that educators choose to include and avoid are derived from some stance and way of seeing the world, which are, by definition, political.

Teaching About Race

There are many elements to a lesson or unit about race and racism, and some of them do not occur on the day of the lesson. The preparation work is crucial to be able to have a successful racial conversation in the classroom. This work begins in the mind and heart of the teacher. Just like teachers prepare for an academic lesson by growing or refreshing their knowledge of the content, they must also develop the knowledge, skills, and mentality to talk about race. However this preparation includes more than watching a few videos. This is heart, mind, and soul work. First comes self-evaluation.

A great starting point for introspection is to honestly search your mind for racial bias against a group (Pitts, 2016). One way to do this is to take a bias assessment online. Harvard University has created an online quiz that is designed to reveal unconscious biases toward Black or White people. As part of my introspective process when writing this thesis, I took Harvard's race bias assessment (Moon, 2011). I was nervous to take it, because I was afraid that it would tell me that I had strong implicit biases that I was unaware of. However, my result was "No automatic preference between African Americans and European Americans" (Moon, 2011). While I am really thankful that Harvard thinks that I am not implicitly biased, I am not excused from continually searching myself to identify new potential bias or bias that the online assessment tool did not catch. It is important to look at bias in your life at large, but especially in the context of your individual classroom (Anderson, 2014). Do you expect more out of your White students than your Black students? Do you assume that your Black students will be louder or quieter? Which students are you most likely to recommend for gifted programs or special education programs? Our unconscious biases affect our students, so we have to get them in check for daily teaching, and certainly before leading our students

into a space where they will check their own potential biases. It is also important to make sure that you practice what you preach before you preach the practice. If you are going to encourage your students to be involved in advocating for justice, then you must prove to them that you advocate for justice (Dillard, 2019). Teachers must take stock of their personal involvement and goals before they bring those same principles to their students. Teachers must be ready to help students grow by first addressing their own growth.

After checking the proverbial temperature of mental and emotional health as it pertains to race, teachers must educate themselves both initially and continually (Nichols, 2020). Teachers, more than anyone, should understand that learning is continual. In order to lead students in conversations about race, teachers must be fully educated in the historical context, current climate, and established ideologies related to race and racism in America. How can one teach what one does not know? One cannot, so he/she must learn. There are many studies, articles, and anecdotes about race being blasted into the media everyday, so there is no excuse not to be up-to-date and educated. However, some people have racist news and media filling their news feeds; media sites like Facebook provide users with media that enforce their own views (Fussell, 2020). If your news feed is not providing a well-rounded selection of perspectives (and it probably is not), consider visiting a few of these resources: NPR or BBC for news and Learning for Justice, Edutopia, and scholarly education publications for educational resources. One particularly valuable resource created by Learning for Justice (2018) is the Social Justice Standards. This group of educational standards, rather than focusing on traditional academic disciplines (e.g., math, science, literacy), takes an interdisciplinary approach by identifying four domains of development related to anti-bias, multicultural, and social justice initiatives in schools: 1) diversity, 2)

identity, 3) justice, and 4) action. These age-appropriate learning outcomes provide "a common language and organizational structure" that teachers and administrators can use to "make schools more just, equitable and safe" (Learning for Justice, 2018, p. 4). Additionally, when looking for resources, be intentional about seeking out resources created by Black educators or academic experts in the field such as Jamilah Pitts. The current event context of this conversation is especially important because race relations are constantly evolving. Education is important for one's own heart, mind, and life, but in the context of teaching, also for the students.

Finally, teachers must be prepared to have grace for themselves. Just as not every geometry lesson works for a class, not every conversation about race that a teacher initiates will be successful ("Let's Talk!", 2017). The teacher must be prepared to work through the failure and try again. There is so much pressure to be perfect in school and in our culture, but perfectionism, as we all well know, is impossible. Okun (n.d.) goes even further, arguing that perfectionism is a characteristic of White supremacy culture that shows up in our classrooms and schools. Heading these warnings, we understand that perfection cannot be the expectation when approaching race conversations in the classroom. There are too many unexpected variables that change student-to-student, day-to-day. Teachers must repeatedly attempt important conversations with their best effort, but failure is inevitable, and grace is necessary. Just as we respect and encourage students to try, fail, and try again, teachers must also give themselves space to do this, to learn, to grow.

Preparing for deep, complex conversations is difficult and pushes teachers to grow personally and professionally, but it is crucial to the success of our students as contributing, kind members of society. The fun part is seeing them learn and grow, but the precursor to that

is teachers' learning and growth. Thus, the first steps to approaching discussions around race and racism in the elementary school classroom are to approach one's own biases, to educate oneself, and to be willing to try, fail, and try again.

Knowing students. Along with preparing for conversations about race, a teacher must prepare to engage relationally with her students. Race conversations are complex and require trust and deep relationships for students to feel safe enough to share and listen. It is important that teachers be familiar with the general characteristics of their class as well as individual students' life experiences and minds. Research has shown that elementary school students are capable of thinking and processing on the level that race conversations require. Diane and Rebecca Barone (2019) conducted a study and wrote an article about students' abilities to make meaning of the abstract idea of justice. They found that fourth grade students were capable of comprehending and even abstractly representing the idea of justice. In the curricular materials created for this thesis, I applied Barone and Barone's (2019) findings to push students to engage with complex ideas surrounding race. Knowing that students can intellectually engage in discussing race is an important first step to being willing to initiate these conversations in an actual classroom setting.

Knowing students personally is also crucial. To enter into a space where students are asked to share their experiences and thoughts in regards to race, it is important to be familiar with their racial identity, cultural identity, and experiences in an authentic way (Anderson, 2014). Before all else, teachers must care about their students as people, and they need to be aware of what might trigger a student due to personal experience or belief. These important conversations about race are part of the way teachers care for students, so genuine love and interest in their lives should play into initiating discussions. Furthermore, conversations with

students will be more successful when the teacher deliberately works from students' prior knowledge and connects the content to their personal lives ("Preparing to Discuss," n.d.). One strong example of this is a teacher resource developed by District of Columbia Public Schools called "Preparing to Discuss Michael Brown in the Classroom" (n.d.), which provides guidance for teachers for engaging in/with emotional current events that center questions around race and racism. The resource suggests that a teacher should first find out what the students already know either in a group setting, through individual discussion, or through writing. This way, the teacher can find out the questions students have and where they got their background information. The document suggests that when presenting a discussion or information, the teacher should intentionally connect the material to students' lives and emphasize why the students should care and how the information affects the past and present of their lives and well as the lives of others. At the root of this practice is empathy.

A main goal of education is to nurture empathy in our students. Empathy is best nurtured through a combination of modeling and direct instruction. By showing interest in our students and being empathetic with their unique experiences and problems, we model what we hope they will do for others. June Christian (2014) writes in her article "#dontshoot" written for Learning for Justice that, "It is incumbent upon all of us—in all communities, in all schools, and regardless of racial demographics—to teach students compassion for their peers" (para. 7). To love students is to know students with the goal that students might then know and love others. One way to encourage empathy through direct instruction is to employ picturebooks as a means of igniting their "social imaginations" (Wissman, 2019, p. 14). When reading fictional books, students are able to foster "relationships" with the characters

and recognize aspects of the characters, their feelings, and experiences. They can translate this connection into understanding the real people that the stories represent and continue their empathy beyond the pages of the book. In the context of this thesis, students can read books about people with different racial identities than their own and foster empathy for real humans who go through challenges based on their race; White students can learn about Black lives (and vice versa) and grow to understand and love others. Beyond this understanding, students can extend these feelings to restorative action and justice.

With this process in mind, teachers must proactively learn about their students, not superficially but deeply and authentically, first, simply to love them and second, to prepare a space for complex conversations such as these about race. In fact, Bree Picower's (2012) guidelines/elements for social justice curriculum design emphasize "self-love and knowledge" (p. 4) if students are to learn "who they are and where they come from" (p. 5). Students need to be able to unpack their personal and community identities and histories–and celebrate those identities–so that they might situate themselves in the world more solidly. As teachers, we want our students to do this for themselves, but we must also include ourselves in this process that we might learn about our students and how best to love and support them.

Diverse students. America's classrooms may be more diverse in some places than others, and some may feature more kinds of diversity than others, but given differences in students' race, gender, class, family backgrounds, ethnicities, abilities and language, our classrooms are irrefutably diverse. All classrooms have students who are intersectionality diverse in myriad ways, and in every lesson teachers teach, they are teaching to these diverse students and must be cognizant of that diversity in order to reach all students effectively. When teaching about race, this awareness becomes even more important because not only are teachers teaching to racially diverse students, they are teaching about racial diversity.

The books that teachers use in their classrooms are an important part of this work. Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) argues that teachers must thoughtfully consider how books function as windows and mirrors for students. Books, and related instruction, should serve as a mirror for all students to be able to see themselves represented in educational material. They should be able to find their lives, humanity, and culture including values, language and traditions. Instruction should also be a window into the lives and experiences of others. This fact is especially important in the sense that students from the dominant culture should have the opportunity to learn about the lived experiences of those in cultural minorities. So, when a lesson features Black lives, experiences, and authors, it is integral that White students participate and learn. Black students should be able to see themselves reflected, and White students should be able to gain insight into the lives of their peers. This educational principle of lessons and books functioning as mirrors and windows is certainly not new, but it is still very powerful for students and applicable for classrooms today.

Historically, teachers have struggled to find children’s literature that serves as windows and mirrors for students who are not White. The lack of diversity in children’s

books continues to be a problem today. For example, of the children's books published in 2019, 50% featured a White character, and 27% featured animals or other objects; only 10% featured Black characters and fewer than that featured characters of other races (SLJ Staff, 2019). Not only are there few books that feature racially and ethnically diverse characters, but many of the books that do feature inaccurate, harmful, and/or stereotypical depictions of characters. Teachers today must find books that not only feature Black characters, but ones that are written from an own-voice Black perspective and accurately represent the lives of Black people.

In order to look into the unique lives and experiences of others, diversity, in all its forms, must be acknowledged and celebrated. The colorblind idea that "we should not see color and just treat everybody the same" is often likely well-meaning yet realistically quite harmful. As previously discussed, silence about race is problematic. People have beautiful differences that should be acknowledged and not overlooked. Race is one of these aspects of diversity that is central to many people's identities and should not be ignored. Of course, the problem with acknowledging racial differences is that some use the differences to push a racist agenda with which they belittle one or more groups based on their race. For this reason, teachers often actively avoid addressing race in lessons and planning. Teacher candidates in one study sought to avoid talking about race and racial differences in their lessons even when the lesson was designed around principles and literature that emphasize race (Pabon & Basile, 2019). Teachers should not fear addressing racial differences in the classroom but rather point them out to celebrate them (McGovern, 2020). In the Learning for Justice film *Starting Small*, one teacher uses paint to match and name each student's skin tone (McGovern, 2020). She celebrates their differences and teaches them to value each other's

unique skin colors. This exercise is but one such example of seeing color and seeing differences without belittling anyone but rather celebrating everyone.

When discussing race, it is important to directly address different racial groups and experiences. For the purposes of this thesis, I am focusing on Black perspectives and identities, but these principles can be adapted to any racial identity. First, I want to address the importance of bringing Black perspectives and identity work into the classroom. There must be curricula that includes, highlights, and is built around Black lives, experiences, and perspectives (Dillard, 2019). The goal is to provide mirrors for Black students who may not see many Black people and experiences elevated in American schooling as well as provide windows for White students into the lives of Black Americans. Racial discussions in the classroom must also address the concept of "whiteness." Emily Chiariello (2016) reminds readers in her article "Why Talk About Whiteness?" that whiteness is a construct and an identity that is not as often claimed as other identities but is certainly felt and used as an agent of dominance. Although it is often overlooked, or discussion of it even banned in classrooms, whiteness and White privilege are worth talking about, especially between White people as a way to acknowledge, reflect, and then work to deconstruct it. It is also helpful for Black students to understand the power dynamics involved with race by discussing White privilege. Finally, it is worth noting that White identity is intersectional. White people are not just White; they also have gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, family dynamics, and immigration status to mention just a few. Directly addressing the complex facets of diverse identities is crucial to a discussion about race.

Despite the importance of White students/people actively engaging in exploring their own White identity, it can be challenging. There are steps that teachers can take to help

White students grapple with the concept of their own whiteness. It is important to discuss privilege without invoking guilt in White students ("Let's Talk," 2019). The goal is to make White students aware of the implications of their identity and how they move through the world to help them contrast that with the ways others move in the world. Empathy is the goal, not guilt or shame. Ryan Crowley (2019) suggests that finding nuanced connections between the history of White people interacting with other races and personal White experiences and ways of knowing is a helpful way to approach the concept of whiteness with White people. It is important to make space for White people to identify their early experiences with and understandings of race (Crowley, 2019). Crowley argues that focusing on the ways the White identity contributes to racism is better than highlighting the ways White people benefit from racism as Peggy McIntosh (1989) does in her well-known article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." There should be openness and directness about thinking about whiteness; create and capitalize on moments in the classroom that lend themselves to addressing White identities. The challenges of discussing whiteness should not be a reason to shy away from the topic but rather a reason to find the most uplifting ways to present the concepts to students.

One way to move forward from potential White guilt is to focus on action that White people can take. Tiffany Jewell (2020), a Black author and educator, in an interview with Learning for Justice (Bell & Collins, 2020), gives an example of what White students can learn to do: they can learn to notice their surroundings. That sounds simple, but White people are often more trusted as witnesses, so teaching White students how to be accurately observant and unbiased (in their perceptions of people of different races) can literally save lives. This is just one example of empowering White students to use their racial identity for

the good of others, but there are many others, and opportunities for action will be further explored later in this thesis.

Emotional elements Discussing race can often be an emotional experience, whether in personal social circles or academic situations like the classroom. When identity is involved in a conversation, strong emotions are often evoked because our identities are so closely linked to how we perceive, experience, and relate to events and others ("Let's Talk," 2019, p. 19). Discussing identity is not an objective practice. It is deeply subjective and personal. The nature of racial discussions are even more complex because race is frequently talked, argued, and fought about in the public sphere. There are often already strong emotions attached to ideas surrounding race and racism. Different students will be prone to feel different strong emotions as the teacher guides them through conversations about race depending on each student's individual identities and experiences.

All students, and especially White students, may experience discomfort when discussing the history, present, and implications of race relations in America (Melville, 2014). Teachers may also be uncomfortable as they facilitate and participate in these discussions. As previously mentioned, race is often a taboo topic within White circles, so learning the skills needed to appropriately discuss it with vulnerability and truth can be especially challenging for White teachers. This risk of discomfort is not a reason to avoid these crucial conversations, just something to be aware of. All true learning is born of some discomfort, whether that is emotional or just reconciling previous ignorance with new information. These conversations about race will often encompass both of those realities. Learning for Justice's "Let's Talk" framework (2017) suggests that discomfort should be embraced and that teachers should practice having hard conversations to ease some of the

awkwardness and adjust themselves and their students to the necessary discomfort. One part of these conversations that can be especially uncomfortable for White students is realizing and unpacking bias (Ahmed, 2018). The goal is never guilt, but rather a reckoning and movement toward action rooted in viewing others as beautiful equals.

Acknowledging and confronting bias can be very hard–just as learning our country's fraught histories around race can be hard. Students may begin to feel that they are part of a racist ideology or group. Students may begin to uncover undesirable thoughts and misconceptions that were previously unconscious or unnamed. Sara Ahmed (2018) suggests that teachers should allow students to sit in this discomfort for a while as they adjust to new thoughts. Teachers should be prepared to feel uncomfortable and allow their students to feel uncomfortable without feeling the need to "save" the moment by relieving the tension or moving on quickly. Let the feelings of discomfort be felt in the interest of learning and growth for all involved.

The potentially traumatic nature of discussions about race and racism should be acknowledged and prepared for. The 24 hour news cycle combined with the hyper-visual nature of social media results in an overexposure of horrific news and images to all, even young students. News about race is often violent highlighting police brutality, riots, protests, and other complex events. Students may feel the effects of exposure to this as second-hand trauma (Mascareñaz, 2016). Black students and other students of color may feel the negative emotions that accompany trauma more than other students because the beaten bodies look like theirs, their parents', their friends'. Black students may have personal experience with racism. These experiences may have harmful impacts which are brought to light while discussing race. It is important to be sensitive to the students' potential negative reactions.

Depending on the specific subject of the conversation and the individual students in a class, it might even be wise to provide a trigger warning to the group or individual students that they may be able to prepare to confront strong, negative emotions ("Preparing to Discuss," n.d.). The key to working through traumatic emotions with students is empathy. Give them space to listen, process, and feel on their terms so that they feel cared about and safe despite the complexity of the topic and their feelings.

In order to guide students through these potentially challenging and emotional moments, the teacher must be prepared. Teachers must first think through their own positions and emotions before the discussion so that they can be available to help students negotiate complex issues. It is natural for teachers to feel things along with their students, but they have the responsibility of remaining calm and in control, especially when students are having a hard time. The teacher should expect strong reactions from her students. Teachers should consider questions like: Which students are most likely to respond? What responses can be expected from these specific students? These questions can only be answered if the teacher knows her students deeply. The teacher also needs to have strategies to de-escalate strong emotions and be prepared to help her students. Students need to feel safe to feel and express honestly, but teachers also cannot leave them in a state of emotional distress and must be prepared to help them process and be able to move on in their day. Learning for Justice's "Let's Talk" (2019) framework suggests that elementary educators employ a practice of de-escalating tension through these four steps: think, feel, breathe, and connect. The students should be encouraged to think about the topic. They should be allowed space to feel their feelings honestly. Then, they should pause and breathe. After this, they can work to connect

their thoughts and feelings to those of the group. Other options for debriefing after a conversation will be discussed later in this work.

In addition to preparing to experience strong emotions, teachers should design their lessons in such a way that affirms students. We want our students to feel safe and appreciated for exactly who they are and what they feel (Tansey & Katz, 2015). Each student has individual experiences, identities, thoughts, and feelings. We must strive to make them feel as if what they think and feel and who they are is valid and valuable. If a student shares an experience they had with racism and then begins to cry, the teacher should not just write off the student's feelings and tell her that everything will be okay. It is important to acknowledge that the student's experience and pain is valid. Teachers should encourage authenticity and emotion by validating and sitting in hard moments with students. As emotions arise, teachers should be prepared to face them and guide our students through them with empathy, affirmation, and love. Racial conversations are only possible as part of a group effort to learn and grow authentically together.

Building up to conversations about race. Thus far, teacher preparation has been heavily emphasized as the initial step to having conversations about race in the classroom. The next step is to prepare the students. This preparation process can take a long time and should be started at the beginning of the school year and consistently worked toward throughout the year. Establishing classroom norms and practices is crucial for students to feel safe enough to engage in complex conversations. Setting the foundation really matters. In this foundation, we want to first build trust with our students (Pitts, 2017). They need to know that we care about them deeply regardless of how they behave or what they say. They must also know that we hold them to high standards of respect and integrity. They must be

able to trust us to listen and respond to them with respect. Additionally, it is important that students are able to trust and respect one another. This element of comfort and trust provides a great starting point for asking students to be vulnerable and discuss a complex and controversial topic such as race.

More tangible classroom procedures and practices are also important for helping students feel safe and comfortable enough to engage. Karen Shreiner, an educator featured in Jamilah Pitts' work (2017), shares that she inserts social justice topics into her curriculum through lesson structures that are already familiar to her students such as gallery walks. Establishing lesson structures and classroom procedures such as gallery walks or a talking circle prepares the classroom to introduce new, challenging topics within the familiar patterns of classroom life. Students are not being asked to learn new content and new ways of learning that content. With a topic as loaded as race, just introducing the new content is a lot to ask students to handle at one time, and the establishment of an emotion-based classroom procedure can help to manage some of the discomfort of such new conversations. For example, in Learning for Justice's film *Starting Small* (McGovern, 2020), one featured teacher has a peace table in her classroom where students can cooperatively work out their conflicts without adult intervention on a routine basis. During a new racial conversation, students who have conflict can feel safe to engage in the familiar practice of visiting the peace table with a classmate to work out their differences. Students can anticipate how problems will be handled and thus may be more willing to take intellectual and emotional risks. Sara Ahmed, the author of *Being the Change: Lesson and Strategies to Teach Social Comprehension,* coaches teachers to teach students how to engage in active listening before having deep conversations about social justice topics such as race and identity (2018). She

suggests creating charts as a class that delineate as explicitly as possible the class expectations for listening, agreeing, and disagreeing. If taught important skills such as active listening and conflict resolution throughout the year, students will be better prepared to feel comfortable when discussing new themes such as race. Preparation definitely starts with the teacher but extends to the whole classroom community.

One tenet of classroom preparation highlighted across my research was the importance of creating classroom guidelines. It is important to carve out time to discuss and create these community standards ("Talking About Race and Racism", n.d.). These guidelines are to be created as a classroom community with cooperation and input from the teacher and the students. The guidelines should explicitly state what constitutes respectful participation in classroom discussions as well as in comprehensive classroom life. These guidelines should be posted in the classroom, and the teacher should model the outlined behavior everyday when having discussions with individual students, the whole class, or other adults ("Preparing to Discuss," n.d.). Respect is a way of being that transcends difficult conversations and must be elevated and modeled at all times in the classroom. The Let's Talk framework and accompanying webinar provide some specific examples of policies to include in community standards ("Let's Talk!" 2017; "Let's Talk," 2019). They suggests instituting a policy of "zero indifference" instead of a more traditional "zero tolerance" policy. With zero indifference, problematic behaviors and comments are always addressed but do not always result in immediate disciplinary action. Students will know that they cannot get away with disrespectful words or actions, but can feel safe to speak out knowing that if they accidentally say something hurtful, they will not be instantly punished. The Let's Talk webinar also provides a few sentence stems for beginning classroom standards such as "In our class

everyone has the right to…" and "To protect our rights we will…" ("Let's Talk!" 2017). These provide great starting points to help students and teachers think about the kinds of attitudes and phrases that are important in their classes. Classroom rules are very common, but intentional cooperative classroom standards are more rare. Those classrooms striving to engage in revolutionary conversations should employ classroom standards as a superior alternative to classroom rules.

Teaching Strategies

The ways in which teachers should prepare themselves and their students to talk about race have been thoroughly discussed above. However, there is only so much preparation a teacher can do before she must dive into the lessons and conversations. When creating and presenting a lesson about race, there are specific research-supported elements that are critical to include.

Teachers should pay attention to how they begin a lesson about race. It is important to build off of previous conversations and established trust with students. Students will most likely not have a lot of objective information about race and racial topics when the conversation is first started in a classroom. A great place to start is to ask students about their own experiences with race, and the response can take the form of a classroom discussion, a private discussion, or a journal entry ("Let's Talk," 2019). One source suggests that students can biography their racial identity as a way to write about their experiences and interactions with race, theirs or others' ("Let's Talk!" 2017). Their own experiences and thoughts can be a springboard to build off of with information and other perspectives.

This idea of giving students voice is crucial throughout these racial conversations. Teachers need to create space for students to be able to have a dialogue about race, but this

exchange requires students' willingness to share and contribute to the conversation. Sometimes providing discussion stems and prompts can help guide students toward relevant thoughts and contributions (Ahmed, 2018). Teachers can also present relatable scenarios that students can discuss or form talking circles for students to discuss a topic or scenario ("Talking About Race and Racism", n.d.). The opportunity to share through speech is powerful, but some classes or individual students may prefer and feel more comfortable sharing through writing. One strategy that combines writing with group collaboration is called the silent discussion wherein students each write their individual contribution on a shared space (e.g. on butcher paper or a whiteboard) (Pitts, 2016). They can read other contributions, build off of others' ideas, and present their own thoughts without the pressures of public speaking. Another iteration of this process happens on a smaller scale through journal dialogue (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2018). This strategy can function student-to-student or student-to-teacher. Basically, the first person writes her thoughts on a piece of paper and hands it to the other person who reads and writes a response. This process repeats for as long as the written conversation continues. This process allows each person to have more time to think, consider, and respond than in a spoken discussion and also has the advantage of more privacy. We want students to have a voice, but we also want them to hear others and feel comfortable throughout the process.

Beyond hearing students' thoughts and responses, teachers should provide students with accurate information and new perspectives. One great way to present information and perspectives is through children's literature. As discussed earlier, books serve as mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990); students should be able to see themselves in texts but also look into the lives of others. Readers gain perspectives through engaging with fictional characters and

auto/biographical accounts in books and seeing how people with different backgrounds and experiences live their lives. Thus, books can be a generative starting point for critical conversations (Enriquez, 2014; Wood & Jocius, 2013). Students can evaluate aspects of books that may reflect or represent real life which can translate to an ability to think critically about real events and phenomena. Literature can also be used to teach social justice by presenting new ideas because each text builds on a certain worldview that may be different from the worldviews of our students (Enriquez, 2014). The transactional reader response (Rosenblatt, 1978), the idea that both readers and books bring valuable information to the table, actively involves the student in reading literature by valuing what knowledge and information the student brings to the reading of the text. Thus, a student's contributions interact with the text's contributions to spark new understanding in the student that is unique to his/her experiences and prior knowledge. This idea validates the theory that books can extend conversations about race beyond the student's direct knowledge because the book can serve as a bridge to the student's knowledge and the new knowledge.

More than theoretically talking about race through books, teachers must push students to root their thinking in lived experiences. For such conversations will come to matter outside of students' minds and classroom spaces. Rooting conversations about race in current events and Black Americans' lived experiences are crucial. One way teachers can extend conversations beyond the classroom is to have students engage with their world. In order to make the topics feel close to home and encourage further conversation with people outside of the classroom, students can ask family or community members about their experiences with race (ROCRestorativeTeam, n.d.). In conversations, teachers can use quotations from historical or current prominent figures to connect classroom conversations to the real world

(ROCRestorativeTeam, n.d.). Using role play can make conversations and events feel real for students (Simmons, 2019). They can learn to notice race in the real world by learning patterns and noticing things from role play interactions. Teachers can tie lofty topics to concrete life examples from their students' lives (“13 Guiding Principles,” n.d.). Finally, they can use real platforms such as social media to present their new findings and projects (Learning for Justice Staff, 2014). This real-world engagement gives them a legitimate voice in the public sphere and models for them how to engage with others online and in real life about complex topics. The more real examples feel, the more the students will be able to relate to them and build their new knowledge on their foundations. Elementary school students thrive with clear, concrete examples and connections, so we want to provide these to enhance our students’ ability to understand.

True understanding is often demonstrated by the ability to use one’s knowledge to create and take action. Transferring knowledge into the real world is a great way to conclude a lesson. In an effort to assess and solidify students’ understanding, teachers can engage their creativity. Using art to teach, express, and present about racial understanding is an effective way to engage students with the read world (ROCRestorativeTeam, n.d.). Teachers can let students create creative works that center around and matter to them and allow them to take action in the world. This engagement with art and the world supports their learning and long term understanding.

Finally, teachers must carefully consider how to end lessons about race. Students need to walk away from these potentially difficult conversations feeling heard, engaged, challenged, and encouraged. There are many strategies for guiding students through this debriefing process. Students can journal their new thoughts/feelings, use puppets to role play,

draw, use movement, or even create a joint presentation of new thoughts, and teachers can also ask intentional questions to encourage debriefing ("Let's Talk," 2019). Students can write their immediate thoughts and feelings, and also reflect on how these have changed over the duration of the unit, conversation, or lesson (ROCRestorativeTeam, n.d.). All of these lesson elements should coalesce to create functional, complete lessons that are attuned to students needs/interests/experiences while being rooted in reality. Please note that a single lesson is never enough to address issues of race. Many lessons and discussions over time with these high-quality lessons are necessary for complete student understanding and success so that students can learn and grow through these elements and processes.

Structuring Lessons

Along with the correct elements in a lesson about race, the correct organization and structure are important too. First and foremost, we want students to explore. Designing lessons around exploration sets the stage for a positive encounter with hard topics and gives the students maximum control. A great way to incorporate students into the planning and execution of lessons is to ask them to pose questions and then explore together based on the direction of student-produced questions ("Preparing to Discuss," n.d.). Children are smart, observant, and curious, and they can come up with brilliant questions and nuanced angles from which a class can approach a topic. Additionally, the more input they have in the direction of the curriculum/unit, the more likely they will be to engage, participate, and glean knowledge. While some teacher direction is crucial for organized learning to happen, students need to be offered the space and time to investigate on their own as much as possible. For example, students can choose books to read or people in the community to

interview; students can create and carry out research methods; and students can guide the process as they explore and share research.

Much of the direction for conversations about race can build from student exploration, and all race-related learning should be student centered. Students need to care to be engaged. Teachers can reach students best by meeting them where they are and intentionally engaging them in/with content. Learning is transactional. The material is important, but what the student brings to the table is also important. When asking questions in class, teachers should focus the questions on the students' thoughts and feelings (Thomas, 2018), and connect the material that is being presented to students' collective and individual lives ("Preparing to Discuss," n.d.). For example, if a lesson is about housing inequity, teachers can ask students about their houses, their ideal house, or their familiarity with homelessness. Teachers need to hear students' thoughts and experiences. Once teachers know these experiences, they must work to develop lessons that connect to and extend these experiences as much as possible ("13 Guiding Principles," n.d.). When presenting new ideas, teachers can give examples from students' lives (their students or hypothetical students). In conversations about race, students can often identify with the idea of fairness, so this shared understanding can be a great starting point for a discussion (Cole & Verwayne, 2018). Another good starting point when talking about identity is to talk about the different aspects of life students identify with, starting with smaller things like favorite color and building to larger topics like race ("Let's Talk," 2019). Student centered learning rooted in an inquiry approach will engage and educate students (and teachers too).

Finally, when talking about race issues and racism specific to Black people, teachers should structure the content of lessons around Black people, their experiences, and histories.

One great way to accomplish this goal is to bring Black educators and community members into the classroom (Nichols, 2020). Let experts teach about what they know instead of one teacher trying to know and teach everything (Tansey & Katz, 2015). Ideas often get lost in translation, so bring in people who can speak about their experiences first-hand. Another great way to center on Black experiences is to read diverse texts by and about Black people. Own-voice texts are a great way to look into another community because authors are writing about themselves and their people/experiences. Moreover, teaching "hard history," such as the endslavelet of Black people by White people, is important ("Teaching Hard History", n.d.). History gives citizens' context for present day events and attitudes (Kamenetz & Hagopian, 2020). History does more than that, too; history informs society's ideas about humanity and human progress or lack thereof. A grave problem occurs when teachers center White voices and perspectives in history, leaving out the realities and perspectives of marginalized groups. This erasure is expecially true when teaching about the role slavery played in the development of the United States and how it still influences our country today. When students are taught that slavery was not actually that bad, how are they to understand the collective trauma it caused for the Black community and choose to work against the lasting injustice today? Specifically in the context of this work, teachers must teach lesser known Black histories (Bell, Collins, & Jewell, 2020) by finding nuanced perspectives on events and biographies written by, about, or from the perspective of Black individuals throughout history.

Centering Students in Lessons

As previously discussed, prioritizing the student is arguably the most important element when teaching about race. It is crucial that teachers approach our students gently by

giving them space to think and not forcing them to talk (Landsman, 2016). The goal is not to get a certain response or force the conversation in any direction, but to listen to, learn from, and guide students into new avenues of thinking and understanding. Students must feel safe in order for this type of learning to occur. One specific action for teachers to avoid is asking any student to speak for a group of people that it might seem like they represent ("Let's Talk," 2019). Teachers do not know exactly how each student identifies, and it is harmful to assume. For example, when talking about race, it is a great idea to invite a Black student about their perspective: "Tony, would you be willing to share how you feel about the Black Lives Matter movement?" However, it is not okay to ask Tony to speak for anyone other than himself. An example of this bad practice would be asking, "Tony, how do Black people feel about the Black Lives Matter movement?" Respecting and hearing individual perspectives is important because each person, each Black person, is only responsible for her own thoughts and feelings. Respecting and keeping each student at the center is always the priority in a classroom.

Taking Action

There are a variety of goals that a teacher might have when discussing race with her students: understanding, gaining new perspectives, gauging how they feel, or even calling them to action. It is never a teacher's place to tell students what they must be passionate about or how they need to take action accordingly, but we do want to invite our students to real activism (about race or anything else they are passionate about). Our lessons should be rooted in real life and reality as has already been discussed. Our students' opportunities for action should also be real and not trivial. Let the students use real platforms to express themselves such as social media or blogs instead of just writing private journal entries

(Learning for Justice Staff, 2014). Let them contact politicians or community leaders (Nichols, 2020). Find meaningful opportunities for students to get involved at the community level ("Let's Talk!" 2017). It is important that students feel connected to and influential in their local communities. Many young students will have many big ideas, but we want to guide them to turn their ideas into real action ("Preparing to Discuss," n.d.). Providing opportunities for community involvement can be a great bridge by which to move students from theory to praxis.

Gauging Students' Emotions

Feelings are real and big, especially to young children. It is crucial that teachers be tuned into and mindful of how students are feeling. This is not to say that teachers always need to cater to the way students feel, but they need to be aware. They should regularly check in with students and respond with kindness and adjustment when necessary ("Preparing to Discuss," n.d.). One way to check in on students is to use a stoplight metaphor ("Let's Talk!" 2017). Each student can hold up a card or just say the color that describes the way they feel: green means "I feel great, let's keep going;" yellow means "I think I need to slow down and think for a minute;" and red means "I feel upset and need to take a break." The teacher can judge based on the feelings of the whole class whether to keep going to take a break. Another way to gauge feelings is to go around and let everyone share a word or phrase about how they feel (Landsman, 2016). This process will take longer but gives the students more options to express themselves. After learning how the students feel, teachers must affirm their emotions and love them as they process feelings and information (Kamenetz & Hagopian, 2020). Affirmation does not mean that teachers always have to agree with everything students say, but adults must continually remind children that what they feel is valid and

okay. Students need to feel safe to process and grow in the classroom, which means that space for processing emotions must be created

Engaging Students' Families

Outside of listening to, loving, and teaching students, teachers must also interact with students' families successfully. Conversations about race could have implications for the students that go beyond their life in the classroom. It is important to bring parents in on these hard conversations. Teachers must communicate with parents (Landsman, 2016; "Preparing to Discuss," n.d.). Teachers and parents are teams working together for the success of the child, so it is important that team members speak to each other clearly and often.

Families may disagree with a teacher's convictions, goals, and mindsets, so conversation about race may be challenging and uncomfortable (Cole & Verwayne, 2018). It is best for the child (and society), however, if teachers are courageous to press on through the challenge. One way to approach the topic carefully is to clearly state how talking about race fits into the established standards and state curriculum (West, 2021). Cite state or federal standards in your plans and communications to parents. For example, a conversation that celebrates and acknowledges each person's racial identity could be connected to Learning for Justice's Social Justice Standard about Identity #4 "Students will express pride, confidence and healthy self-esteem without denying the value and dignity of other people" ("Social Justice Standards," n.d.). This lesson could also tie into North Carolina's 2nd grade Speaking and Listening Standard (SL.2.1) which states that students will "Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups." They will "Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions, build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others, [and] ask for

clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics and texts under discussion" ("Understanding the NC, 2017). The aims of discussion and collaborative classroom work fit right into state's expectations of what students are expected to learn and do.

Teachers must be careful using buzz words in letters and information that are sent home with students. Teachers need to frame lessons clearly leaving little room for misinterpretation. Families matter to the lives of students, so they should matter to teachers. It is so important to communicate clearly and effectively with parents about race-related conversations that are happening at school if teachers hope to find support and extension of learning at home.

Final Thoughts

Talking about race can seem uncomfortable, nontraditional, and counter-cultural in some spaces, but the research is clear that it matters. Our students are diverse, so our instruction must be diverse. While treading gently, with grace and kindness, we must firmly stand on the principles that drive us to include and serve our students, especially those who identify as people of color. To support our students and stand for justice well, we must effectively plan and implement lessons, read alouds, and discussions about race in our classroom. There must first be internal work on the teacher's part and classroom preparation. Then, the actual lessons must be carried out with poise, comfort with the uncomfortable, and factual information. Our intentions and standards must be communicated clearly to parents and students. The research is clear, and the resources are abundant. Knowledge drives classroom practice, and I hope that this review of current literature and research has equipped you, the reader, with knowledge about the intersection of racial discussions and the elementary school classroom.

Leveraging the Research to Develop Curricular Resources for Teachers

After completing the extensive research discussed above, I transitioned my focus from others' work to my own contributions to the conversation about and work of teaching about race and racism in the elementary classroom. My work is rooted in the research I conducted but seeks to be practical for teachers to use in their own classrooms and literature collection processes. Most teachers do not have time to read all of the research and books, so my work seeks to do some of that work for them and guide them quickly to resources and books. I began by developing guiding questions to serve as an evaluative tool for educators to use when looking for books about race and racism to use in their classrooms. Any book can be looked at through the lens of these questions and evaluated for authenticity and usefulness in regards to Black life and racism in America. Additionally, these questions could be adapted to evaluate texts focused on other races, topics, or experiences.

In a dual effort to put these questions to use and to create a text set that could be used in an upper elementary classroom, I began to collect and read a wide selection of children's literature. I started with a list of about seventy-five books, fifty of which I selected to read. After reading all the books and choosing the ones for my text set, I formally evaluated each book by using my guiding questions. I wanted to make sure that each text was accurate, authentic, and acceptable to present to students and other teachers. Then, I engaged in deeper analysis by selecting three books on which to focus from across my text set. One of my final steps was to write a lesson that teachers could use in their own classrooms that builds on one of the texts from my text set. This lesson introduces the text as well as a variety of discussion strategies for talking about race that I gleaned from my research. The lesson combines my academic research work and my practical text set work to create a resource for teachers. In

the sections that follow, I offer insights into my process and share the curricular resources I developed.

Guiding Questions

In order to help educators discover and evaluate books that they could use to help frame conversations about race with children, I created eleven guiding questions to serve as an evaluative tool. My guiding questions were informed by the work of Frank (2019); Hartsfield and Kimmel (2020); Mascareñaz (2016); Meier (2015); Sharma and Christ (2017); and Thomas et al. (2016). Other people and organizations have created similar evaluative tools and written standards such as Black Lives Matter at School ("13 guiding principles," n.d.) and Learning for Justice ("Social Justice Standards," n.d.). I chose to create a new tool because I wanted to unify existing tools such as these with my own experiences with and interpretations of academic research and literature. Also, on some level, I wanted the opportunity to research, create, and think about these topics for myself and my future students with the hope that my tool will support and contribute to the larger and existing conversation. Alongside the eleven guiding questions, I also developed supporting questions to add clarity for those who need practical assistance evaluating books (see Appendix A). The guiding questions are as follows:

1. Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?
2. Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?
3. Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?
4. Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?
5. Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?

6. Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?
7. Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?
8. Does this book contain healing elements?
9. Is this text appropriate for your students?
10. Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?
11. If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?

Exploring and Reviewing Children's Books

After creating the guiding questions, I began my quest to find books for my own text set. Text sets provide a useful, focused way to explore topics because they focus attention on many aspects of the topic. A text set is "a carefully curated collection of texts that are related by topic, concept, theme, essential question, or genre" (Capiello & Dawes, 2020, p. 14). Text sets can help teachers extend student exploration and learning beyond the standards by providing a scaffolded pathway of understanding for students to follow that results in the understanding of more complex concepts (Capiello & Dawes, 2020). They also provide multiple perspectives from which students can look at a topic from. I wanted to put my theories and questions into practice. I set a goal of reading fifty children's books across genres and formats that addressed the Black identity, experience, and racism in America. I compiled a list of books based on recommendations from my research, websites and articles, a webinar from an Appalachian State University librarian, and my own experiences and book discoveries. My list was over seventy-five books long, so with the help of my thesis director (Beth Buchholz) and Instructional Materials Librarian (Jewel Davis), I trimmed this list down to fifty books. I found these books in the Appalachian State University library, the

Denton Public Library, and on websites such as MackinVIA and Hoopla. As I collected the texts, I read them for content with a critical eye and a mind set on my guiding questions, ultimate text set goals, and target age group (grades 3-5). After reading each book, I made notes about the content, my critical thoughts, the author's identity, the genre, the publication date, the awards it had won, and whether or not the text was age appropriate. I later used this information to trim down my list of fifty books into my seventeen book text set. Almost all of the fifty books were great texts that I would be comfortable reading in my future classroom, but the seventeen I chose were the texts best suited for my text set goals.

I wanted my text set to cover many aspects of race and racism as well as represent a variety of genres, formats, and historical time spans. Once I had finished all fifty books, I first chose the novel that I wanted to include. Then, I moved my attention to the picturebooks. My goal was to have subsections of my text set that focused on certain elements of race and racism such as activism and historical perspectives. Organization and logical grouping was important to me, and I had some ideas of ways I might group the books. I laid out all of the picture books I had physical copies of and papers with the titles of those I had read online. With the books scattered across my dorm room bed, I began to see similarities and potential groupings. Some of the books obviously did not fit, and others were not up to my standards. Some I felt compelled to include and worked to create categories around them. Categories are useful within text sets in order to focus on certain aspects. Books in a text set work together individually, but they also work together in their subsets to more completely cover a topic. Subsets can also help focus sections of a lesson/unit on different specific aspects of an issue. Organization is important in planning, and categories provide some built in structure. Ultimately, I developed four subsections with sixteen books

total plus one spotlight novel. See Appendix B for the list of all of the books that I read but *did not choose* for the text set.

The Final Text Set

The text set I developed is titled "Exploring Black Identities and Experiences," and focuses on themes surrounding Black identity, experience, and racism in America (see Figure 1 for a visual overview of the text set; see Appendix B for a full list of books read with additional information). The text set is designed to be a springboard for a teacher to start and facilitate conversations about race with elementary school students. There are four subsections and a spotlight novel. The sections are Approaching Identity, Highlighting Black Life, History Through Biographies, and Introducing Activism. The final text set includes the following books arranged by theme and subsection:

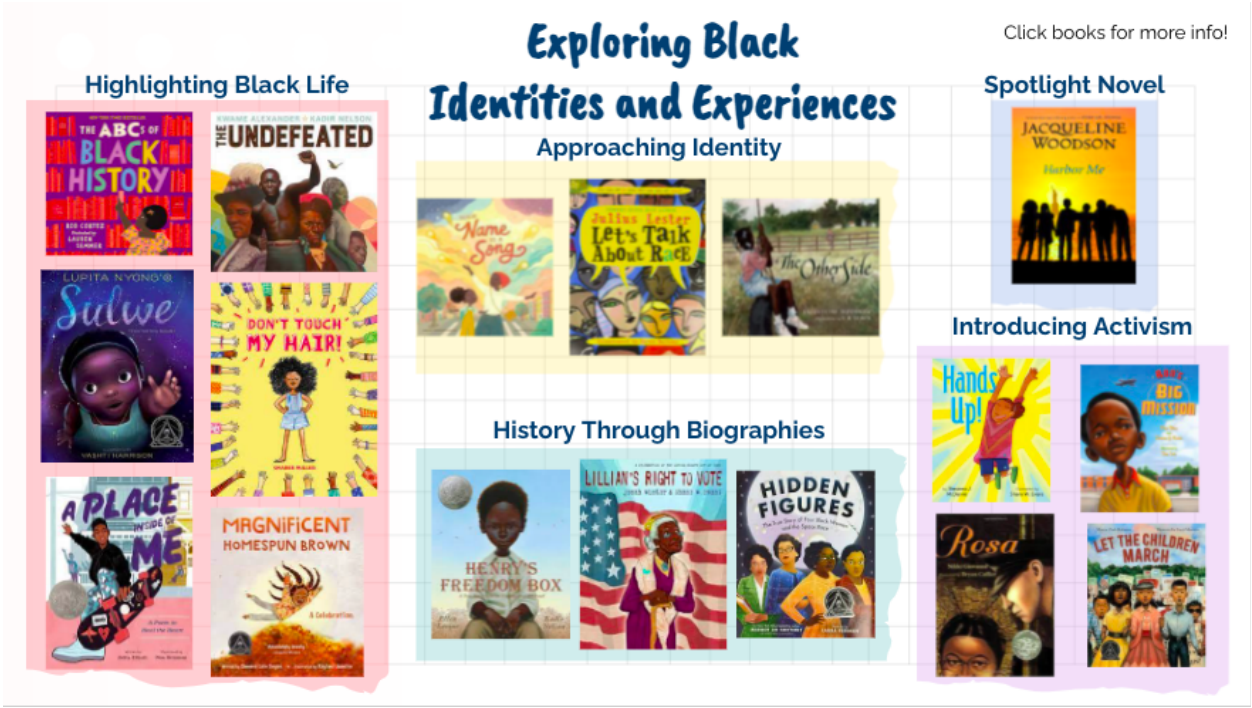
- Theme/Section I: Approaching Identity
    - *Your Name is a Song* (Thompkins-Bigelow & Uribe, 2020)
    - *Let's Talk About Race* (Lester & Barbour, 2005)
    - *The Other Side* (Woodson & Lewis, 2001)
- Theme/Section II: Highlighting Black Life
    - *The ABC's of Black History* (Cortez & Semmer, 2020)
    - *The Undefeated* (Alexander & Nelson, 2019)
    - *Sulwe* (Nyong'o & Harrison, 2019)
    - *Don't Touch my Hair* (Miller, 2018)
    - *A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart* (Elliott & Denmon, 2020)
    - *Magnificent Homespun Brown: A Celebration* (Doyon & Juanita, 2020)
- Theme/Section III: History Through Biographies
    - *Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad* (Levine & Nelson, 2007)
    - *Hidden Figures: The True Story of Four Black Women and the Space Race* (Shetterly et al., 2018)
    - *Lillian's Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (Winter & Evans, 2015)
- Theme/Section IV: Introducing Activism
    - *Hands Up!* (McDaniel & Evans, 2019)
    - *Ron's Big Mission* (Blue et al., 2009)

- *Rosa* (Giovanni & Collier, 2005
- *Let the Children March* (Clark-Robinson & Morrison, 2018)

- Spotlight Novel
  - *Harbor Me* (Woodson, 2018)

Figure 1

Text Set Graphic



The *Approaching Identity* section serves as an introduction to a conversation about race. We want to set our students up for productive dialogue about identity by giving them the tools to approach complex subjects. These books have been chosen to facilitate beginning conversations about individual identity, race, and racism.

The *Highlighting Black Life* section serves as both a mirror and window for students. The goal is to affirm the lives and experiences of Black students while giving other students

an authentic look at the lives of their peers. These books celebrate life in general but especially lives of Black people, past and present.

The *History Through Biographies* section highlights the collective past of Black people in America by spotlighting specific people and events. Students need to have a view of Black life that encompasses both the past and present. History is important for understanding present society. Biographies are a great way to peer into the past because the narratives are accessible and personable.

The *Introducing Activism* section introduces students to the idea of productive, peaceful activism. We want to give students the agency to work for change when they see a need whether that be related to race or not. Some of these books highlight past activism, and one serves as an introduction to peaceful activism at large.

Each of the seventeen books in the text set supports the main topic and the subsection theme. All of the books not only fit thematically in the text set but have been evaluated by means of the set of guiding questions I developed. An example of my evaluation of the book *Your Name is a Song* can be viewed in Figure 2, and the full set of book evaluations of each book can be found in Appendix D. Some of the books do not satisfy the requirements of every guiding question, but those that are lacking still meet the standards of acceptance and authenticity established by means of the guiding questions. Since individual books have strengths and purposes that may not address race and/or racism comprehensively, the seventeen books work in concert to paint a holistic picture of race and racism for students and educators. Along with the text set, I included four inquiry questions to guide conversation and exploration of the texts. They are as follows:

- What is identity?

    - What factors, from within myself and from society, shape my identity?
    - How can I describe and compare my identities, individual and group, with those of other people?
    - How does a person's race impact their identity?
- How can I live, work and play with others when we have differences?
    - How can I learn about other people's lives, identities, and experiences in ways that are respectful, kind and understanding?
    - How can I celebrate other people's identities as well as my own in ways that are respectful, kind, and understanding?
    - How can differences between people help friendships and groups become stronger?
- How has my life been affected based on who I am, where I was born, or the color of my skin?
    - What advantages or disadvantages do I notice because of identity groups?
    - How do people judge my group(s)? How do people judge other groups(s)?
    - What identities and experiences are unique to the Black community?
- What contributions have Black people made to restoration, justice, and fairness historically in our country?
    - Why is history important? How does it affect how people live today?
    - How have Black Americans been treated unfairly in our country? In what ways has that changed? What still needs to change?
    - How have people of other races worked with Black people to bring about restoration and justice?

- How can we create a more fair and just community?
    - What does it mean to speak about justice and differences with others in loving, kind, respectful ways?
    - How can I work with others to restore my community?
    - How do we ensure freedom for all people?
    - What can I do to help groups or individuals who are struggling?

I also created additional materials to support teachers in further examining and sharing these books (see Appendices D, E, and F). These materials have more information that will be useful to a teacher seeking to understand, evaluate, and use my text set.

Figure 2

Example Evaluation of a Text Set Book

Your Name is a Song
Written by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow
Illustrated by Luisa Uribe

Guiding Question		Evaluation
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. Multiculturalism is emphasized.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?		Discrimination based on traditional names is explored, but not race specifically. I am using this book to serve as an introduction to talking about identity, specifically the identity we find in our names, to set up a conversation about identity found in race.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes. The discrimination is based on personal predjudices and group differences and prejudices.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes. Black joy is especially highlighted.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?		Somewhat. Gender diversity is present, but not focused on.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes, especially the mother.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	It is written by a Black, Muslim woman.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	The names in the book have pronunciation guides and accurate meanings.

Deeper Analysis of a Small Text Grouping

To demonstrate the application of my criteria to the content evaluation of texts related to race, specifically Black life in America, I engaged in a deeper evaluation of a grouping of three books from the text set: *A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart* (Elliott & Denmon, 2020); *The Other Side* (Woodson & White, 2001); and *Lillian's Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (Winter & Evans, 2015). I selected these three particular books because they are from different sections within the text set, and I wanted to demonstrate how books from different sections work together to paint a fuller picture of the topic. I also really love these three books for their perspectives and authenticity and wanted to highlight their merits. Moreover, for children to fully explore ideas in the classroom, more than one text is needed, so I wanted my analysis to highlight the ways these texts are valuable individually as well as how they interact to more holistically address Black identity, experience, and racism in America. My analysis of each book offers an introduction before using the guiding questions and sub-questions to engage in critical evaluation. I conclude with comments on the unity and collective value of the three texts. See Appendix F for my full analysis.

Sample Lesson for a Single Book

As the final piece of my project, I created a lesson plan that uses literature and my research about teaching kids about race that can be implemented in a classroom. It begins with an objective rooted in the Common Core standards and Learning for Justice's Social Justice standards. The lesson introduction includes advice for setting up a classroom environment that lends itself to collaboration and complex discussions. Next, there are some activities with which to engage students: a read aloud with questions, a talking circle with

prompts, a silent discussion, and, finally, small group discussions. The lesson closes with independent journaling time for students to reflect on their experiences. As noted above, though a complete discourse about race and racism will require many lessons over time, this lesson constitutes a useful starter conversation that will lay the groundwork for longer, more sustained discussions.

Reflection

I have learned much having spent the past year researching and writing about how best to teach about race in the elementary school classroom. I initially expected to find lists of strategies and proven techniques, but I did not discover a clear and easy path from theory to practice from research regarding strategies to practical implementation of them. I thought there would be a model, or at least enough information for me to create one. Maybe there would be examples and academic studies on classrooms that talked about race and the effects on students. I did not expect for this topic to be so individual and emotional. My research broke down my expectations and opened my mind to a new way of thinking about my topic. I learned very quickly that there is not a scientific process for approaching race. There is not a one-size-fits-all model; there never is in education. Race cannot be discussed in one lesson or one unit. The process will span a year, maybe multiple years, of building trust and adjusting mindsets through discussions and shared experiences. The work for the teacher starts internally, evaluating one's own experiences, biases, and perceptions. There is much to be done before she ever sets foot in a classroom to talk to students about race. She must first search within herself, educate herself, and be thoroughly prepared to walk through the same steps with her students. The process is lengthy and challenging. It does not fit into a pedagogical framework that could be applied to every classroom. I was wrong in what I

expected to find, and so glad that I was, because I am a far more thoroughly equipped educator after learning all I have for this thesis. I have had the opportunity to dive into academic research surrounding pedagogical practices, classroom trust building, and discussing race. I grew in my knowledge of children's literature and learned that to be used effectively, teachers must engage students with it. I learned to present extensive work clearly for a specific audience. I created a tool for evaluation and used it. I chose books and wrote a lesson that I hope to use in my future classroom. I researched educational theories and explored various educational practices, and I have products to show for it. My heart, knowledge, and toolkit have all grown from this experience. I hope that this information and these resources will benefit you, too.

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Appendix A

A Tool for Evaluating Children's Literature

The following "guiding questions" were developed along with additional supporting questions to help evaluate the books for inclusion in the text set.

1. **Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?** (Meier, 2015; Thomas, Reese, & Horning, 2016)
    a. Is the representation of Black culture authentic and accurate?
        i. Are the places realistic?
        ii. Is language communicated authentically?
        iii. Are the traditions presented true and not trivialized?
        iv. Are families and communities highly valued?
    b. Are the Black characters realistic, holistic, and beautiful?
        i. Are Black characters change agents for the plot of the story?
        ii. Are Black male characters presented as capable, smart, contributing community members?
    c. Are there any stereotypes or details that might perpetuate stereotypes?
    d. Is there any erasure of Black history, people, or experiences?

2. **Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?** (Thomas, Reese, & Horning, 2016)
    a. Does this text celebrate beauty and joy that is uniquely Black?
    b. In the celebration of Black life, does the text diminish the validity or importance of other lives?
    c. Does this text serve as a mirror for Black students to see themselves and a window for students of other races to better understand Black lives?
    d. Does this text value diversity and multiculturalism? ("Social Justice Standards", n.d.)
        i. Are there characters that represent diversity across race, class, gender, ethnicity, language, etc.?
        ii. Are lives that may be outside of the cultural majority presented as equal and valuable?

3. **Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?** (Frank, 2019)
    a. Does this text oversimplify complex issues such as race?
    b. Is the ending unrealistically happy and successful?

4. **Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?**
    a. Can the reader see race as a systematic and personal issue?
    b. Does the text address both the history and present realities of race and racism?

5. **Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?** (Frank, 2019)
    a. Are the illustrations true to what Black people say Black lived experience looks like?
    b. Is there equality in the way that characters of different races and ethnicities are visually represented?
    c. Do the illustrations communicate Black joy?
    d. Do the illustrations include any caricatures or perpetuate any stereotypes?

6. **Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?** ("13 Guiding Principles, n.d.)
    a. Are the Black characters portrayed within/across the complexities of other intersecting identities such as gender, ability, family role, class, etc?

7. **Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?**
    a. Are Black characters the wise ones?
    b. Are those in charge (physically, emotionally, or intellectually) Black?

8. **Does this book contain healing elements?** (Mascareñaz, 2016)
    a. Does this text explicitly or implicitly address pain individually or collectively experienced by the Black community?
    b. Are there elements of joy, restoration, and hope?
    c. Are students who have experienced racial trauma going to feel better or worse when reading this book?

9. **Is this text appropriate for your students?** (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020)
    a. Are the issues in this book complex enough for your smart, capable students?
        i. Note: Just because your parents or teachers chose not to address issues of race in elementary school does not make it okay to avoid addressing race with your students. As awful as it is, your students live in a world where they are aware of racial injustice and unrest. It is your job to make your classroom a safe space for discussing these topics. Here (Pitts, 2016) is an article to encourage you in your courageous endeavor!
    b. Is the content relevant to what students are interested in, experiencing, and/or learning about?

   c. Are the literary components (length, vocabulary, sentence length, etc) of this book developmentally appropriate for your students?

10. **Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?** (Sharma & Christ, 2017)
    a. Is the author writing about things he/she has personally experienced?

11. **If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?**
    a. Are the author's/illustrator's sources listed?
    b. If there are sources, are the sources biased or problematic?

Appendix B

Children's Books Reviewed for the Official Text Set

This following is a list of books that I reviewed as part of my thesis work but ultimately chose not to include in my text set.

- *One Crazy Summer*
  - Written by Rita Williams-Garcia
  - This novel tells of three sisters who go visit their mom who is a Black Panther in Oakland during the 1970s. It is a work of historical fiction that highlights the often untold stories of the Black Panthers.

- *The Parker Inheritance*
  - Written by Varian Johnson
  - This novel follows two pre-teens as they hunt for the past and treasure in their seemingly sleepy town.

- *New Shoes*
  - Written by Susan Lynn Meyer
  - Illustrated by Eric Velasquez
  - Ella May and Charlotte start a shoe store in their southern town during the Jim Crow era where Black people can try on shoes because they cannot try them on in White-owned shoe stores. This book provides an effective image of the Jim Crow South.

- *For Black Girls Like Me*
  - Written by Mariama Lockington
  - This novel tells Makeda's complex story of adoption, family challenges, mental illness, racism, and other problems middle school girls face. This text is too advanced for grades three and four.

- *Howard Thurman's Great Hope*
  - Written by Kai Jackson Issa
  - Illustrated by Arthur Dawson
  - This biographical story tells of Howard Thurman, a Black man growing up in the segregated South, and his journey through school against all odds.

- *Ways to Make Sunshine*
  - Written by Renée Watson
  - This novel follows fourth grader Ryan Hart as she adjusts to a new home, gains confidence to emcee a talent show, gets along with her brother, and spends time with her friends. This text provides an example of authentic Black experience but does not address racism directly enough to be included in my text set.

- *A Good Kind of Trouble*
  - Written by Lisa Moore Ramée
  - This novel follows Shayla as she inhabits a middle school world of friendships, crushes, and family dynamics within the larger context of the Black Lives Matter movement and a police brutality trial. This novel is too mature for third graders.

- *Genesis Begins Again*
  - Written by Alicia Williams
  - This novel tells of Genesis's struggles with colorism, racism, family drama, friendships, and poverty with strong notes of hope and resilience. This book is too mature for third and fourth graders.

- *Brown Girl Dreaming*
  - Written by Jacqueline Woodson
  - This autobiographical novel in verse is made up of beautiful free verse poetry about Woodson's life.

- *New Kid*
  - Written by Jerry Craft
  - This compelling graphic novel follows a Black seventh grade boy as he transfers to a primarily White private school and navigates classes, friendships, and identity discovery.

- *Black is Brown is Tan*
  - Written by Arnold Adoff
  - Illustrated by Emily Arnold McCully
  - This book is an illustrated poem about a mixed race family. It is a great text about diversity as it highlights the equality between people with different skin colors.

- *The Talk: Conversations About Race, Love, and Truth*

        - Edited by Wade Hudson and Cheryl Hudson
        - This anthology contains poems, stories, and letters that center around “the talk” that many non-White parents have with their children about race and racism. This text is not aimed at elementary school students.

    - *Ruth and the Green Book*
        - Written by Calvin Alexander Ramsey
        - Illustrated by Floyd Cooper
        - This engaging work of historical fiction tells the story of a Black family travelling through the Jim Crow South and using the Green Book to find safe, welcoming places to stop.

    - *Black is A Rainbow Color*
        - Written by Angela Joy
        - Illustrated by Euka Holmes
        - This book is the celebration of Black culture, life, and experiences. It allows the reader to explore what it means to embody the color Black as an identity with a little girl who realizes that Black is not in the rainbow.

    - *All Because You Matter*
        - Written by Tami Charles
        - Illustrated by Bryan Collier
        - This letter from mother to son reminds Black children that they really matter. The child’s worth is rooted in their history and personal sense of self. This book would serve as a great mirror text for Black students in which they can see themselves and find affirmation.

    - *I Am Every Good Thing*
        - Written by Derrick Barnes
        - Illustrated by Gordon C James
        - This book serves as a celebration of Black boyhood and Black boys. It highlights aspects of childhood such as career dreams, playing, and friendship. The book reminds readers that they are enough, capable, and a joy. The book is uplifting and fun.

    - *Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans*
        - Written and illustrated by Kadir Nelson
        - This book tells the history of Black people in America through the lens of an old woman's family and personal stories. It covers everything

from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement. It is a great history book, but not a great read aloud.

- *The Day You Begin*
  - Written by Jaqueline Woodson
  - Illustrated by Rafael Lopez
  - Students who feel excluded from their class for various reasons (race, language, looks, ability) are highlighted and valued in this text. The point is that our uniqueness is beautiful and can be accepted and valued. This text does not focus on race but is an uplifting book about diversity and diverse perspectives.

- *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Boy*
  - Written by Tony Medina
  - Illustrated by various artists
  - This poetry collection by Tony Medina with corresponding illustrations by thirteen different artists centers on the varied and beautiful life experience of Black boys.

- *We Rise, We Resist ,We Raise Our Voices*
  - Edited by Wade Hudson and Cheryl Willis Hudson
  - The pieces in this collection center around the idea of uplifting and encouraging people in the context of various social justice issues. This work strives to humanize and encourage all.

- *Freedom in Congo Square*
  - Written by Carole Boston Weatherford
  - Illustrated by Gregory Christie
  - This is a historical poem about Congo Square, a square in New Orleans where Black people gathered to dance, catch up, and rest on Sunday afternoons during slavery. It highlights the struggle of slavery and the agency of the slaves to make joy in the midst of the suffering. It highlights an untold story of an aspect of slavery.

- *Hey Black Child*
  - Written by Useni Eugene Perkins
  - Illustrated by Bryan Collier
  - This book is a poem to Black children reminding them how strong and capable they are. It uplifts and encourages the Black child's soul with pointed language and vibrant, varied illustrations. The primary

function of this book is to affirm Black children.

- *Going Down Home with Daddy*
  - Written by Kelly Starling Lyons
  - Illustrated by Daniel Minter
  - A young boy goes to his family reunion where the Black family celebrates their history and family identity with traditions and love. This text highlights the values of family identity and community.

- *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*
  - Written by Derrick Barnes
  - Illustrated by Gordon C. James
  - This book delights in the experience of a barber shop and a fresh haircut for a Black boy. It celebrates the beauty and humanity of Black men especially. The young narrator loves getting his new fade that makes him feel so important, desirable, and capable. This book highlights and applauds Black boys.

- *My Hair is a Garden*
  - Written and illustrated by Cozbi A. Cabrera
  - This book tells the story of Mack, a young Black girl, who is bullied for her hair. She visits Miss Tillie who teaches Mack that her hair is like a garden that must be nurtured, loved, and cared for. Mack comes to believe that her hair is beautiful and that she must care for it well.

- *Skin Again*
  - Written by bell hooks
  - Illustrated by Chris Rashcka
  - This book is an introduction to the idea that we are not defined by our skin. We must get under the skin, to the heart, to really understand someone. This text is not as direct and clear as some others such as *Shades of People* by Sheila M. Kelly and Shelley Rotner.

- *A is for Activist*
  - Written and illustrated by Innosanto Nagara
  - In a collection of poems that correspond to the alphabet, Nagara explores many aspects and objects of activism, but the book is centered around concerns of race.

- “My People”

        - Poem by Langston Hughes
        - This poem celebrates Black beauty through comparisons to nature.

    - *Sing A Song: How "Lift Every Voice and Sing" Inspired Generations*
        - Written by Kelly Starling Lyons
        - Illustrated by Keith Mallett
        - This is the story of how the song "Lift Every Voice and Sing" has been passed down and inspired Black Americans for decades. This beautiful book portrays the lives, strength, and resilience of Black people and explains a culture icon.

    - *Shades of People*
        - Written by Sheila M. Kelly and Shelley Rotner
        - This is a book that recognizes and celebrates the different shades of skin that humans have. The emphasis is on delighting in differences and realizing that our skin color does not define us. This book has really positive messages about race and diversity. This is a terrific introductory book about racial differences

    - *As Fast as Words Could Fly*
        - Written by Pamela Tuck
        - Illustrated by Eric Velasquez
        - This book tells the story of the author's father's adolescent journey to gain acceptance in a White school as Black student. Despite his exceptional typing skills, he is discriminated against. This realistic work of historical fiction is notable for its wide-ranging vocabulary and engaging story.

    - *Brick by Brick*
        - Written by Charles Smith Jr.
        - Illustrated by Floyd Cooper
        - This book recognizes and tells the story of the slaves who built the white house. It emphasizes their toil and unappreciated struggle on behalf of the White slave owners and politicians. It portrays Black people as powerful and resilient in the face of deep injustice.

    - *Testing the Ice: A True Story About Jackie Robinson*
        - Written by Sharon Robinson
        - Illustrated by Kadir Nelson

- This book tells the story of Jackie Robinson's bravery testing the ice on a frozen lake and compares it to his story of bravery as the first Black man in Major League Baseball.

Appendix C

Final Text Text Set Focused on Black Identities and Experiences

- Theme/Section: Approaching Identity
  - *Your Name is a Song*
    - Written by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow
    - Illustrated by Luisa Uribe
    - 2020
  - *Let's Talk About Race*
    - Written by Julius Lester
    - Illustrated by Karen Barbour
    - 2005
  - *The Other Side*
    - Written by Jacqueline Woodson
    - Illustrated by E.B. Lewis
    - 2001

- Theme/Section: Highlighting Black Life
  - *The ABC's of Black History*
    - Written by Rio Cortez
    - Illustrated by Lauren Semmer
    - 2020
  - *The Undefeated*
    - Written by Kwame Alexander
    - Illustrated by Kadir Nelson
    - 2019
  - *Sulwe*
    - Written by Lupita Nyong'o
    - Illustrated by Vashti Harrison
    - 2019
  - *Don't Touch my Hair*
    - Written and Illustrated by Sharee Miller
    - 2018
  - *A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart*
    - Written by Zetta Elliott
    - Illustrated by Noa Denmon
    - 2020
  - *Magnificent Homespun Brown: A Celebration*

        - Written by Samara Cole Doyon
        - Illustrated by Kaylani Juanita
        - 2020

- Theme/Section: History Through Biographies
    - *Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad*
        - Written by Ellen Levine
        - Illustrated by Kadir Nelson
        - 2007
    - *Hidden Figures: The True Story of Four Black Women and the Space Race*
        - Written by Margot Lee Shetterly with Winifred Conkling
        - Illustrated by Laura Freeman
        - 2018
    - *Lillian's Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965*
        - Written by Jonah Winter
        - Illustrated by Shane W. Evans
        - 2015

- Theme/Section: Introducing Activism
    - *Hands Up!*
        - Written by Breanna J. McDaniel
        - Illustrated by Shane W. Evans
        - 2019
    - *Ron's Big Mission*
        - Written by Rose Blue and Corinne J. Naden
        - Illustrated by Don Tate
        - 2009
    - *Rosa*
        - Written by Nikki Giovanni
        - Illustrated by Bryan Collier
        - 2005
    - *Let the Children March*
        - Written by Monica Clark-Robinson
        - Illustrated by Frank Morrison
        - 2018

- Spotlight Novel
    - *Harbor Me*
        - Written by Jacqueline Woodson
        - 2018

Appendix D

Critical Evaluations of Children's Literature Included in the Text Set

The tables on the following pages demonstrate how I evaluated the seventeen books in my final text set using my guiding questions. A checkmark indicates whether the book satisfied each question/criteria, and then I also included a brief explanation to provide additional context. This critical evaluation of children's literature is the kind of work that teachers must engage in order to choose books for their classrooms that authentically and appropriately represent groups of people if they are to introduce students to multiple perspectives in an authentic, just, and restorative way.

Your Name is a Song
Written by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow
Illustrated by Luisa Uribe

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. Multiculturalism is emphasized.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?		Discrimination based on traditional names is explored, but not race specifically. I am using this book to serve as an introduction to talking about identity, specifically the identity we find in our names, to set up a conversation about identity found in race.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes. The discrimination is based on personal predjudices and group differences and prejudices.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes. Black joy is especially highlighted.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?		Somewhat. Gender diversity is present, but not focused on.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes, especially the mother.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	It is written by a Black, Muslim woman.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	The names in the book have pronunciation guides and accurate meanings.

Let's Talk About Race
Written by Julius Lester
Illustrated by Karen Barbour

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Somewhat. The purpose of the book is to help students think and talk about race, so it doesn't spend time discussing Black life, but when Black identity is addressed, it is accurate.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. All identities are affirmed.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Race is portrayed holistically, but racial justice is barely touched on. Racial injustice is described and holistically represented.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?		The illustrations are primarily too unrealistic to represent any life "accurately."
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes. All readers, especially those who identify with minority groups, are empowered.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	The text is written by a Black man.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?		n/a.

The Other Side
Written by Jacqueline Woodson
Illustrated by E.B. Lewis

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. Equality is the main premise of this text.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Somewhat. Race and prejudice are depicted, but only on a personal level. This could easily lead to a more holistic discussion about race and racism.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	See note above.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?		Not really. Childhood/age is present in the story.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes. Power is shared.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes. There is beautiful resolution and growth.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	The author is a Black woman, and the illustrator is a Black man.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?		n/a.

The ABC's of Black History
Written by Rio Cortez
Illustrated by Lauren Semmer

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. Present and past, Black life is presented and celebrated.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. The history and present realities of race are addressed in this text.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes. The illustrations especially address diversity and equality.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes. This is not a fiction book, so there are not traditional characters, but figures included and Black readers are empowered and honored.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes. There is so much joy and celebration.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	The author is a Black woman.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	Yes.

The Undefeated
Written by Kwame Alexander
Illustrated by Kadir Nelson

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. The illustrations realize the poetic words in the faces and depictions of these beautiful Black people, named and unnamed.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. Other identities are not directly addressed, but are never belittled.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. This is a major strength of this book.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes. This text definitely addresses the historical and present implications of race, racism, and Black life in America.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes. Past and present.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes, absolutely.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	Yes. It is written and illustrated by Black men.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	Yes. There is factual explanation of the events and people included.

Sulwe
Written by Lupita Nyong'o
Illustrated by Vashti Harrison

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. This book highlights colorism and affirms differences between Black people.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. Again, this text focuses on colorism and equality and worth between Black people of different skin tones.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?		No. This text focuses on colorism rather than White-Black racism and racial issues.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes, especially different shades of skin within the Black community.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	Yes. It is written and illustrated by Black women.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?		n/a.

Don't Touch my Hair
Written and Illustrated by Sharee Miller

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. The book successfully calls out some groups of people without belittling or attacking them.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?		Somewhat. Racial differences (namely hair) are addressed, but racism is not addressed specifically. There could easily be conversations about racism that stem from this text.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Race, yes. Racial justice, not so much.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes, specifically female and Black, but the illustrations include diverse people.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes. This text is appropriate for students even younger than upper elementary.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	Yes. The author/illustrator is a Black woman.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?		n/a.

A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart
Written by Zetta Elliott
Illustrated by Noa Denmon

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. This book specifically highlights the beauty and value of Black male life.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. The illustrations depict this.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. This is definitely a strength of this book.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes, complete with Black joy, vibrant life, and real sorrow.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes. Male and Black identity as a beautiful intersection are especially explored here.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	Yes. It is written and illustrated by Black women.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?		n/a.

Magnificent Homespun Brown: A Celebration
Written by Samara Cole Doyon
Illustrated by Kaylani Juanita

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. Many aspects of Black life are highlighted and portrayed as particularly joyful.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?		Somewhat. The experience and joys of being Black are highlighted, but racism is not discussed at all. As the title suggests, this book is a celebration.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?		Not really. Race is depicted holistically, but racism and racial justice are not addressed. Again, this book is a celebration.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes. Age, ability, gender, family roles, and religion are all depicted either in the text or illustrations.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes. It is a healing text overall.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	Yes. It is written and illustrated by Black women.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?		n/a.

Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad
Written by Ellen Levine
Illustrated by Kadir Nelson

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. It accurately represents slavery.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. It depicts slavery and provides a historical perspective on race relations and racism in America.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Somewhat. Because this text is about slavery, it does not address racial justice, but does condemn slavery and thus racism.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?		Somewhat. It mostly focuses on the identity of being a slave.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes. Even as a slave, Henry finds the agency to free himself.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes. There are really hard elements that are not fully resolved.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	It is illustrated by a Black man.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	Yes.

Hidden Figures: The True Story of Four Black Women and the Space Race
Written by Margot Lee Shetterly with Winifred Conkling
Illustrated by Laura Freeman

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. Even though sexism and racism are addressed, the white characters are never villainized.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. It focuses on racism during the space race within NASA and explores the complexities.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes. Especially gender and race.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes. The women are highlighted for their intelligence within the scientific community.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes. There is a positive ending that is not simple, but uplifting.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes. It is a picture book that is aimed at upper elementary students.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	Yes. The primary author and the illustrator are both Black women.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	Yes. The back provides further facts and explanation.

Lillian's Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965
Written by Jonah Winter
Illustrated by Shane W. Evans

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. This book portrays Black lives through the years in America and shows the changes to life as a Black American.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. The history of Black people voting in America is complex and messy, and this text addresses the entire history without leaving out the hard parts.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Somewhat. Gender and age are included, but not the main focus.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes. The main source of power is derived from the right to vote.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	It is illustrated by a Black man.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	Yes.

Hands Up!
Written by Breanna J. McDaniel
Illustrated by Shane W. Evan**s**

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. The childhood of the main character is holistic and accurate.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes. The last page highlights multiple social justice issues, not just racial justice.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?		Somewhat. The book serves as an introduction to peaceful activism which grows out of a need for complex racial relations.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Somewhat. Race is portrayed holistically, but racism is only addressed in that there is a need for activism and standing with your “hands up.”
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes. Age and gender are both addressed through illustrations.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes. This is especially depicted through illustrations.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes. This text is accessible for students as young as 6 or 7.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	Yes. It is written by a Black woman and illustrated by a Black man.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?		n/a.

Ron's Big Mission
Written by Rose Blue and Corinne J. Naden
Illustrated by Don Tate

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?		The complex impacts of historical segregation are depicted, but the resolution is slightly oversimplified. This book should be read with another book like *Let the Children March* that more accurately depicts the challenges of desegregation or coupled with a conversation about the realities of desegregation.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?		See note above. This book does a great job of depicting the power of one child to initiate change while leaving out some major hurdles that need to be mentioned when this book is read.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes. Age and race are integrated.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes. A Black child is empowered to create big change.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	The illustrator is Black man.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	Yes.

Rosa
Written by Nikki Giovanni
Illustrated by Bryan Collier

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. It is true to the time period.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. The Civil Rights Movement is portrayed well in this text.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes. The historical aspect is emphasized in this text.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes. Rosa is both a woman and Black person.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes. Rosa Parks is the epitome of power and wisdom in this biographical account.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes. This picture book is aimed at upper elementary students.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	Yes. The author and illustrator are people of color.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	Yes, but there is no bibliography included.

Let the Children March
Written by Monica Clark-Robinson
Illustrated by Frank Morrison

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. It is historical, so the details are not directly applicable to life today, but they are accurate.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. This text dives into the complexities of children's roles in the Civil Rights Movement. It is complex and portrayed well. This text is brave enough to include some harsh historical realities.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?	✓	Yes.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?		Not specifically, but age is discussed.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes Black children have the power.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes. The book is empowering and has a positive ending.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes. There are difficult moments like when the children are sprayed with a firehose and jailed, but the text portrays these difficult events in appropriate ways.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	The illustrator is a Black man.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?	✓	Yes.

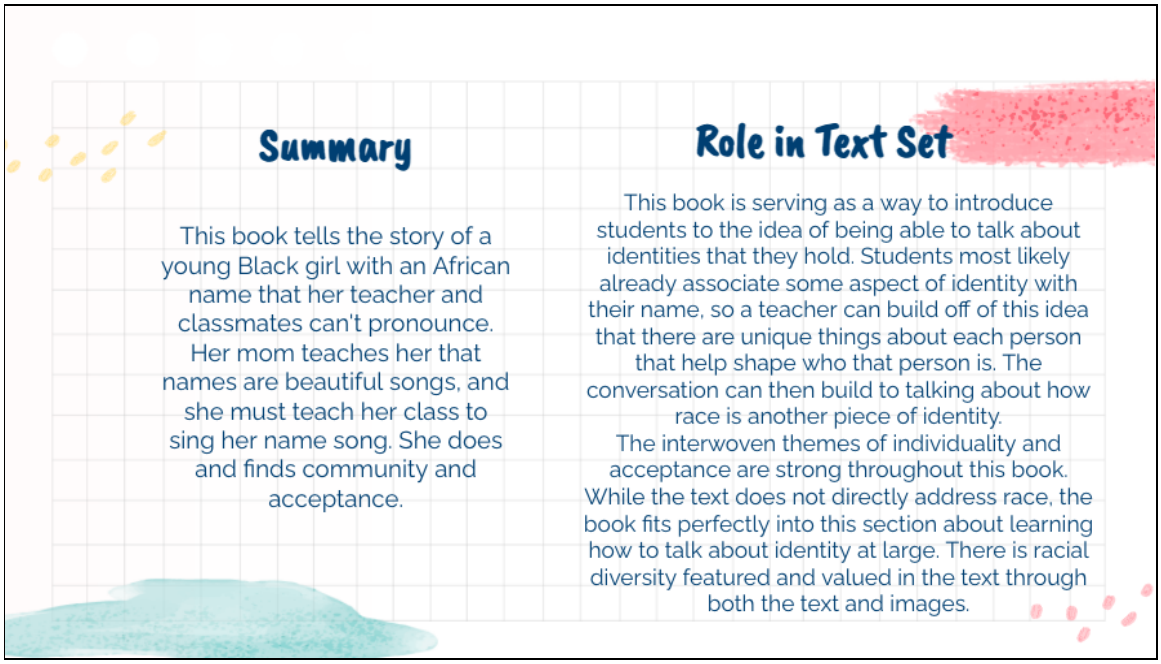
Harbor Me
Written by Jacqueline Woodson

Guiding Question		**Evaluation**
Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?	✓	Yes. This is not the primary focus of the book, but when it does depict Black life, it does so well.
Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?	✓	Yes.
Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?	✓	Yes. The complexities on personal and societal levels are addressed in really apt ways. This story serves as an example for how we are to discuss race and other difficult topics with understanding, freedom, and grace.
Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?	✓	Yes.
Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?		n/a.
Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?	✓	Yes. There are many identities discussed and portrayed in this novel. Many of them overlap and their interaction is depicted.
Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?	✓	Yes.
Does this book contain healing elements?	✓	Yes. There are uncomfortable moments, but there is resolution.
Is this text appropriate for your students?	✓	Yes. This book is appropriate for grades 3 and up. Third graders might need help understanding some of the larger themes.
Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?	✓	Yes.
If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?		n/a.

Appendix E

Book Summaries and Rationales on Google Slides

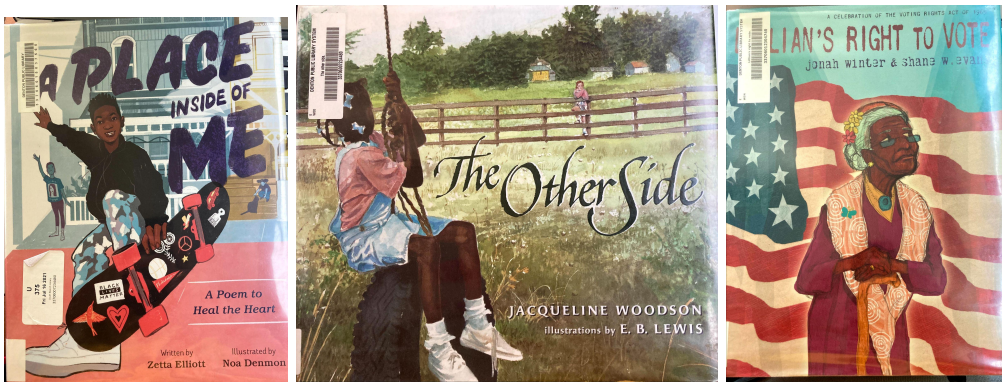
Aiming to communicate my work to educators and the public, this section includes as example of one Google Slide that I created to describe and rationalize my text set decisions. The following sample summary and rationale describes and discusses Jamialh Thompkins-Bigelow's *Your Name is a Song*: Text Set Google Slides:


Summary
This book tells the story of a young Black girl with an African name that her teacher and classmates can't pronounce. Her mom teaches her that names are beautiful songs, and she must teach her class to sing her name song. She does and finds community and acceptance.
Role in Text Set
This book is serving as a way to introduce students to the idea of being able to talk about identities that they hold. Students most likely already associate some aspect of identity with their name, so a teacher can build off of this idea that there are unique things about each person that help shape who that person is. The conversation can then build to talking about how race is another piece of identity.
The interwoven themes of individuality and acceptance are strong throughout this book. While the text does not directly address race, the book fits perfectly into this section about learning how to talk about identity at large. There is racial diversity featured and valued in the text through both the text and images.

Appendix F

Deeper Analysis of a Small Text Grouping (from Larger Text Set)

This section demonstrates an in-depth analysis of three books to demonstrate the intellectual process teachers must engage in to find relevant literature. I provide critical analysis of each book, including visual images, as well as a justification for how the books work together to achieve the overarching goals of the text set.



Book 1: *A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart*

A Place Inside of Me, written by Zetta Elliott and illustrated by Noa Denmon, is a beautiful poem that highlights the emotions and experience of a young Black boy. The text and illustrations cohesively depict his range and depth of emotions as he loves, grieves, climbs, skateboards, and more. Each spread explores a different feeling (joy, anger, hunger, compassion) and how that feeling is expressed for this child. The young Black male is painted in an utterly holistic and positive light. I love the way that this book celebrates life, especially young, Black, male life. It is a joy to read and experience life through this boy's perspective from his skateboard in his neighborhood with his people.

Guiding Question 1: Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?

The Black experience is represented holistically and authentically in this text. Elliott and Denmon highlight realistic community spaces such as the barber shop (see Table 1, Example 1). These spaces are full of diverse, realistic Black faces. Black people are featured with friends, families, and lives. The boy has friends, a cat, a robust community, a school, and a community where he clearly feels comfortable. The author and illustrator have chosen to emphasize that this boy is immersed in a community which authentically represents the high value placed on collective identity and experience in the Black community. All of the Black people portrayed, especially the featured boy, are central to the story. They are the ones feeling, doing, working, and loving. They are the agents for the story. There are no stereotypes perpetuated in this text. There is also no erasure of experiences. Hard parts of being Black such as losing those you love to violence are featured (see Table 1, Examples 2 and 3). Black people and the Black community are holistic and beautiful in this text without exception.

Guiding Question 2: Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?

This poem certainly affirms Black identity. There are so many beautiful parts of Black life (community, sports, emotions, skin color, and more) that are highlighted in this text. For example, the bottom of the boy's skateboard features a Black Lives Matter sticker (see Table 1, Example 4). Almost every person in this text is Black; Black identity is the focus. However, in lifting the Black voice and spirit, other identities are never diminished. When a shooting is referenced, the focus is on the Black community's grief rather than the villainization of the (probably White) shooter. Black students, especially those in an urban

setting, will be able to pick up this book and see themselves reflected in the words and pictures. Students with other identities will be able to look in and see what life looks like for one Black boy which may represent experiences and emotions that other Black people share. The text addresses intersectional identities and multiculturalism primarily through the illustrations. There are Muslim and Jewish people featured (see Table 1, Example 5). There are also people that have different body types, skin tones, genders, and abilities. None of these people (Black, Muslim, heavy-set, female, handicapped) are marginalized. They are all valued and illustrated as equals. The underlying message of these illustrations is inclusivity.

Guiding Question 3: Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?

A Place Inside of Me does a fantastic job of holding complex issues and emotions in tension. Being a Black person in America is complicated. It must be hard to watch people that look like you being shot for just existing. Elliott and Denmon do not shy away from this reality and the feelings of anger and sorrow that accompany it. There are spreads dedicated to both sorrow and anger related to the death of a young Black girl (see Table 1, Examples 6 and 7). These challenging emotions are balanced with joy, compassion, and love, but they are not removed or watered down. The Black Lives Matter stickers and posters featured in the illustrations also reference the societal injustices and harsh realities thus tying the themes in the text to real world pain. I like that this text directly addresses harsh realities and hurts of being a Black American. The end of the text is uplifting and focused on love for self and world, but does not write over the hard parts discussed throughout the text.

Guiding Question 4: Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?

This text matter-of-factly addresses racial tension and justice holistically. The broader tenants of racial issues such as media portrayal, group gatherings (vigils and protests), and community experiences are all addressed through the illustrations. The personal level is also addressed as the poem highlights the individual feelings that are connected to these events and realities. For example, on the spread that addresses anger, the author addresses the inside feelings responding to the images of the outside, society-wide Black Lives Matter protests (see Table 1, Example 7). Racism is being addressed and responded to both systematically and personally. The present and past of racial issues are also both featured. Current events such as unjust shootings, media portrayal, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement tie this text to today. Tributes in the illustrations of Black heroes of the past such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Jackie Robinson root this text in history (see Table 1, Example 8). Race relations then and now, systematic and personal are all crucial aspects of race conversations, and this text manages to touch on them all. Please note, however, that this text mainly focuses on the present and personal aspects.

Guiding Question 5: Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?

Denmon's illustrations holistically portray Black life. Black people are beautiful, prioritized, and real. The places are true to Black communities. Black people are honored through the illustrations in that there are mostly Black people pictured. These people are colorful against more monochromatic backgrounds (see Table 1, Example 9). They are in the foreground. The people are realistic and not informed by stereotypes or caricatures. Each person is unique and represents diversity within the Black community. On the spread that focuses on hope, there are men, women, children, people from different religions, and people

that are different sizes who are all Black, valuable, and beautiful. There is rich emotion on the faces of the people. These emotions are echoed in the text of the poem.

Guiding Question 6: Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?

Intersectional identities, while not the main focus of this text, are certainly present. The people in the illustrations are Black and women, men, tall, short, young, old, handicapped, Muslim, Jewish, skinny, heavy, light skinned, and more. None of these intersectional identities are valued more than another, but they are portrayed as equals in the illustrations (see Table 1, Example 5). The main character is a Black male, but there is nothing in the text or illustrations that suggests that he is better than anyone else because of his individual identity.

Guiding Question 7: Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?

Black characters hold all of the power and wisdom in this text. In the context of the poem and pictures, the power and wisdom are found in the abilities to feel and act accordingly. The young man feels and does so much. He feels compassion for a friend, so he sits with and comforts her (see Table 1, Example 10). The Black community feels angry, so they protest for Black Lives Matter (see Table 1, Example 7). There is an entire spread dedicated to Black people throughout time who are “triumphant & beautiful.”

Guiding Question 8: Does this book contain healing elements?

While this text explicitly addresses individual and collective pain in the Black community, it also highlights elements of joy, restoration, and hope. Students may feel the weight and pain of people losing loved ones and bearing that pain. Students will also see the resiliency of the Black community despite the great pain. There is a whole spread dedicated to joy. The illustration features children playing basketball, and the text talks about joy “that

glows bright and warm" (see Table 1, Example 11). There are many smiles, flowers, and bright colors throughout the text. The diction is also vibrant and lively. Additionally, there is a spread that talks about the calm that the boy feels and features children meditating in class. I like this nod to the current push for mindfulness even among children. Peace can be found, and calming practices are effective to reduce stress and anxiety. (see Table 1, Example 12) While students may see and feel the pain present, they will likewise be guided into joy and tranquility over the course of this text.

Guiding Question 9: Is this text appropriate for your students?

This text is appropriate for upper elementary school students. It focuses on a young man who is about eleven years old (see Table 1, Example 13). Students will be able to relate to someone around their age, and they are likely to be able to relate to his experiences (haircuts, friendship, pet cat, playgrounds, and more). The syntax and vocabulary are also very appropriate for upper elementary school students. Elliott pushes children's understanding by using lively words such as "seething," "sinister," "yearning," and "tranquil," but the images and context clues are sufficient for students to understand these potentially new words. Reading this book aloud could help struggling readers grasp the more challenging vocabulary. Poems can be challenging for elementary aged students, but this one, accompanied by vibrant illustrations, is very accessible. Some teachers may worry that the topics of racism and protests may be too mature for their students, but as I have addressed, students live in a world where they are aware of racial injustice and unrest. Teachers are only hurting their students if they are not brave enough to gently introduce students' impressionable minds to these complex topics in the safety of classrooms. This text offers an

excellent opportunity to embark on that journey because it is vibrant, often celebratory, and accessible to young people.

Guiding Question 10: Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?

Both the author and illustrator are Black women. We want to read our students books from people who have experienced that which they are writing and drawing about. Black people are the experts on Black lives, so we want to hear from them. This book brings perspectives from two Black women to combine to create this authentic look into Black life.

Guiding Question 11: If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?

This book is not an informational text, so this question does not apply.

Book 2: *The Other Side*

This fictional text written by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by E. B. Lewis is on the surface a story about girls becoming friends and a metaphorical commentary on racial divides on a deeper level. The protagonist is a young Black girl, Clover, who lives on her designated side of the fence in her presumably southern town. She observes a young White girl on the other side of the fence. This girl, Annie, often sits on the fence and seems interested in interacting with Clover though their mothers have taught them to stay on their own sides of the fence. The girls eventually sit on the fence together, become friends, and play together on the same side of the fence. It is a sweet story of friendship. Beneath this surface level, however, Woodson is presenting the idea of a racial divide to young readers. White people are on one side of the fence, and Black people are on the other side. They are

separated, but these wise children see the similarities in each other and the joy found in crossing the divide to be friends. This text is a very accessible way to introduce children to the ideas of racial divides and tension.

Guiding Question 1: Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?

This text accurately represents the Black experience, but it might be simplified.The story is told through the perspective of a young child. She would not understand all of the differences and dynamics that are at play in a mostly segregated Black experience. However, all that is depicted is depicted realistically such as the people, houses, clothes, and feelings. The Black characters, Annie, Mama, and the friends, are all holistic characters with emotions, character change throughout the book, and real experiences. There are relational bonds between the characters in the Black community within the story. Segregation is depicted realistically as the Black and White people do not typically interact. The Black and White mother-daughter duos do not interact in the street even though they are neighbors (see Table 2, Example 1). The mothers both tell their daughters to stay on their own side of the fence. Black characters are change agents in this story as they are in real life. There is no victimization. Clover initiates the friendship with Annie by walking over to the fence and choosing to sit on it with her. She ignores her Black friends' initial weird looks and eventually incorporates Annie into her original friend group (see Table 2, Example 2). This text does not include any stereotypes. It does not wholly depict the complexities of segregation, but it does not erase any elements; the child's perspective is simply limited as it would be in real life.

Guiding Question 2: Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?

Woodson writes this book in such a way that Black identity is valued as equal to White identity. The young girls are depicted in picture and word as equals (see Table 2, Example 3). They both feel, play, observe, and eventually take action to be friends. Black women are beautiful in this text, but are not depicted so at the expense of White women. The Black mother has agency and power, but so does the White mother. While unique aspects of Black life are not the focus of this text, Black children should be able to see themselves in Clover's life; children of all races should be able to identify with the girls who become friends and play together. Unity within diversity is a prominent theme in this book. Black and White people can be friends but do not have to compromise their own identities. Unity, not uniformity, is the aim. This text, while excelling in the communication of the joy and value of interracial friendship, does not address intersectionality outside of the charcaters being both their races and women. However, this exclusively racial focus is not problematic and may even help the theme of unity be clearly understood by children.

Guiding Question 3: Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?

This text simplifies the concepts of race and racial division for children to be able to understand through this extended metaphor, but it does not remove the issue. Overcoming segregation through personal relationships is one of the main themes of the book communicated through Annie and Clover's friendship. The girls are literally separated by a fence and told to stay on their own sides. The fence represents a racially divided society where people are physically or ideologically separated by group, and in America, Black and White people are often separated by literal train tracks though divides can also be more subtle and less physical. Woodson makes these concepts concrete through the use of an actual

fence separating the girls (see Table 2, Example 4). While this literary and visual device may seem simple to an adult who understands the societal nuances of racial divides, this is a great introduction for children. The ending of this book features the girls involved in sweet friendship, but the fence still stands. Clover hopes that the fence will be knocked down one day, but the text acknowledges that there is not a simple end to racism. The personal relationships are built, but society's barriers have yet to change. This end is not simple at all and accurately depicts the state of society and race relations; the book suggests that steps are being taken in the right direction through friendships, but there are not holistic solutions yet.

Guiding Question 4: Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?

As I have addressed, the ideas of race and solutions to racial injustice are simplified for the sake of children's introduction to understanding race. However, race is addressed at both the personal and systematic level. The girls' separation and barrier-breaking move toward friendship is personal progress to end racism. The society-built fence addresses racial issues on a societal level. The end of the book where the girls are friends but the fence still stands illustrates the disparity between personal and societal movement to end racism (see Table 2, Example 5). This text addresses both the present and past of racism by having it set in the literary present where progress is being made toward equality but also hoping that the issue improves. The progress illustrates that the past was worse, the present is improving, and the future will hopefully be better.

Guiding Question 5: Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?

The illustrations do authentically represent Black life. The Black people are realistic and beautiful (see Table 2, Example 6). The places where the characters exist are also realistic and not built on stereotypes. Black and White characters are depicted as equals. The

girls each have a side of the fence (see Table 2, Example 3). They are the same size. They both have lives, yards, and mothers. All of these are depicted equally. The other Black characters, Mama and the friends, are also beautiful, holistic, and accurate to life. The illustrations add to the agency and lives of the Black characters. The illustrations take special care to illustrate joy in the lives of Black characters. Clover is a happy child with a caring mother, space to run, and a big smile (see Table 2, Example 7).

Guiding Question 6: Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?

This text focuses on the relationships between Black and White characters and does not highlight intersectional identities such as gender, ability, or sexual orientation. All of the characters are female which does highlight the woman's power to create change. The girls who make friends and cross racial barriers are young which shows that young people can also initiate real change. None of the Black characters' identities, race, age, or gender, inhibit their abilities to move in and change society. Clover is a strong, kind, revolutionary young Black woman. Her Mama is a strong, kind, Black woman who encourages Clover in her new friendship (see Table 2, Example 8).

Guiding Question 7: Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?

Black characters are wise, powerful, and change makers in this text. Mama is an authoritative mother who is wise to encourage her daughter in her new friendship with Clover. "'I see you made a new friend,' [Mama] said one morning. And I nodded and Mama smiled." Clover's friends choose to include Annie in their jump rope play (see Table 2, Example 9). Clover is the wisest Black character as she is the brave one who initiates friendship with her White neighbor. She connects the sides of the fence by sitting on it with Annie. She is the one who hopes that one day the fence will be knocked down. The Black

characters in this story are never depicted as needing “White saviors”; they are quite capable of initiating change and joy by themselves.

Guiding Question 8: Does this book contain healing elements?

This text is full of healing elements. The overarching theme of interracial friendship is a positive theme. Seeing characters come together to grow in collective joy is beautiful. It is hard to read this book without smiling and seeing positive change in the world through the eyes of Clover. The book starts talking about the separation created by the segregation fence (see Table 2, Example 4) and moves toward healing with the girls crossing the fence to become friends (see Table 2, Example 5). While segregation is not solved, the beautiful friendship between the friends is certainly a restorative step. Students who may have experienced racial trauma will likely be uplifted by the hope of restorative friendship when they read this book. They will most likely not be triggered by anything as the book does not focus on the harsh realities of segregation.

Guiding Question 9: Is this text appropriate for your students?

This text is appropriate for any elementary student but will probably have the most impact on older elementary students as they will be able to better grasp the metaphorical implications of racial divide. It is uncomfortable to talk about racial segregation and injustice, but upper elementary students are aware of the issues and cognitively capable of handling these complex topics. This book is a fantastic way to broach these topics because the topic of friendship is so relatable for children. The concrete metaphor of a fence representing segregation makes the idea of racial divide accessible for children. The literary components are also appropriate for elementary school children. The vocabulary, sentence length, and other syntactical elements are well within a child’s ability to understand. Most

pages just have a few simple sentences and a large corresponding illustration. The colors and size of the illustrations will be appealing to students.

Guiding Question 10: Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?

Both the author and illustrator are Black. It is important that students read texts by diverse authors. This is especially important when the focus of the texts are race and other race/culture related topics. This book satisfies this standard as the Black author and illustrator have created a text that features Black individuals and racial issues.

Guiding Question 11: If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?

This text is fiction, so this question does not apply.

Book 3: *Lillian's Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965*

This text is a narrative about an old woman going to vote that incorporates vignettes of her ancestors' paths to eventual voting rights. As she walks up the hill toward the voting booth, she sees her ancestors who were slaves being sold and treated horribly. She remembers that her great-grandparents were charged poll taxes and given fake intelligence tests despite the Constitutional Amendment that gave them the right to vote. She remembers going with her parents to vote and being chased away. She can still picture the hateful cross burning in her yard. Her own first voting experience was unsuccessful due to an impossible literacy test. She remembers the Civil Rights Movement and its heroes. Finally, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed which allows Lillian to climb the hill and vote successfully. The hill that she climbs is a physical hill with a metaphorical meaning. Black people in

America have had to work so hard to gain the right to vote. It has been an uphill battle, but a successful one. This book honors the struggle, celebrates the outcome, and encourages action.

Guiding Question 1: Does the book represent the Black experience authentically?

This text focuses on the aspect of Black life that centers around voting throughout history. This book does not seek to portray Black life holistically but rather to zoom in on the right to vote. The book accurately portrays Black access to voting throughout time. The depiction of each stage of history is accurate. The pages on slavery show slavery as it was: dehumanizing, traumatic, harsh. Lillian's ancestors are sold like cattle, have whipping marks, and do hard work under the watch of an armed overseer (see Table 3, Examples 1 and 2). Black people attempting to vote are denied and depicted as dejected. The struggle was hard, and the illustrations and tone of the text reflect this pain that the Black community felt and may still feel. The text supports these depictions with facts and perspectives that accurately describe historical experiences and realities. Black characters are holistic and beautiful. Though the experiences described are terrible and dehumanizing, the Black people are presented as smart and capable (see Table 3, Example 3). They are not projected as lacking agency or intelligence. Black people move the process of gaining the ability to vote along through voting attempts, protests, and petitioning. This book handles harsh realities of discrimination and other topics, but communicates them in an accesible way for children. This book does not include any past or present stereotypes.

Guiding Question 2: Does this text affirm Black identity WHILE not belittling other identities?

Winter and Evans affirm the historical identity and present triumph of Black people and their ability to vote. The struggle for suffrage for Black people in America has been especially painful, with a successful result. The book is a self-identified "celebration" of the right to vote. There is triumph in Lillian's trek up the hill. There is victory when she pushes down the lever and votes (see Table 3, Example 4). Though White people were the cause of Black voter suppression, they are never villainized in the text. There are accurate depictions of slave overseers and sheriffs denying individuals the right to vote, but these individuals are not the focus. The emphasis is placed on the Black people who peacefully attempt to vote and march for freedom. Black life is lifted up and valued, but White lives are never devalued. Black students may identify with the oppression that the Black community has felt today and throughout American history with voter suppression and other injustices. White students will have the opportunity to peer into these experiences in order to gain perspective and empathy.

Guiding Question 3: Does this text legitimately explore the complexity of race and racism without oversimplifying?

This book certainly does explore active racism. The characters are denied human rights like freedom and civil rights such as the right to vote due to their skin color. These realities are not avoided in this text, but rather brought to light. The struggle for the right to vote has not been simple, and Lillian's journey reflects that. Slavery, poll taxes, angry mobs, literacy tests, marches, speeches, injury, and even death were part of the long and arduous road to Black suffrage. All of these are directly included in the text. Winters goes even further to make these issues feel personal by creating a character with named ancestors that the reader can relate to and feel empathy for. Racism and oppression are not distant realities; real people were and are affected. While the end of the book features Lillian beating the odds

and voting, the effects of the battle for the right to vote do not disappear. The book reminds readers that John Lewis's scar was on his head until the day he died. Lillian reminds a young man to exercise his right and vote which in turn reminds the reader to exercise his right to vote (see Table 3, Example 5). The path to equality and justice, the book argues, is not finished yet.

Guiding Question 4: Are race and racial justice portrayed holistically?

Race and racial justice are portrayed holistically. As discussed above, the author connects the realities of voter suppression with characters that readers may be able to better relate to. An entire section of the population was oppressed, but each of those people had names, stories, families, and dreams. This book makes questions of justice personal. The reader comes to love and root for Lillian as she struggles up the hill. Historical racism is highlighted, as previously discussed. The present realities of injustice are not highlighted because the focus is on the Black community gaining the protected right to vote through the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Guiding Question 5: Do the illustrations authentically represent Black lives?

The illustrations are not fully realistic as the artistic style is more representative, but they are not caricatures or built on stereotypes. The people are beautiful despite being in different artistic styles, colors, and placements on the page. Real life events and realities such as voting, walking with a cane, and receiving advice are depicted (see Table 3, Example 6). Black people are often depicted as looking pained, which makes sense as they are being denied a basic citizen's right. There is hope in the colors and illustrations outside of people's expressions. Black and White people are portrayed as human equals even though the illustrations also show that White people oppressed Black people. The illustrations and text

only depict the external realities; they never suggest that Black people are lesser in any way than White people.

Guiding Question 6: Does this text acknowledge intersectional identities?

The only intersectional identity that is featured is Lillian's intersecting identity as an old woman and a Black person. She is still capable and powerful even at her age. She exercises her right to vote and encourages young people to do the same (see Table 3, Example 5). The intersection of her age and race only make her a stronger character as she has more presumed expertise in the experiences of being Black throughout history. She felt the historical effects of voter suppression against the Black community.

Guiding Question 7: Do Black characters hold power and wisdom in this text?

Black people hold all the wisdom and power in this text. Black people are the ones who march for the right to vote. They attempt to vote and feel the fury of officers and angry mobs. They are oppressed, yet prevail with new freedoms. Great leaders like John Lewis and Martin Luther King Jr are honored by name (see Table 3, Example 3). Black people are the individuals who realize the injustices of the system and successfully resist and bring about change.

Guiding Question 8: Does this book contain healing elements?

This text should not bring up trauma for students because young children will not have experienced being denied the right to vote. However, they could know the feelings of collective pain and racial oppression and discimination. The book ends on a victorious note with Lillian in the voting booth voting without obstruction. This is a joyful end to a long climb up the physical and metaphorical hill. The students should be able to see the joy in this moment contrasted to all the pain that came before it. This is not a book that seeks to address

current feelings and heal the hurt, but the reminder of a successful historical struggle can give hope that current injustices can be overcome through perseverance and peaceful efforts.

Guiding Question 9: Is this text appropriate for your students?

While this book does address hard realities such as slavery, it is very accessbile for yong students. They will be able to understand the specific historical examples as well as the broader concepts of racism and discrimination throughout time. Despite some states removing requirements to teach hard history like the Civil Rights Movement, it is absolutely crucial that we educate our students on the complete picture of American history, not just the comfortable parts. The content of the book is historica, yet presented in such a great narrative way that even students who do not traditionally like history can access and appreciate this book with its lessons. The book is appropriate for upper elementary schoolers grammatically and vocabulary-wise. They will be able to read and comprehend the text without issue.

Guiding Question 10: Is the text written and/or illustrated by a Black author/illustrator?

The illustrator is Black, but the author is White. This artistic perspective from someone in the Black community contributing to a book about the experience of Black people in America is so valuable.

Guiding Question 11: If the text is nonfiction, historical fiction, or claims to include facts (historical or otherwise), is the research legitimate?

This book includes facts and references historical information in the text. While the author does not include a bibliography, he does include an author's note confirming the validity of his information and inspiration.

Interactions Across the Three Texts

Part of the beauty of a text set is that the texts come together to paint a fuller picture of an issue. That is true of this sample from my text set. These three texts build on and compliment each other in such a way that paints a broader picture of the topic of Black racial experiences and racism in America. *A Place Inside of Me* brings a very current and emotional perspective. The poem highlights feelings. The illustrations are relevant, urban, and specific. Racial issues are addressed directly, and specific tenets of the present conversation such as the Black Lives Matter movement are featured. *The Other Side* brings a more theoretical approach to the topic. The metaphor of a fence separating races in the girls' yard that translates to many barriers separating people in society digs at the root of the issue: historically established division and prejudice. The narrative is beautiful, but the undercurrent of systematic and personal division is the signal contribution of this book. *Lillian's Right to Vote* provides a broad, historical context. Past inequalities and injustices are discussed and triumphs are honored. The historical perspective sheds light on the society in which we are living and understanding the world.

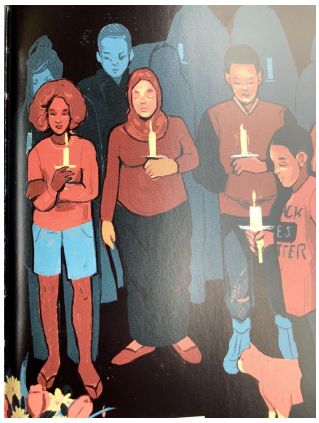
These three books are best when read together. If you only read *The Other Side*, you miss current realities, deep feelings, and historical context. If you only read *Lillian's Right to Vote*, you get lots of history but little emotion, present reality, or theoretical commentary. If you only read *A Place Inside of Me*, you get the current events and emotions, but miss history and theory. Certainly, each book is so valuable on its own. It is important to take time to zoom in just on history or just on the present. However, in order to paint a whole picture, we need all three texts. It is too much to ask one single book to do everything, so I have found some of the best of each type and combined them to form a multifaceted collection of books that covers many aspects of the issue of race. These texts balance and add to one another. A

conversation or lesson rooted in the collective strengths of these books will lead to the best education for your students.

Table 1

Visual Analysis of *A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart* by Zetta Elliot

Example #	Pages #	Page/Illustration	Analysis Notes
1	10-11		The barber shop is highlighted as a community space where Black community members gather. Note the positive male figures surrounding the boy and rounding out the robust community.
2	10		The TV shows a media feed about a Black life being taken. Losing members of the Black community to violence is a reality.
3	29		This memorial for Black life reinforces the emphasis on the tragic loss of Black life and the collective mourning pictured it evokes.

4	32		The Black Lives Matter sticker on the skateboard highlights that Black identity is the focus of this text. There is also so much joy in the boy's face and movement in this illustration.
5	29		Note the diverse identities and intersectional identities pictured here. There is a woman in traditional Muslim clothing and people with different hair types and shades of skin color. They are different ages and have different body types.
6	10-11		This spread highlights the community shock at getting news that a fellow member of the Black community was killed. Note that all the barber shop attendees are paused and paying attention to the screen in a very serious way.

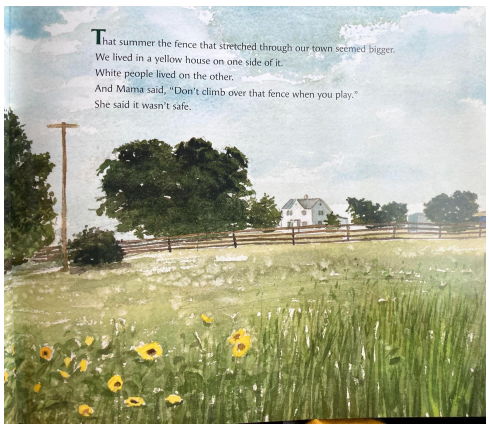
7	14-15		The expressions and colors in this spread communicate the just anger felt by Black people when their community is harmed. Note the contrastive shades of warm colors on p. 14 and the tight, drawn-up expression on the boy's face on p. 15. This spread also illustrated an example of Black Lives Matter protests.
8	20-21		Some historical figures who are Black are featured on this page to root this text in history. Notice Jackie Robinson, the first Black MLB player, Martin Luther King Jr, and Mae Jemison, the first Black female astronaut..
9	26-27		The illustration tactics here enforce the idea that Black people are at the center of the narrative. The Black characters are in vibrant color against a monochromatic background.

10	26		The Black boy is the agent of compassion and gentleness with his friend. He is obviously caring, gentle, and kind.
11	8-9		The vibrant colors, huge flowers, and playing children highlight joy in this spread. The words, with "Joy" accentuated in a large font, also communicate a tone of happiness.
12	24-25		A meditative session highlights a healing practice in a classroom. The students are together, natural, and relaxed. Everyone is on an equal playing field and seeking healing collectively.
13	25		Note the age of the young man who is the featured character in this book. He looks to be the age of an upper elementary student that readers can either relate to as a mirror of oneself or a window into the life of someone else.

Table 2

Visual Analysis of *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson

Example #	Pages #	Page/Illustration	Analysis Notes
1	10-11		The girls of different races pass each other and notice one another, but do not interact. All of their feet appear to be in motion showing that they have not slowed down to socialize or greet one another.
2	30		All of the girls, both Black and White, look bored together. They are equal up on the fence that previously divided them.
3	18-19		The Black and White girls are illustrated as equals. They are both behind the fence on their side. They look to have clothes that indicate equivalent socioeconomic status; neither is depicted to be better than the other. They are even approximately the same size.

4	5		This page references in the text and depicts in the illustration the fence that runs between the houses separating the Black people from the White people. The natural world seems to be the same on each side. The fence is a metaphor for racial divide.
5	32	 "Someday somebody's going to come along and knock this old fence down," Annie said. And I nodded. "Yeah," I said. "Someday."	The children have become friends despite the fence that separated them, but the fence is still there. They are over and on and around it, but it has not gone away. Likewise, racial divides can be circumvented personally, but societal racism still exists.
6	18		Clover is a beautiful, whole, human girl. She is proportional, appropriately messy for a young girl, smiling, dressed normally, and has authentic features. She is not defined pictorially by stereotypes or anything like that.

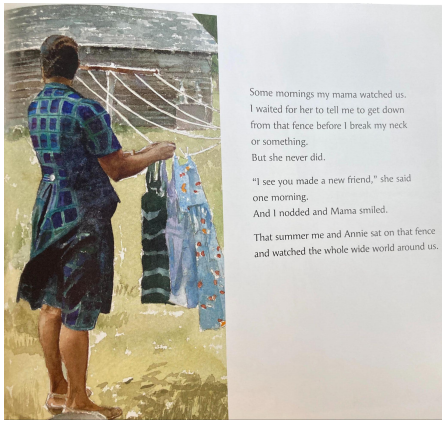
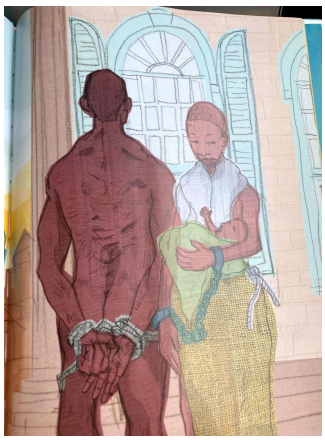
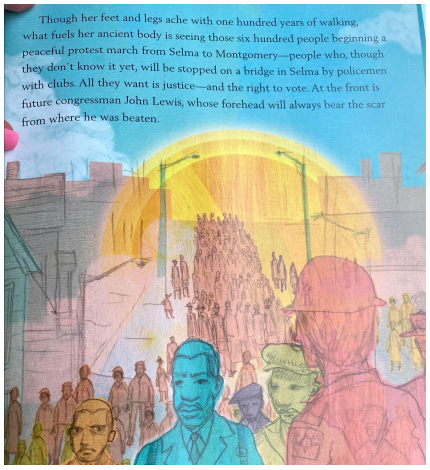
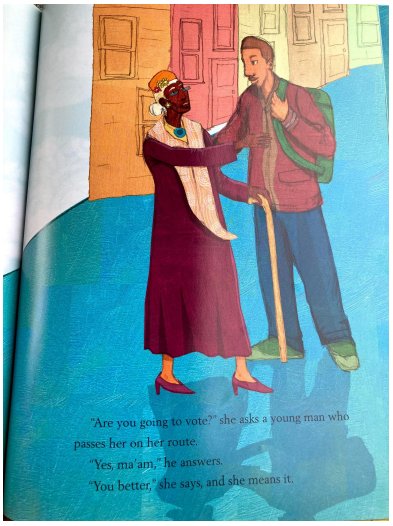
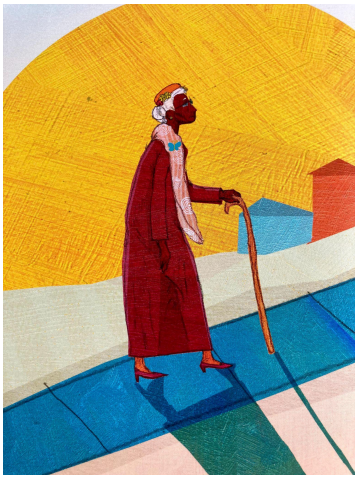
7	17		Notice the joy in this illustration! Clover is smiling with her hands wide open. She is in a vulnerable position with her body which indicates that she feels safe. Her clothing is yellow which is a light, happy color.
8	27		Mama is pictured here standing tall and working hard. She is well dressed and serving her family while keeping close watch on her daughter.
9	28-29		This image depicts the Black girls including Annie in their play. She is one of them: equal in size, ability, and dress.

Table 3

Visual Analysis of *Lillian's Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965* by Jonah Winter & Shane W. Evans

Example #	Pages #	Page/Illustration	Analysis Notes

1	7		This picture depicts the body of a slave. He is naked and humiliated. He is in thick chains with what appears to be his wife and child who are also in chains. He has clear whipping marks all over his back. Slavery is shown to be degrading and phyically harmful.
2	9		This depiction of slavery shows the slave as hard working but tired. His eyes looking sideways show distrust and discontentment. The overseer behind the slave is depicted as higher up and more powerful with his horse and gun. The slave is obviously being exploited and dehumanized, but his ability to still stand and work communicates his resiliency.
3	23		Black people are shown as capable and resilient in the face of diversity. Notice the mass of people walking so far to fight for their rights and justice. Individual contributors to the Civil Rights Movement such as John Lewis are honored by name.

4	30-31		Here we see Lillian in the voting booth voting. She is exercising the right that so many have fought for with pride. Hard work led to this moment as depicted by the woman's hand on her back looking exhausted. But also, old Lillian is standing tall voting. She is victorious.
5	19		Lillian is imploring the young man to vote by standing with him and showing him the importance firsthand as she lived through the struggles to get the right to vote for Black people.
6	10		Black life is real and holistic in this book. Lillian walks and dresses like a person. She is old and has a cane. She is an authentic representation of a Black person.

Appendix G

Example Lesson Developed for a Book in the Text Set

Title: Exploring Race Together

Grade Levels: 3-5

Objective: Students will understand and discuss the idea that different races exist and people are sometimes racially divided due to racism with their peers focusing on openness, respect, and kindness after guided discussion and experiences with literature.

- **Common Core Standards:** English Language Arts Standards, Speaking & Listening, Grade 4: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1.B, C, D: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
    - Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.
    - Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.
    - Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.
- **Learning for Justice's Social Justice Standards:**
    - Identity Anchor Standard 1: Students will develop positive social identities based on their membership in multiple groups in society.

- Diversity Anchor Standard 6: Students will express comfort with people who are both similar to and different from them and engage respectfully with all people.
- Diversity Anchor Standard 8: Students will respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and will exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.
- Diversity Anchor Standard 9: Students will respond to diversity by building empathy, respect, understanding and connection.

Learning Targets: I can talk to others about different races and racial division with respect, appropriate questions, and summary. I can keep an open mind, listen to my classmates, and share my own opinion while being respectful and kind.

Materials: *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson, butcher paper, markers, journals or loose leaf paper, talking object (stick, stuffed animal, and the like)

Introduction: In this lesson, the teacher and students will explore what it means that many races of people exist in America. They will broach the topic that racism divides people by their race. This is designed to be an introductory lesson about race and can be done in one long lesson or broken up into smaller segments.

Before engaging students in this lesson, the teacher must create a learning environment that caters to and is familiar with complex discussion. The teacher must be informed and prepared emotionally to talk about race. She must also have an open mind to

hearing her students' perspectives and thoughts even though they may challenge her. The teacher must also foster and build trust with her students throughout the school year and provide ways for students to learn to trust one another. More practically, the teacher should work with students to create community guidelines around discussion that students can adhere to. Some examples are: "I will always listen with an open mind"; "When I disagree with someone I will say…"; "You make a good point, but I think..."; "I hadn't thought about your perspective, but something else that I see is ..."; and "I will listen to everything my friend says before responding."

To introduce this lesson, ask students if they have ever heard the word race before. Let students share their experiences with race in a teacher-led conversation. Correct any racist ideas or implications, but do not invalidate the existence of challenging realities around race. Give students a good, working definition of race. See this website for help understanding race for yourself (PBS, "What is Race? Having the Conversation with Young Children", 2020).

Instructional Input: Read *The Other Side* aloud to the class using established read aloud skills and norms.

Here are some questions that should be asked *before the read aloud*:

- What do you notice about the cover?
- What do you think the title means?
- What do you predict this story will be about?

- How do you think this might relate to the topic of race that we are talking about today?

Here are some questions to ask during the read aloud:

- If you were the friends, would you let Annie play? Why or why not? (pp. 8-9; Annie asking to play and being rejected)
- What do you notice about the girls? (pp. 18-19; girls on either side of fence introducing each other)
    - What are differences between the two girls?
    - What are similarities?
- What do you notice about the fence? (pp. 22-23; Annie reaching down from fence)
    - Why do you think there is a fence between them?
    - Why do their moms tell them not to cross the fence?
- What do you notice about Mama's response to Clover's new friend? (pp. 26-27; Mama doing laundry)
    - Why do you think that Mama smiles when Clover makes friends with Annie?
- What do you notice about the girls now that they are playing together? (pp. 28-29; girls all jumping rope together)
    - How do you think they are feeling? Why? What evidence in the text or images supports your thinking?
- What do you think the fence represents? (p. 32; last page; girls playing on fence)
    - What do you think it means that they hope it gets knocked down?

Talking Circle: In this next part of the lesson, we want to guide students to discuss race. This guidance will start with practicing how to discuss and then move toward student facilitated discussion about race. In order to start this process, the teacher will facilitate a talking circle that focuses on the book. All of the students should form a circle with the teacher. There should be a designated "talking object" (stick, stuffed animals, etc.) that designates the only person who should talk at any time. The teacher should start with the talking object and pose a question, and then facilitate the students who get to have the talking object and share their thoughts and feelings.

Here are some questions to include in this discussion:

- Did you like the book *The Other Side*? Why or why not?
- What was your favorite/least favorite part?
- What would you have done if you were Clover? If you were Annie?
- Is the ending of this book a happy ending? Why or why not?
- Do you see any connections between this book and the real world?
- What is the theme of the book?
- How does this book connect to the ideas of race and racial divide that we are talking about?

Make sure that students understand how to listen respectfully and state their opinion with kindness. Think about suggesting and praising phrases such as:

- Can you say what you mean in another way?
- I disagree with what (John) said, and think that ____.
- I agree with (Jackson) because _____.

- Building off of what (Reagan) said, I think ____.
- Another perspective is ____.

Steer students away from phrases such as:

- (Carrie) is dumb for thinking ____.
- Nobody thinks that ____.
- Everyone knows that _____.
- I can't believe you said ____.

Silent Discussion: The talking circle is a very monitored space for students to begin practicing discussion skills. We want to move them to a more independent discussion that is more centered on race than the talking circle was. In order to do this, a silent discussion will follow. Silent discussions use paper and pencil to communicate ideas which gives students space to share without the pressure of public speaking. In this discussion, the teacher should use large sheets of butcher paper. She should write the following question at the top of the paper: Why does talking about race matter? Instruct students to make one written comment and respond to at least one of their classmate's comments. Remind students that they are still expected to follow discussion guidelines, and be kind. Students are free to write at their own pace and as much/little as they want. The teacher should not control the written discussion but should monitor what is being written to check for comments that are disrespectful or blatantly wrong/problematic. At the end of the silent discussion, students should take about ten minutes to look over the paper and read classmates' responses.

Check for Understanding: At this point in the lesson, the teacher should pause to conduct a "fist to five" check for understanding. Students should be instructed to hold up a hand with the appropriate number of fingers for their corresponding answer. A fist (0) would be I am not good to continue on/I don't understand/I'm not comfortable at all. All five fingers up signals to the teacher that the student is right on track and ready to move forward. Here are two questions to use the fist to five with:

- How comfortable do you feel with our discussions about race?
- Do you feel safe in our discussion spaces?

Collaborative Practice: For the final part of this lesson, students will engage in student-led small group discussions in order to demonstrate their ability to have complex discussions about race with their peers. Put the students in groups of about 4 students. Ask them to first share something that they learned in the lesson about race (from the book, talking circle, or silent discussion). Remind them to hear from everyone in their group and use positive discussion practices. After five or so minutes, ask the students to move on to discuss what they think about racism. After five or so minutes, ask them to share with their group how they have felt about this lesson's discussions. There is not an objective assessment attached to this lesson, but the teacher should listen in to students' small group conversations and make notes about what they do and do not appear to understand.

Closure: To close this lesson, we want to allow our students to debrief because these topics can be challenging. Ask all the students to take out a piece of paper (can be in a journal or loose leaf). Ask the students to write in response to this question: Did your thinking about

race change today? If so, in what ways? If not, how do your previous thoughts fit in with our discussions? Allow students to share their writing with you or choose to keep it private.

Lesson informed by:

Let's talk: A teaching tolerance guide: Facilitating critical conversations with students. (2019) Teaching Tolerance. Retrieved February 16, 2021.

Let's talk! Discussing race, racism, and other difficult topics with students [Webinar]. (2017, October 4). Learning for Justice. https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/webinars/lets-talk-discussing-race-racism-and-other-difficult-topics-0

Pitts, J. (2016). *Don't say nothing*. Learning for Justice. https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2016/dont-say-nothing

Talking about race and racism. (n.d.) Learning for Justice. https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/talking-about-race-and-racism