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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Antiracist Reading Revolution* [Grades K-8].

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## DISRUPTING A “HEROES AND HOLIDAYS” CURRICULUM

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



Learn more about  
teaching Black history  
year-round.

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

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

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

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

## **SYSTEMIC RESISTANCE**

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

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

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

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

### Resources

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

## Reflect

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

### TEACHER DISCOMFORT

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

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



Read more about  
#DisruptTexts here.

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

## Reflect

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

### MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT THE WORK OF ANTIRACIST TEACHING

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

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

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

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

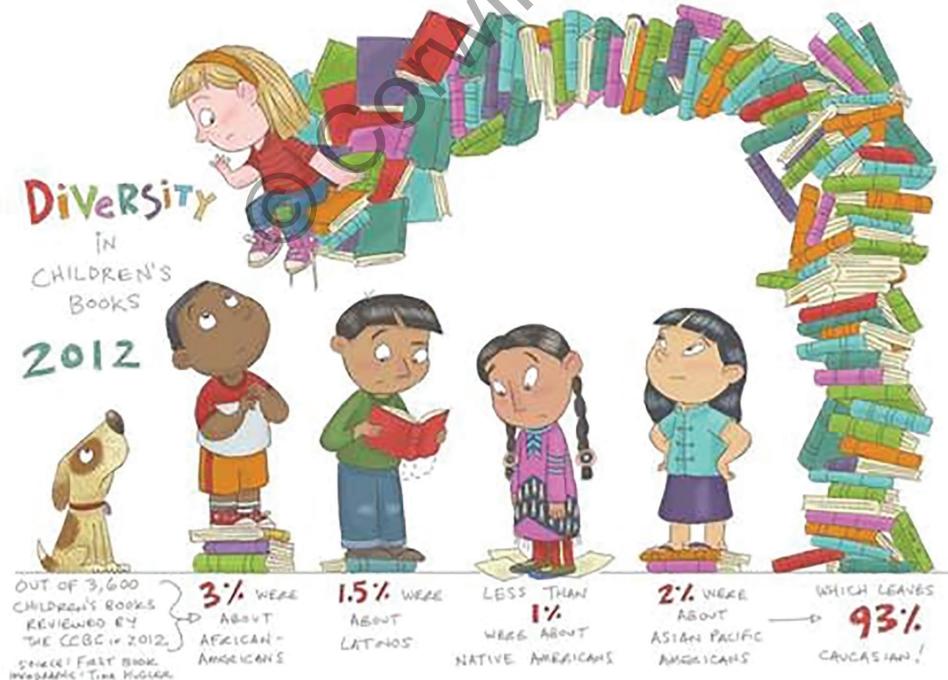
When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part. Our classrooms need to be places where all the children from all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

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

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

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

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



Kügler, Tina (2013).

# Diversity in Children's Books 2015

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

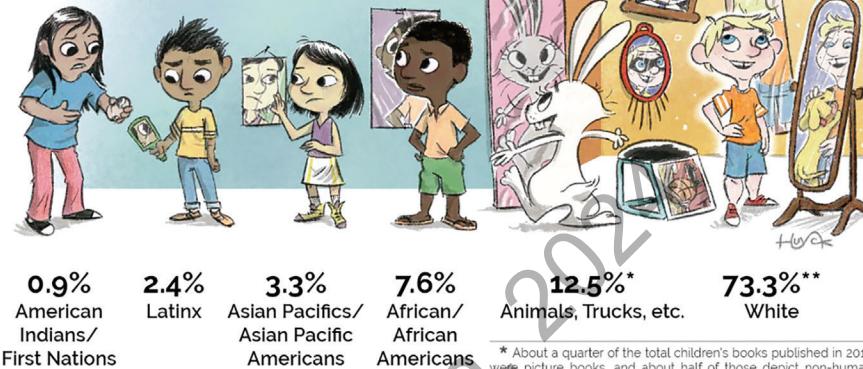


Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen & Molly Beth Griffin  
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\* About a quarter of the total children's books published in 2015 were picture books, and about half of those depict non-human characters, like animals & trucks

\*\* The remainder depict white characters.

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

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

# DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS 2018

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

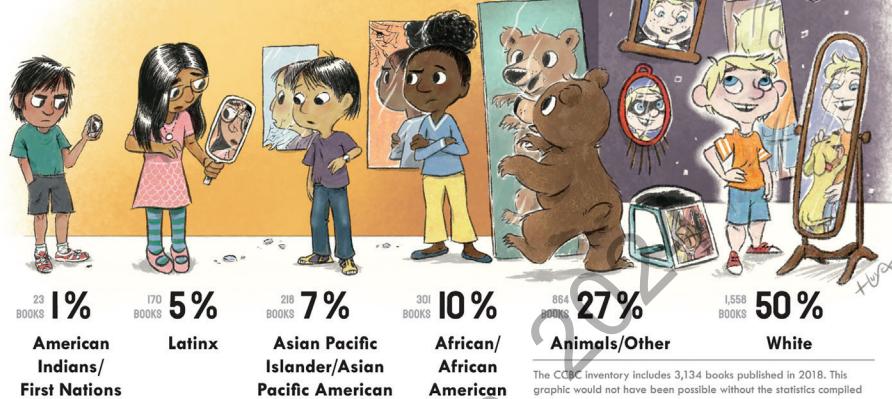


Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen

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

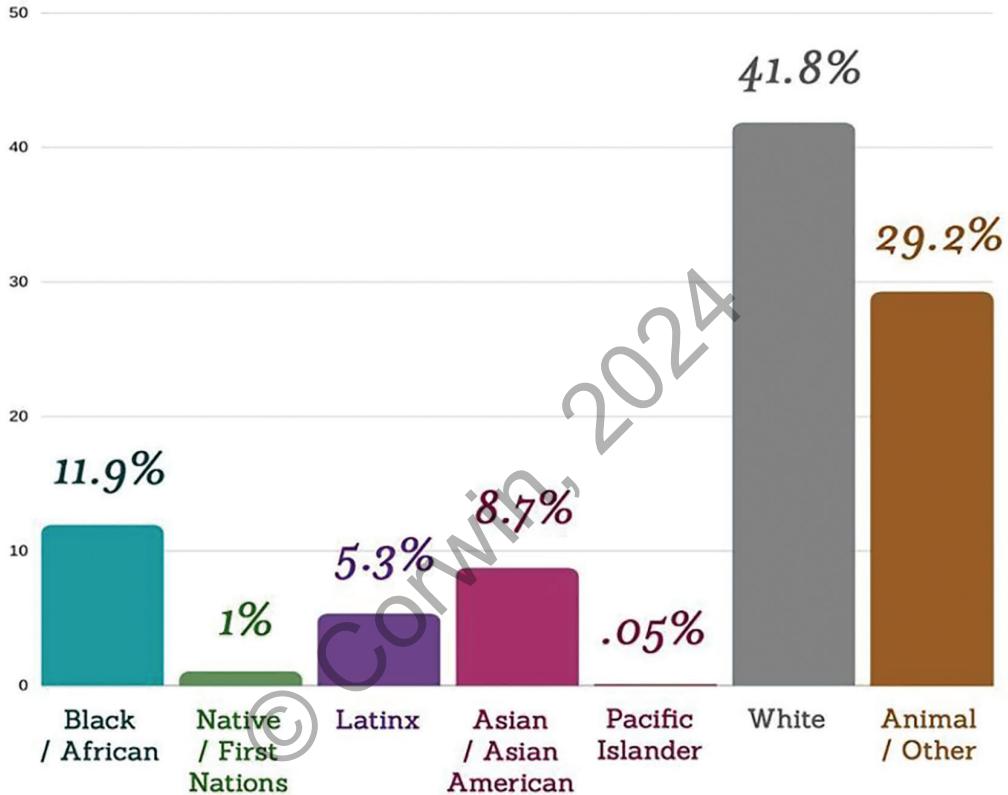
Huyck, David, and Sarah Park Dahlen. (2019 June 19). Diversity in Children's Books 2018. sarahpark.com blog. Created in consultation with Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Horning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner, with statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's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

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

# 2019 by the Numbers:

## MAIN CHARACTERS IN U.S. CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

\* statistics from the Cooperative Children's Book Center

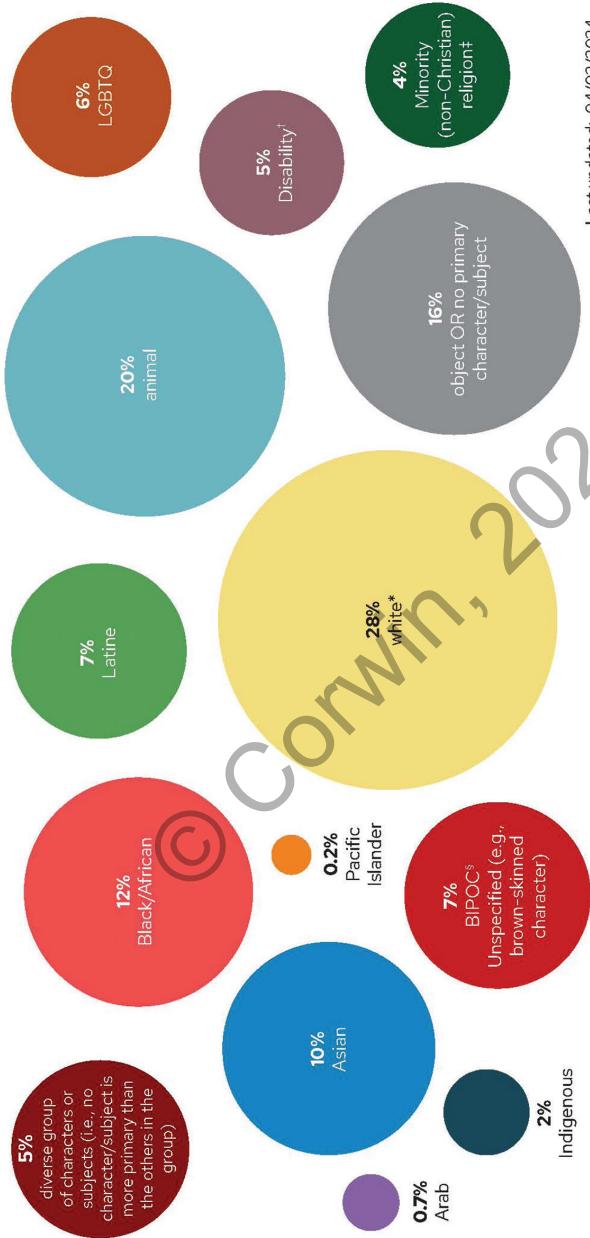


**WNDB**<sup>®</sup>  
diversebooks.org



## 2023 CCBC Diversity Statistics: PRIMARY CHARACTER/SUBJECT

Race/Ethnicity, Disability, LGBTQ, Religion



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



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

Last updated: 04/02/2024  
 \* "White" is not counted for multiracial characters/subjects so as not to misrepresent a BIPOC\* individual as white.  
 † "Disability" includes physical, cognitive, neurological, and psychiatric disabilities.  
 ‡ 12% Jewish, 1% Muslim, 0.3% other minority religion

§ Black, Indigenous, and People of Color



Source: Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2024.

## Reflect

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

## A FOUNDATION OF LOVE, JOY, VALIDATION, AND HEALING

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

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

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

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

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

## APPLICATIONS OF THIS BOOK

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

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

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

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

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

### Online Resources

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

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

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

## Books

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 1. Implementing Read-Alouds

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

## 2. Developing Mini Lessons

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

## 3. Coaching Into Reading Partnerships/Groups and Book Clubs

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

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



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

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

#### 4. Supporting Independent Readers

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

#### 5. Creating Text Sets

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

## 6. Planning Curriculum and Units

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

## 7. Facilitating Whole School and Community Reads

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

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