Using Multicultural YA Literature to Examine the Impact of Racism on the Lives of Teens of Color

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Today’s Presentation

- Youth of Color + Stereotypes in the Real World and YA
- Setting the Framework / Key Constructs
- Talking with Teens about Race and Racism
  - Why is it important?
  - The Power of Stories
  - How do we do it?
- Strategies for Using YA Lit to Talk about Race, Racism, Power and Privilege
  - #1: Juxtapose Multiple Texts
  - #2: The Community-Centered Approach
  - #3: Text Graffiti
Conditioning

STEREOTYPES

Implicit Biases

Media Messages

EXPLICIT Biases
What messages does the media send about youth of color?
How do youth of color experience stereotypes?
No, I don't want to hear your rap.

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“So, like, what are you?”
“Can you see as much as white people? You know, because of your EYES...?”
"So what does your HAIR look like today?

She said as she pulled off my hat without MY PERMISSION"
You're well spoken for a Black kid

#itoamberkeley

#itoamberkeley
How are youth of color in YA literature experiencing stereotypes?
“And who says white kids have a monopoly on being good students.”

“...when Marcy saw Henry sitting there all alone, she asked him out of the blue, “You’re good at math, Ching Chong. Can you help me with my homework?”
“The three police cars, lined up in a single file, slowly began following Rameck’s car. “Why they sweatin’ us, man,” Dax said, “We ain’t done nothing wrong. Not one thing.”

“It’s not about being wrong. It’s about being black,” Rameck said, anger, and regret in his voice. “Why do they assume we’re up to no good?” Dax asked bleakly.

“Who knows?” Rameck answered as the three police cars followed their every turn and stop.

“DWB—Driving While Black—is the newest crime, don’t you know.” He looked in the rearview mirror, and none of the cars had on lights or sirens. They just followed like silent vultures in the darkness.
“I’m surrounded by a society that expects nothing of me other than to become a regular, tired housewife. I speak my mind and it’s considered rude. When I speak with my peers I’m told that I speak like a white girl.”

“...it just seems like more than a coincidence when it happens to me. Like what made them think I needed remedial anything. Nobody tested me. Nobody asked me. They just threw me in it [the remedial class] and then looked surprised when I knew it all. I mean, it makes you wonder –is it my hair?”

“Hey, Terry, my family didn’t cross the border; it crossed us. We’d been here for over three hundred years, before the U.S. drew those lines.”

“When some kids are bad in white families,” my ma said, sighing, “their mas and dads say they’ll dump them off among the wild Indians and let them find their own way home.”

“The wild Indians. We’re their punishment?”
What Do You Think?

● Norms for Discussion.
  ○ Use “I” statements. Speak about your own thoughts and experiences.
  ○ Be patient with each other. We all make mistakes.
  ○ Learn from each other. We are ALL teachers and learners.

● Pair Share.
Setting the Framework Today

● This 1 ½ hour block is only a **starting point**.
● Understanding and challenging racism in this country is a **journey**.
● José Vilson’s “Rethinking Conversations on Race Among Educators”
  ○ Discomfort is the starting point, not the end goal.
  ○ Proceed with the best intentions.
  ○ Be honest and inclusive.
● What important issue are we NOT focusing on in this presentation?
● [libequity.web.unc.edu](http://libequity.web.unc.edu) and **#libequity**
● Guess what? We’re white.

Key Constructs

- **Racism**: systemic, institutionalized reality
  \[ \text{racism} = \text{prejudice plus power} \]

- **White privilege**: “invisible package of unearned assets”

- **Microaggressions**: continual indignities that communicate racial slights and insights towards people of color

- **Achievement Gap vs. Opportunity Gap**: the ways in which race, ethnicity, SES, wealth contribute/perpetuate lower educational attainment for students

Why It’s Important To Talk with Teens About Race

- Racism is endemic. We are not a post-racial society.

- The facts on this slide come from Michelle Alexander’s book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.

ABOUT 1 IN 3 BLACK AND NATIVE STUDENTS

AND ABOUT 1 IN 4 HISPANIC STUDENTS

DON’T GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL ON TIME,

COMPARED WITH ABOUT 1 IN 7 WHITE STUDENTS.

Disparities in School Discipline

Black students are 3-4 times more likely than their White peers to be expelled or face multiple suspensions from school.

Risk of Being Expelled

Risk of Facing Multiple Suspensions

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2009-10
More than half of Asian-American teens are bullied in school.
Incarceration rates by race and ethnicity, 2010

(number of people incarcerated per 100,000 people in that group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2,207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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CRACK COCAINE IS USED BY A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF BLACKS THAN WHITES.

All other drugs, including powder cocaine, heroin, LSD, and marijuana, are used by more whites than blacks and Latinos combined.

THE “WAR ON DRUGS” FOCUSED ON CRACK COCAINE. Since the 1980s, a person found in possession of just five grams of crack (more used by blacks) would face a mandatory five-year minimum prison sentence, while it would take 500 grams of powder cocaine (MORE USED BY WHITES) to warrant the same punishment.

The majority of illegal drug users and dealers nationwide are white, but 3/4 of all people imprisoned for drug offenses are black or Latino.
Why It’s Important To Talk with Teens About Race

- ALL youth are aware of race.
- Teens of color recognize and experience the impact of white privilege in their communities and schools.
  - Normative position of power and whiteness within the curriculum, particularly in English and History classrooms.
- Being ‘Black or Latino or Asian American or Native is NOT a Risk Factor’
  - Research shows that for youth of color, positive racial identity leads to academic success. **Positive racial identity is a precursor to academic success!** [Hanley and Noblit, 2009]
- Guess what? Our schools are not majority white.
A New Majority in K-12

The 2014-15 academic year is projected to be the first in which African-American, Asian, Latino, and Native American students together will outnumber non-Hispanic whites in K-12 public schools. Growth in the Hispanic population is expected to propel the trend of a rising share of nonwhite students through the next decade.

Related: View our entire story package on the changing demographics of America’s schools.
The Power of Stories

“I think I started to realize that stories are so powerful — particularly powerful because we’re not always aware of how powerful they are.”

- Chimamanda Adichie
The Danger of a Single Story by Chimamanda Adichie

http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en
Single Stories

- Group / Table Share
  - Reflection on Chimamanda Adichie’s words.
  - Think of examples of YA books that CHALLENGE the single story.

- Large Group Sharing of YA Titles
The Power of Stories

- Authors = image makers.

- Counterstories are necessary to negate *the single story*.
  - They give voice, present complexities, and challenge readers.
  - “By affirming their vision of the world, well-written, authentic multiethnic children’s literature can provide healing from the damages of living in a racist society.” (Barker, 2010)

- Dominant “race audiences can enrich their own reality though listening to the stories and counterstories of parallel cultures.” (Delgado, 1989)

“If you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves.”

-Junot Díaz
Prior to beginning the conversation:

- Engage in your own courageous explorations about race, power, & privilege.
- Establish TRUSTING relationships with teens.
- Set up an atmosphere of caring.
Prior to beginning the conversation:

- Adopt a critical literacy framework for your discussion with teens.
  - In whose interest?
  - For what purpose?
  - Who benefits?

- Select enabling texts - (Tatum, 2009)
HOW do we talk with teens about race?

Characteristics of Enabling Texts

1. Promote a healthy psyche
2. Reflect an awareness of the real world
3. Focus on the collective struggle of people of color
4. Position the characters of color as having agency
5. Serve as a road map for being, doing, thinking, and acting
6. Recognize, honor, and nurture multiple identities
7. Demonstrate resiliency
8. Are interesting and provocative
9. Avoid caricatures
“Reading Monster with- and against-Hole in My Life encourages students to develop a more conscious awareness of the race-based privileges and disprivileges at work in their own lives, and in the various systems in which ‘justice’ is meted out.” (Engles & Kory, 2013)

Framing Questions:

1. How does a person become reconciled to a different identity?
2. Does a person become a “monster” by choice or are they forced into becoming a “monster?”
3. What impact do the judgments of others have on self-esteem and self-efficacy?
4. Is the U.S. a redemptive society or is it constructed to save some and sacrifice others?

Additional Resources:

- Statistics from Juvenile Justice
- PBS video “Education Under Arrest” (video.pbs.org/video/2328669166)
- News Story: “Juvenile Justice System Fails Some American Teens” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBp5cIKmHM)
Steve: How do you think the trial is going?”

O’Brien: Well frankly, nothing is happening that speaks to your innocence. Half of these jurors, no matter what they said when we questioned them when we picked the jury, believed you were guilty the moment they laid eyes on you. You’re young, you’re Black, and you’re on trial. What else do they need to know? (p. 78-79)

Newman called the next afternoon and woke me up. “Okay,” he announced, “here’s the deal. We plead guilty to one charge of conspiracy to distribute and they drop the rest....”

“What do you think?”

“You do it,” he replied without hesitation. “Besides there is a good chance you’ll just get five years’ probation.”

“What do you think will happen?” I asked, “Seriously.”

He paused. “Don’t sweat it,” he replied. “You’re just a kid.” (p. 131)
Strategy #2: The Community-Centered Approach

**Individual:** How does the character describe him or herself? Or how is he or she described?

**Affiliated Communities**
- To what communities does s/he belong or with what communities does s/he identify?
- What role does s/he play in these communities?

Outsider Communities: Are there other communities to which s/he does not belong that are also present?

Society

- How do these communities view each other?
- Which communities have more or the most (social, political, institutional) power?
- How do you know?

Strategy #2: The Community-Centered Approach

Back to the Individual!
- What effect does this have on the character’s experiences?
- What effect does this have on the character’s understanding of him or herself and the world in which s/he lives?
- What would s/he like to change?
- What challenges does s/he face? Why?

Strategy #2: The Community-Centered Approach

Meixner’s Community-Centered Approach

Individual → Affiliated Communities → Outsider Communities → Society → Individual

Strategy #3: Text Graffiti

- Exposes students to subsections of a text prior to having them read the full text.
- Gives students an opportunity to silently respond to a text and then to the comments of their peers.

How to Graffiti a Text

1. Read the text silently.

2. Respond to the text in writing:
   - Write what you think the text might mean and why you think so.
   - Draw a representation of what you think the text might be talking about.
   - Explain what the text makes you wonder.
   - Write what the text tells you about people.
   - Write about the kind of conflict the text is describing.
   - Tell how this text reminds you of something in your own life or in the world. What? How?
   - Tell how this text reminds you of something else you have read. What? How?

3. Pass your response to the person to your right.

4. Write a response to another person’s graffiti thoughts.

5. Repeat steps 2-4.
Writing Reminders

1. Try to write so others can read your notes.
2. Use all the time you are given to write – keep your pen moving!
3. Write quietly. *[The discussion will come later.]*
Small group discussion: Take 8-10 minutes to discuss in your group. We’d like each group to be prepared to share one powerful thought with the whole group.

Large group Round Robin: Sharing of powerful thoughts.

Debrief: Benefits of text graffiti as a technique for initiating conversations about race, power, and privilege
Closing Thoughts

“We don’t empower teens. We give them the space and tools to empower themselves.”

- Kane Smego
  The Sacrificial Poets
Closing Thoughts

● JOIN THE CONVERSATION. Share what you learn and contribute back to the network of practice.

● Speak with your collection budget. Demand diversity! #WeNeedDiverseBooks

● Never lose sight of your goal: to provide meaningful, authentic support for teens!
When I began to read, I began to exist.

-Walter Dean Myers
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Student pictures from nortonism.tumblr.com and itooamberkeley.tumblr.com.


U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2009-2010.


Bibliography: YA Literature


