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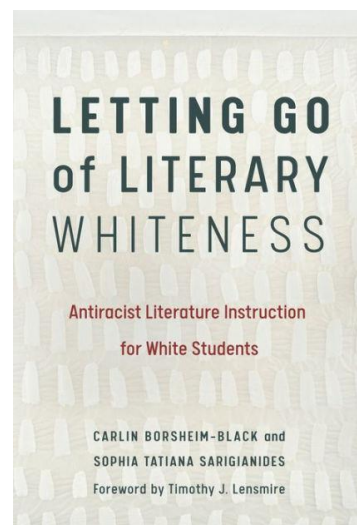
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In June 2020, the Education for Liberation Network hosted a free webinar called *Repurposing Our Pedagogies* where seven educators of color came together to discuss the Black Lives Matter movement and its impact on education. Throughout the 90-minute conversation, the takeaway was clear – now is the time for White allies to do the work of dismantling the systems of racial privilege.

We [people of color] did not start this, and it's not our job to end it- White folks got to end this, and they got to want to be a part of this. And not performative, not from the sidelines. You got to deeply want to be a part of what it means to be an abolitionist.

(Education for Liberation Network, 2020, 14:45)



Letting Go of Literary Whiteness: Antiracist Literature Instruction for White Students is an answer to this call for White people to begin working against racism within educational institutions. The authors, Carlin Borsheim-Black and Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides, use their own experiences in the classroom as teachers and researchers to provide secondary English instructors the tools needed to engage majority White classrooms in important discussions about race.

Before delving into the depths of this book, it is important to note that the authors both identify as White women, and the intended audience is White English teachers working with a mostly White student population. This is an identity that I also share with the authors. Although my teaching career has

included diverse environments, I currently work in a school with a majority White student population. As a reviewer of this book, I am aware of the bias in my own racial identity and experiences that I may bring to my analysis.

The authors make the obvious point that White supremacy is very much a White problem in the US; and all too often, racist ideas are perpetuated in the classroom. For teachers in White-dominant schools, the aim of antiracist education should be to disrupt the traditional whitewashed perspective that is prevalent within U.S. schools. The authors recognize that many educators are working within bureaucratic systems that are resistant to overarching reform. Therefore, the strategies presented in this book offer teachers practical tools that can be implemented within an existing curriculum.

The book is divided into seven chapters, with an introduction outlining the reasons why a book on this topic is necessary for our times. Four chapters give specific information for what antiracist education would look like in a high school English classroom using commonly taught texts like *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Each chapter begins with a “Common Challenge” section that details an anecdote from the authors’ own experiences. It is followed by a section on “Why This Matters from an Antiracist Perspective,” which reviews the scholarship on the topic. And, the “What You Can Do” section, informed by the research previously stated, details the steps required to disrupt the White narrative in which the novels were written. Lastly, several chapters conclude with an antiracist lesson plan that showcases how the strategies can be implemented within the Common Core Standards.

Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides make evident from the start that they are writing as White teachers enacting an antiracist approach to pedagogy. The pronoun “we” is used throughout the book to connect the authors to Whiteness and the assets and liabilities that come with talking about race as a White person (p. 13). Using critical race theory (CRT) as a framework for analyzing literature, the authors develop a compelling argument on how CRT can be utilized to interrupt Whiteness. According to the authors, applying a CRT lens to literature instruction is imperative because “literature does not simply *reflect* race and racism in American society; literature has played a role in *constructing* race and racism in American society” (p. 7, emphasis in original). Therefore, antiracist literature instruction makes Whiteness visible in the classroom and provides students the opportunity to develop racial literacy skills, i.e., the ability to identify and act against forms of everyday racism (Twine, 2004).

In writing this book, it is also apparent that the authors understood the lack of autonomy that many teachers face in choosing the literature that their students read in the classroom. Three of the seven chapters address the issue of text selection from different angles, using what Morrell (2018) “refers to as *different reading* and *reading differently*” (p. 33, emphasis in the original). While some space in chapter three, “Introducing Racialized Reader Response,” is given to the idea that teachers should include more literature from writers of color (different reading), the authors argue that this alone is not enough to disrupt the White

perspective prevalent in schools. White students are conditioned not to see race unless it is explicitly stated by the author. Instead, Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides outline four strategies teachers can employ to bring race to the forefront of the discussion, regardless of a book's designation as diverse. Therefore, the authors spend a considerable amount of time describing the tools needed to explicitly analyze a text from an antiracist perspective. The typical tools of literature analysis in today's classroom, e.g., New Criticism, may actually reinforce notions of racism instead of dispelling them. Incorporating a perspective that racializes literary elements and then asks students to consider the implications of this perspective into the analysis of canonical texts can actively bring to the forefront the racial ideologies that undergird the novel.

Letting Go of Literary Whiteness is an important resource for White English teachers looking to racialize the canonical texts in majority White environments. While each strategy is tied to antiracist education theory, the most compelling parts of the book are the real-life examples contained within the chapters. Talking about race can be an uncomfortable and vulnerable experience, and the scenarios from their own teaching and research demonstrate how difficult, yet rewarding, this kind of work can be. The authors encourage readers to engage students in examining their own racial identities while also remembering that the work of racial literacy is never finished. White teachers have been socialized into reading the world through a White lens, and criticality is necessary to disrupt the status quo.

Although this book does excellent work in providing tangible ways to incorporate antiracist literature instruction, it is not a primer on the subject. The authors understand the importance of teachers engaging in their own racial identity work. "There is a threshold of racial literacy that we, as English teachers, need in order to embark on antiracist teaching with our students, because a surface-level understanding not only will not suffice but may end up reinforcing problematic thinking" (p. 119). While the authors do devote a few pages of each chapter to explain the theory behind the strategy, it is not a definitive source of foundational beliefs on antiracist education. In fact, I would argue that the reader needs an in-depth understanding of antiracist teaching methods to truly gain pedagogical benefits from this book. Even though the last few pages of the text do provide a list of resources in a variety of media, I would encourage any English teacher planning to racialize their curriculum to do their homework so that they feel more confident in doing the work of an antiracist educator.

One shortcoming of the book is in response to the authors' lack of concrete strategies to mitigate the risk of "silencing or marginalizing the experiences and needs of a small number of students of color in White dominant classrooms" (p. 5). Other than some general guidelines and tools to engage in race talk during a whole-class discussion, the book does not address this topic substantively. On a second reading, I noticed only one, very short, example that explicitly tackled this issue. To better meet this aim of the book, it would have been beneficial to include an additional chapter on how to manage similar situations like this with sensitivity and grace.

The ability to disrupt the Whiteness of canonical texts and openly talk about race in majority White classrooms is answering the call of the Education for Liberation Network, as well as that of other organizations, by becoming an active member in the antiracist education movement. “As English teachers, we must be aware of the role we play in maintaining the racial status quo of White supremacy in the ways we engage all students via literary study” (p. 5). Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides offer several strategies that teachers can implement in their classrooms to promote racial literacy among White students. While it is an important resource for any teacher seeking to interrupt Whiteness within the curriculum, it is also imperative for teachers to continue to grow in their own professional understandings of race and identity. As the authors demonstrate from the beginning, antiracist literature instruction is not for the faint of heart. It is emotionally laborious and requires continual self-reflection, but the rewards of this introspective process will have a formative ripple effect on our own schools and communities.

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