

Elementary Literacy Teachers Change the Underlying Story Through Transformative Read-Aloud Curricula

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This study investigated the curriculum development practices of two critical elementary educators who used their daily read-aloud time to challenge the dominant narrative that the United States is equitable and just.

MANY ELEMENTARY TEACHERS in the United States teach about the civil rights movement during Black History Month (February). They read books to their students about the successes of Martin Luther King Jr., Ruby Bridges, and Rosa Parks in overturning discriminatory laws in the 1950s and 1960s. These lessons are usually added on to the state-mandated curriculum, and they generally perpetuate what some scholars have called a “single story” (Adichie, 2009) of the civil rights movement (e.g., Busey & Walker, 2017; Tschida et al., 2014). By presenting systemic oppression as a problem that was resolved in the distant past, these lessons reaffirm the hegemonic narrative that the present-day United States is an ideal, post-racial society. To teach young children how systemic racism still oppresses Black and brown Americans, and to teach them that they have the power to change our society for the better, requires a different, truly critical pedagogical approach.

Transformative, anti-oppressive curricula, as theorized by Banks (1989, 2014) and Kumashiro (2001, 2009), directly address present-day realities of racism, discrimination, and oppression. According to Banks (1989), a transformative curriculum includes “the infusion of various perspectives, frames of reference, and content from

various groups, that will extend students’ understandings of the nature, development, and complexity of U.S. society” (p. 18). Transformative curricula challenge the dominant narrative of the United States as a nation that was built upon the principle of equality for all.

One of the accepted components of a transformative, anti-oppressive education is the use of diverse texts (e.g., Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Thomas, 2016; Xie, 2000). Organizations from #WeNeedDiverseBooks to the National Council of Teachers of English have encouraged teachers to share books from diverse authors with their students. Nevertheless, treating these texts as neutral add-ons to the state curriculum falls short of transformation, as so many units about the civil rights era demonstrate. Kumashiro (2001) observed: “It is easy to add difference to the curriculum in a way that complies with hegemony” (p. 6).

Scholars recognize that it takes more than adding diverse texts to change or complexify the story of the United States.

For teachers, integrating children’s literature means making decisions that require a deep understanding of curriculum, learning processes, social context, and literature. These decisions require risk-taking on the part of the teacher who is stepping away from a prescribed curriculum

and into topics and content that may disrupt the values represented in the traditional curriculum. (Flores et al., 2019)

The standard U.S. literacy curricula are not built on a foundation of cultural relevance, criticality, or social justice (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Muhammad, 2020); therefore, the resources prescribed for teaching literacy, including children's literature, are perceived as culturally neutral and racially color-blind. However, critical teachers and scholars begin with the premise that all stories are political in nature.

In this article, I demonstrate how two elementary literacy teachers, who taught predominantly white students, set out to "change the underlying story" (Kumashiro, 2001) of colonialist and capitalist ideologies of the United States by implementing what Banks (1989, 2014) theorized as the transformation approach and what Kumashiro (2001) theorized as anti-oppressive education, during whole-group read-aloud. I focus on the critical educators' curriculum development for their daily read-aloud with diverse texts. In these two classrooms, diverse texts included diverse children's literature (Thomas, 2016), videos, music, and art that centered the voices and experiences of people of color. The teachers envisioned read-aloud as a dedicated space and time for addressing critical sociocultural knowledge (Brown, 2013) and sociopolitical knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2014) with the young people in their classes. The research question that guided my inquiry was: How do critical elementary literacy teachers address sociopolitical and sociocultural issues during read-aloud in order to support students in disrupting dominant narratives?

Theoretical Framework

To analyze the work of the critical teacher participants, I drew on conceptualizations of antiracist education (Leonardo, 2002; Love, 2019; Muhammad, 2020; Spaulding et al., 2021). Antiracist scholars describe how an antiracist curriculum must center Black, brown, and Indigenous people's genius and joy. Leonardo (2002) taught us that white privilege "is less of an essence and more of a choice" (p. 35). Spaulding et al. (2021) added that "in order for white educators to become antiracist, committing to disavow whiteness is essential" (p. 13). Love (2019), Muhammad (2020), and Spaulding et al. (2021) further argued that antiracist education does not and should not begin with teaching about oppression, but rather with teaching the dream of a future in which all people live in their full humanity. It follows that antiracist educators' work is to support students in their critical readings of the word and world (Freire & Macedo, 1987/2005) in order to "eradicate racism...[by centering] the full humanity of

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those most directly impacted by it" (Spaulding et al., 2021, p. 14). Using this lens of antiracist education, I examined how Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker (pseudonyms) challenged the dominant narrative of whiteness in their curricula.

Similar to the purposes of antiracist education, Kumashiro's (2001, 2009) theoretical framework of anti-oppressive education also centers the well-being of the "Other." He explained that the "Other" are "traditionally marginalized in society, that is, that are *other than the norm*" (p. 3). In dominant narratives, the "Other" are portrayed as inferior, deficient, and unable to meet the commonsense standards of American society (Brown, 2013; De Lissovoy, 2015; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997/2012). In response, Kumashiro (2001) asked teachers to resist repetition (i.e., upholding dominant ideologies as curriculum or reiterating deficit views of the "Other") and to work for change through reflection and action.

Although diverse texts are an important resource for developing cultural awareness, an anti-oppressive education framework can support teachers to establish that no single narrative can tell the whole story of a people. Kumashiro (2001) explained that including texts from different viewpoints is important "not merely in its broadening of perspectives, but also in its ability to change the underlying story of the curricular unit and its political effect" (p. 6). Furthermore, when students hear different versions of a story, rather than repetitions of the hegemonic "single story" (Adichie, 2009), they can start to evaluate why they are being taught some stories and not others, which culminates in a critical questioning of what stories our society tells about itself, and why.

With antiracist education and anti-oppressive education as theoretical lenses, I found that Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker developed their read-aloud curricula with the intent to resist repetition and illuminate the political and partial nature of all stories, and to advocate for the well-being of those who are Othered in the United States.

Methodology

This study was part of a broader study that centered on questions regarding the teachers' enactment of critical pedagogies during their daily read-aloud. I employed

qualitative, multi-case-study methods (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 2006). The study took place in two classroom contexts, each one serving as a bounded case (Merriam, 2002). Dyson and Genishi (2005) highlighted that case study invites us to study the “messy complexity of human experience” (p. 3). The messiness of case study aligns with my theoretical understandings, specifically that the stories I tell across these cases will be both partial and political (Kumashiro, 2001), with the intention to bring forward the teachers’ resistance to the repetition of teaching standard curricula through their efforts in developing transformative read-aloud curricula.

DESCRIPTIONS OF SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

This research took place in two elementary classrooms in two different independent school districts in Central Texas (see Table 1). The teacher participants, Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker, had established literature-based classrooms (e.g., Allington, 2000), self-identified as critical educators, and were committed to the practice of reading aloud and discussing diverse texts with their students regularly as an approach to enacting critical pedagogies. Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker were cooperating teachers in the university’s teacher education program. I met them in my role as a literacy methods instructor and field supervisor, and I was inspired by their commitment to anti-oppressive teaching. Although these two teachers shared similar approaches to literacy instruction, they differed in terms of their classroom contexts and teaching experiences.

TABLE 1
School Demographics

Teacher	Ms. Smith	Ms. Barker
School	Coyote Elementary	Village Elementary
Total enrollment	800	800
Demographics		
White	40%	50%
Hispanic / Latin@	40%	25%
Asian	5%	25%
African American	5%	—
Other / two or more races	10%	—
Economically disadvantaged	30%	10%
English language learners	10%	10%
Special education svcs.	10%	10%
School performance	Passing rates above 90% in reading, math, and science, and above 80% in writing	Earned a performance distinction for Student Progress and showed strong gains on all four indicators in the state accountability system

MS. SMITH, THIRD-GRADE ESL, COYOTE ELEMENTARY. Ms. Smith, a white, middle-class, cisgender woman, had taught elementary grade levels in the local ISD for over 20 years. She believed that teachers should be lifelong learners. She shared many pivotal experiences that had shaped her identity as a critical educator. Ms. Smith said that her parents believed that to be racially just, the right thing to do was adopt a color-blind stance. Therefore, for many years, Ms. Smith built her curriculum around color-blind principles in pursuit of equality of experiences for all her students. However, with the murder of Trayvon Martin (in 2012), the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the release of the movie *Selma* (in 2014), Ms. Smith’s eyes were opened to the continued oppression and violence enacted on Black bodies in the United States today. After these events demonstrated that systemic racism was still at work in the United States, Ms. Smith gave up color blindness for racial awareness. Ms. Smith identified as a social justice educator who introduced students to other cultures, issues of injustice, and people who worked for change in their communities—whom she called “up-standers.”

MS. BARKER, FOURTH-GRADE ESL, VILLAGE ELEMENTARY. Ms. Barker, who identified as biracial, middle class, and cisgender, was in her 13th year of teaching elementary school. Her mother, who had immigrated from Iran, was Persian, and her father was white. She often mentioned her Persian heritage during read-aloud. Ms. Barker described challenges she experienced when people around her made racist and defamatory remarks about people from the Middle East because they read her as a white woman. I learned that Ms. Barker had lived abroad in Singapore for much of her childhood. Therefore, in addition to her Irani roots, she felt a strong connection to Southeast Asian culture. Ms. Barker reported that her identity as a Persian woman and her childhood abroad strongly influenced her pedagogy toward global perspectives and social justice. Ms. Barker identified teaching as her form of activism in the world. Teaching reading and writing was Ms. Barker’s passion, and she incorporated social-emotional learning as well as social justice themes into her units of study.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

I identify as a Muslim, Pakistani American woman. I taught elementary school for nearly 20 years, and I am currently an assistant professor for elementary literacy education at a Midwestern university. I was a participant observer in the teachers’ classrooms. I was there to learn and stand in solidarity with Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith. I built relationships with teachers, students, and parents across these two classroom communities. I always sat close to the students during the read-aloud event. I also greeted them, checked in with them, and sat with them at their

tables as they worked in reading workshop. Although I would visit with students after read-aloud events to follow up on class discussions, I did not interact often during the read-aloud events. I believe the students perceived me as a teacher; specifically, I was their teacher's good friend who was there to learn from them. Throughout our time together, the teachers would often share sentiments like Ms. Barker did after the fall semester:

I love having you here, and the kids love having you here. It's good because I feel like I'm already mindful about, you know, those books that I am selecting and things like that, but it helps me be even more mindful to...make sure...that I'm reading a variety of genres, but at the same time also making sure I'm exposing the kids to a variety of cultures and things like that.

I interpreted these responses to mean that my presence was a reminder for the educators to keep pursuing their hopes to curate resources and facilitate conversations that engaged students in cultural competence and criticality. To consider how my multiple positionalities (e.g., critical scholar, classroom teacher, person of color) influenced my data collection and analysis, I wrote weekly reflective memos to evaluate my own assumptions.

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

To address my research question—How do critical elementary literacy teachers address sociopolitical and sociocultural issues during read-aloud in order to support their students in disrupting dominant narratives?—I used an ethnographic approach to data collection (Erickson, 1984), and I engaged in participant observation and open-ended, semi-structured interviews. I observed and collected data for 35 read-aloud sessions in Ms. Smith's classroom and 35 in Ms. Barker's classroom across the academic year. The data sources reported here consist of ethnographic field notes, video and audio recordings of whole-group read-aloud, four formal semi-structured interviews with each teacher throughout the academic year (summer, fall, winter, spring), and classroom artifacts, specifically photos of read-aloud text set displays.

Data were analyzed using an inductive approach (Erickson, 1996) informed by the constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Tesch, 1990). I expanded my daily field notes with further detail from the day's observation, making note of informal conversations I had with faculty, students, or families. I documented my methodological, personal, and theoretical notes within my field notes (Corsaro, 1985) as a way of engaging in ongoing analysis of the ways in which teachers organized and implemented their instruction.

I transcribed and open-coded the semi-structured interviews across the year, and I developed categories and

additional codes within the categories. For example, during the first interview, teachers shared their teaching history, vision statements as critical educators, reasons for using diverse texts, and thoughts on the purpose of read-aloud. As I identified these components from the interviews, I worked to triangulate the data, making meaning of how the work the teachers were doing in their classrooms related to their critical pedagogical intentions. I identified key words and phrases the teachers used with their students (e.g., Ms. Smith's use of "up-standers" and Ms. Barker's emphasis on "be kind" and "have empathy"). I organized these terms into categories, and I noted how and when the teachers used such phrases to guide my continued observation and analysis (e.g., When does Ms. Smith remind students that they are up-standers, not by-standers?).

I created activity logs of the video and audio recordings, wrote summaries of classroom activities and discussions, and flagged sections relevant to antiracist and anti-oppressive education for closer analysis. This process supported my work of further generating codes and hypotheses that were grounded in the data I collected, particularly in noticing and naming the specific resources, structures, and routines the teachers used to foreground critical sociopolitical and sociocultural issues during read-aloud.

Analysis indicated that the teachers' strategies for addressing critical sociocultural and sociopolitical knowledge started with their development of curricula, long before the read-aloud event. Therefore, I analyzed, categorized, and defined how the teachers planned for and implemented structures within the read-aloud, as well as how they planned and improvised their discourses to enact critical pedagogies during the event. Two major themes emerged from the data: the teachers' organization and predictable routines of daily read-aloud, and their focus on changing the underlying story of the United States with their students. These two themes are presented below.

Findings

Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker designed curricula that were grounded in critical issues with carefully curated resources, including diverse texts, to foreground critical perspectives with their students every single school day. Two themes emerged in my analysis:

1. Read-aloud structures and curricula—how Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith established predictable routines for read-aloud and developed and organized their read-aloud curricula.
2. Teachers' intent to change the underlying story of the United States—how Ms. Barker's and Ms. Smith's instruction and ongoing curricular work challenged and disrupted underlying dominant stories of the United States for their students.

READ-ALOUD STRUCTURES AND CURRICULA

READ-ALOUD: A PREDICTABLE ROUTINE. Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker valued the read-aloud structure as an essential component of their daily literacy instruction. They invested between 20 minutes and an hour for this event every day, sometimes extending the event to include whole-group discussions, small-group discussions, and even independent written and artistic reading response in their journals. Within the first few weeks of the school year, the students knew that read-aloud would take place every day.

The predictability of this event is not an unusual feature for workshop teachers; many practitioners (e.g., Miller, 2002/2012) place the read-aloud event at the center of reading workshop. However, Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith reimaged the typical content of read-aloud by engaging students in critical conversations (e.g., Daly, 2021) about sociocultural and sociopolitical issues during the time allotted for literacy instruction, rather than giving in to their schools' and districts' expectations to focus solely on state standards or comprehension strategies. Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker made a sustained commitment to teaching critical sociocultural knowledge (Brown, 2013) and sociopolitical knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2014) by reading diverse texts almost every day.

This consistent routine meant that students knew that they would meet again the next day to critically discuss the topics at hand. Some students occasionally complained; for example, Gavin in Ms. Barker's class said, "Oh no! More history!" during the spring discussion of *Amelia's Road* (Altman, 1993). In contrast, other students took advantage of the routine to ask repeated questions over days and even weeks; for example, in Ms. Smith's class, Elliot asked, "Why is there racism?" after each read-aloud event during the "Civil Rights" unit.

ORGANIZATION OF CURRICULA: THEMES, UNITS, TEXTS.

Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker moved back and forth from macro- to micro-level sociocultural and sociopolitical issues to support students' thinking about how their lived experiences and knowledge connected with the systemic functions in society. For example, during the first week of school, the teachers shared with the students the overarching themes for their read-aloud blocks. Ms. Smith's theme was *We Are Global Citizens. We Are Up-Standers!* and Ms. Barker's theme was *Each Kindness Makes the Whole World a Little Better*.

The teachers further organized their read-aloud curricula into multiweek units, which were designed to build upon each other and expand the meaning of the overarching themes. For each multiweek unit, they curated a set of diverse texts. See Table 2 for the organization of units by months, and see the appendix for the unit text sets, with the genre and modality of the texts.

TABLE 2
Teacher-Developed Units of Study for Read-Aloud

	Units of Study in Ms. Smith's Classroom— Third Grade	Units of Study in Ms. Barker's Classroom— Fourth Grade
Theme	We Are Global Citizens!	Each Kindness
August	Same and Different	—
September	Overview of Types of Discrimination	Multiple Intelligences (text set of picturebooks) Empathy and Kindness (<i>Wonder</i> by R. J. Palacio)
October	Story of Columbus (Dominant and Counternarrative) Global Goals (United Nations Project)	Empathy and Kindness (<i>Wonder</i> by R. J. Palacio)
November	Immigration	<i>Ghost</i> by Jason Reynolds
December	Homelessness, Poverty, and Hunger Inquiry	—
January	Underground Railroad	Civil Rights
February	Segregation; Civil Rights (Yesterday and Today)	Signs and Symbols (topics addressed: Japanese internment, migrant farm work, Holocaust, loss of mother, global poverty, environmental well-being) (pairing of fiction and nonfiction multimodal texts)
March	Civil Rights (Yesterday and Today)	Signs and Symbols (continued)
April	Women's Rights	Holocaust (<i>Number the Stars</i> by Lois Lowry)
May	What Is Normal?	—

As is evident in Table 2, in both classrooms the focus of each unit was on issues of equity and social justice (e.g., “Homelessness, Poverty, and Hunger”; “Immigration”; “Civil Rights”). Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker developed diverse text sets for each unit, and these sets were often composed of picturebooks written by authors of color, which was one way for the teachers to bring multiple perspectives into the classroom.

The teachers began the academic year with anchor units that illuminated their themes by laying the foundational principles centering on humanity, activism, and difference. Both Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith recognized the importance of welcoming the students into community by starting with deep digs into their own culturally rich lives.

The teachers began the academic year with anchor units that illuminated their themes by laying the foundational principles centering on humanity, activism, and difference. Both Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith recognized the importance of welcoming the students into community by starting with deep digs into their own culturally rich lives (Mentor & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). Ms. Smith’s opening unit on “Same and Different” and Ms. Barker’s unit on “Multiple Intelligences” set the tone for how the students and teachers would engage with each other during read-aloud as both storytellers and critical listeners. For example, Ms. Smith focused on *The Colors of Us* (Katz, 1999) for two consecutive read-aloud events. On the second day, she asked each student to think about their own skin color, like the characters in the book, and compose a self-portrait that they felt realistically portrayed their skin color. Starting with these units, the teachers welcomed the students to listen, consider, and discuss cultural, cognitive, racial, and linguistic differences that existed within their own classroom communities, as well as in society. Mentor and Sealey-Ruiz (2021) emphasized that we cannot expect to develop racial or critical literacy if we do not spend ample time digging deep into our own ways of being while reading the word and world (Freire, 1970/2000). I found that Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker embraced Mentor and Sealey-Ruiz’s (2021) advice by the way they centered their students’ knowledge and talk.

Importantly, the teachers did not have a lesson plan book that had every unit, text set, and text mapped out

and organized chronologically. Although the teachers had fleshed out their visions for the purpose of read-aloud, as well as many of the texts they hoped to incorporate, some of their curricula development happened in the moment—a necessary approach for critical educators. Depending on the direction of the students’ talk regarding critical issues, or events in the world, they added or removed texts for read-aloud. For example, Ms. Barker had originally planned to read aloud, after *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012), *Towers Falling* (Rhodes, 2016) as part of her commitment to changing the dominant narrative about Muslims, but she decided in the moment to read *Ghost* (Reynolds, 2016) as an example of a contemporary cultural text that centered love and friendship for Black children (Love, 2019; Muhammad, 2020). Ms. Barker had just read *Ghost* (Reynolds, 2016) on her own, and she shared:

I have read stuff like that [*Bud Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999)] to my kids and that’s more like a historical aspect of people going through civil rights and things like that. Whereas this [*Ghost*] is modern day—right now, right now, and it’s a character and context that the kids can relate to because it’s modern day.

Ms. Barker was committed to keep growing, learning, and updating her resources as an anti-oppressive educator. Neither Ms. Smith nor Ms. Barker recycled unit plans from previous school years. For Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith, this balance of planned and improvisational (Brown, 2013) antiracist and anti-oppressive curricula upheld the principles of transformation as dynamic and critically responsive to the current moment, as opposed to the static nature of mandated curricula intended to uphold the status quo.

In developing their yearlong plans for instruction, Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker engaged in praxis (Freire 1970/2000) as they planned how to teach critical sociocultural and sociopolitical knowledge (Brown, 2013) that was both historical and contemporary. According to the teachers, they designed the units to build upon each other in order to demonstrate to the children that all stories are partial (Kumashiro, 2001) and continuous. The units were recursive, intersectional, and layered. Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker thought about how each book they selected supported the focus of the unit. They also thought about how the books within each unit worked together to provide multiple perspectives and support students’ development of critical sociocultural knowledge (Brown, 2013) on topics of equity, race, class, gender, immigration, and more. For example, Ms. Barker made space to address anti-Muslim discrimination in the United States across multiple units, text sets, and texts. In her first unit,

“Multiple Intelligences,” Ms. Barker read aloud a series of texts to celebrate the beauty and strength of human resilience. Within this text set she read *The Librarian of Basra* (Winter, 2005), and she invited students to hear the story of the war in Iraq from the perspective of Alia Muhammad Baker, rather than the perspective of the U.S. narrative of the “War on Terror.” Between this unit and her read-aloud of *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012), she introduced the anniversary of 9/11 with the read-aloud of *September Roses* (Winter, 2004) and wove the topic of anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States through subsequent units on “Wonder,” “Civil Rights,” and “Signs and Symbols.” During these units, Ms. Barker discussed 9/11 and the “Muslim ban,” but rather than portraying the United States as the victim of Muslim terrorists, she “changed the narrative of the United States’ role in simultaneously challenging and contributing to various oppressions” (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 6).

Similarly, Ms. Smith opened her year with a focus on race as a social construct in the unit “Same and Different.” This unit served as the foundation for Ms. Smith and her students to consider the realities of race and racism in the United States and the world, and to challenge the notion of race as a biological reality. Ms. Smith explained to me that this activity was an initial step toward understanding race as a social construct. By disrupting the ideas of skin color as literally black or literally white, Ms. Smith invited students to explore what “race” in our society really means, if it does not mean the actual color of one’s skin. This anchor lesson served as the springboard for students to learn that we all have beautiful, unique skin colors, but race in the United States is political and painful and beyond the actual scope of skin color. Starting with this lesson, Ms. Smith’s students learned that people can be oppressed because of their racial identity, or they can have power because of their racial identity. Ms. Smith made a point to address racism as a constant form of systemic oppression within subsequent units that addressed other forms of oppression, inequity, and resistance.

I learned that although Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker taught in different schools and districts, the focus of their units overlapped significantly. For example, they both foregrounded contemporary concerns regarding immigration, gender equality, race and racism, religion, war, and poverty. As the teachers taught their units of study and read aloud a broad range of diverse texts, the students learned about how these concerns intersect in people’s lives. Over time, the students demonstrated an increasing ability to extend their talk toward criticality by naming not only a single form of oppression (e.g., discrimination based on a person’s race) but also the multiple intersect-

ing forms of oppression that might affect a single person’s life (e.g., race, class, and gender). Ms. Smith would often remind her students that they (the students and Ms. Smith) would continue to learn about and debate these issues and events throughout their life, indicating to them at some level that all stories are partial and political (Kumashiro, 2001).

TEACHERS’ INTENT TO CHANGE THE UNDERLYING STORY OF THE UNITED STATES

Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker developed curricula and selected resources to transform the content of the daily read-aloud from teaching comprehension strategies (i.e., retelling, summarizing, and inferring) to teaching critical sociocultural and sociopolitical realities from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker challenged commonsense dominant narratives of the United States as a constant source of good (Kumashiro, 2001) with their transformative read-aloud curricula. In this section, I present how they revised the purpose of read-aloud by centering the voice of the “Other” (Kumashiro, 2001) and reimagining the role of children in society.

THE “OTHER.” During their read-alouds, Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker actively resisted repetition of hegemonic and deficit narratives regarding the “Other” (Kumashiro, 2001) by centering and humanizing the voices of people who experienced inequity and injustice as a response to their multiple and intersectional sociocultural identities. Listening to diverse voices each day facilitated the students’ “unlearning” (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 8) of dominant narratives. Ms. Smith centered the experiences of diverse characters in 32 of her 35 sessions, and Ms. Barker centered the experiences of diverse characters in 31 of her 35 sessions. Furthermore, as indicated by the titles, most of the texts that Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker read focused on people’s resistance to oppression rather than stories about people’s oppression. Ms. Barker explained,

I think it’s important for them [the students] to get to see themselves in books but then also get to see people that are different from them and not only being in those situations where they’re always at a deficit, but just being a regular person and a regular kid. I don’t always want to choose a book about a character who was Black that is struggling because of slavery.

Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith presented critical sociocultural issues on race, class, and gender as political topics that had many sides and intersections (Crenshaw, 1991) in local and global contexts, and they were willing

to engage their students in discussions that changed the underlying story (Kumashiro, 2001) of the United States as a place where discrimination only occurred in the past, not the present. Their themes, units, text sets, and texts created space for a yearlong discussion that disrupted the notion that the United States is always good in the world and that the culture of the dominant group in the United States is the only “normal” culture.

ROLE OF CHILDREN. Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith presented all stories to their students as political (Kumashiro, 2001). They openly acknowledged the political implications of the stories they taught, and they invited their students to take up those implications during discussions. Rather than downplaying or silencing the political nature of the texts that they presented, these teachers insisted that students talk about politics in the context of school, using diverse texts as the springboard. Throughout the academic year, each teacher, in her own way, welcomed students to push back on the notion of being politically neutral in school. The ultimate objective for Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker was to teach their students that the world is not finished, that it can change for the better, and that they had agency and could be part of that change. Ms. Smith’s and Ms. Barker’s transformative curricula engaged their students so that even as children they could envision themselves as activists.

Ms. Smith taught an extensive unit on various types of discrimination in September, including discrimination based on race, gender, religion, and ability. Throughout this unit, she emphasized the importance of talking about things that are not fair and reminded students that we all have a responsibility to take action against unfairness. For example, during her book introduction to *She Persisted* (Clinton, 2017), Ms. Smith opened her read-aloud in this way:

Ms. Smith: We are going to be talking about some things related to rights and opportunities for everyone. And we are going to start noticing these things in our classroom, in our school, and in our community because we want to see when things are not fair, so we can stand up against it. So, we can be an up-stander—

Student: Not being a by-stander.

Ms. Smith: Not just standing by and watch something happen. We do something about it. Sometimes that means personally doing something about it, sometimes it means getting an adult to help out, and sometimes it means educating people

by teaching them about what is right. Today we are going to talk about a specific kind of discrimination. Discrimination is when you have a bias towards people because of how they look or what gender they are—things that are just a part of people. Discrimination is when you act on that—take some kind of action. This book is about a specific type of discrimination: gender discrimination, discrimination that is specifically against women.

Ms. Smith outlined multiple ways that her third-grade students could take action and be “up-standers” against discrimination. First, she named “talking about” rights and unfair treatment as a form of social action in itself, and she asked her students to be aware and willing to call out “things that are not fair.” Ms. Smith invited her students to be activists both in and out of school, and she indicated that her classroom was a space where they could talk about injustices. This book introduction serves as an example of Ms. Smith’s welcoming of—even insistence on—political discourse from her students as up-standers. Even in this early part of the year, one student was already chiming in that they were not going to be by-standers, which shows how students had begun to take up the language and concepts Ms. Smith had emphasized in previous read-aloud events.

I observed similar invitations for political engagement and talk in Ms. Barker’s classroom. Ms. Barker framed her invitation by describing the need for kindness as social action that can make the world better. Ms. Barker reminded students of national and global “tragedies” throughout the year, and she continuously drew on the broad theme of the classroom, *Each Kindness*, as a mantra for social action. Both teachers through their read-aloud curricula established that school was a place to talk politics in order to address things that were not fair in their world and the world at large—and, more importantly, to learn to work toward solutions together as a community.

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Discussion and Implications

Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith appreciated the expansive power of the daily read-aloud. They utilized this space to engage their students in collective reading, writing, listening, and speaking that centered on critical sociocultural and sociopolitical issues in society. This work started on the first day of school, when the teachers shared big-picture classroom themes of global citizenship and kindness. As the year progressed, the teachers revealed focused units of study one after the other, with diverse text sets as the primary teaching tools, to bring the principles of multicultural (Banks, 2014), antiracist (Love, 2019; Muhammad, 2020), and anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2001) to life for their students.

I found that Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith rejected what Banks (1989) called “the additive approach,” in which teachers add multicultural content, concepts, themes, and perspectives to a traditional curriculum without changing the structure of the curriculum itself. Instead, these teachers each designed a yearlong curriculum comprising structures and routines that met Banks’s (1989, 2014) criteria for the “transformation approach” and often seemed to be moving toward the “social action approach.” Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker were committed to working for change in the context of school, and they enacted this commitment in part by continuously integrating critical topics into their instruction.

Kumashiro (2001, 2009) spoke to the dangers of repetition of dominant narratives until they become society’s common sense; we can infer that in response to this repetition, critical educators must repeatedly offer diverse perspectives that have the potential to disrupt and ultimately dismantle hegemonic power structures. For elementary teachers pursuing antiracist and anti-oppressive education, this study offers the following implications: (a) Teachers must commit to changing the underlying story of dominant narratives through intentional planning of new literacy curricula; (b) teachers can use daily read-aloud to engage their students with critical sociocultural and sociopolitical themes and issues; (c) teachers should draw on diverse children’s literature as a springboard to share multiple perspectives that continually challenge dominant narratives; and (d) teachers should foreground with their students that all stories (and texts) are partial and political. By intentionally and continuously focusing on political discourse, and by creating multiple opportunities for students to actively voice their perspectives, Ms. Barker and Ms. Smith prepared their students to become up-standers.

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At this moment, across the nation, institutions of education are being faced with state legislation policies that restrict the teaching of historical or contemporary inequities, claiming that such curriculum inhibits the free-speech rights of the dominant group by making them uncomfortable. With this type of legislation, teachers will be forced to continue to water down or even completely omit the critical edge of their pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Mentor & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021; Muhammad, 2020). In developing their transformative read-aloud curricula, Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker were able to disrupt dominant narratives of meritocracy, neutrality, and color-blind ideology and change the underlying story of the United States for their students. ▣

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APPENDIX

Units of Study With Text Sets: Ms. Smith and Ms. Barker

Units of Study in Ms. Smith's Classroom—Third Grade		Text Sets/Observed Read-Alouds	Genre and Form
August	Same and Different	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We Are All Wonders</i> by R. J. Palacio (2017) • <i>The Colors of Us</i> by Karen Katz (1999) • <i>The Best Part of Me</i> by Wendy Ewald (2002) 	Realistic fiction picturebooks Photography
September	Overview of Types of Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sneetches Movie</i>, Dr. Seuss; YouTube (original 1953) • <i>She Persisted</i> by Chelsea Clinton, illustrated by Alexandra Boiger (2017) • <i>My Friend Has Down Syndrome</i> by Amanda Doering Tourville, illustrated by Kristin Sorra (2008) • <i>Hidden: A Child's Story of the Holocaust</i> by Loic Dauvillier and Greg Salsedo, illustrated by Marc Lizano (2014) • <i>Baseball Saved Us</i>, by Ken Mochizuki, illustrated by Dom Lee (1993) 	Realistic fiction picturebooks Biography picturebook Historical fiction graphic novel Movie
October	Story of Columbus (Dominant and Counternarrative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A Picture Book of Christopher Columbus</i> by David Adler (1991) • <i>Encounter</i> by Jane Yolen, illustrated by David Shannon (1996); watched read-aloud on YouTube 	Biography picturebook Historical fiction picturebook
	Global Goals (United Nations Project)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If the World Were a Village: A Book About the World's People</i> by David J. Smith, illustrated by Shelagh Armstrong (2011) • <i>Global Goal</i> videos: <i>World's Largest Lessons</i> (2015) 	Nonfiction picturebook Media from nonprofit (https://www.globalgoals.org/)
November	Immigration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Arrival</i> by Shaun Tan (2007) • <i>The Lotus Seed</i> by Sherry Garland, illustrated by Tatsuro Kiuchi (1997) • <i>Two White Rabbits</i> by Jairo Buitrago and Rafael Yockteng, translated by Elisa Amado (2015) 	Wordless picturebook Realistic fiction picturebooks
December	Homelessness, Poverty, and Hunger Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Lady in the Box</i> by Ann McGovern, illustrated by Marni Backer (1997) • Video: <i>Humans of New York</i> • <i>Fly Away Home</i> by Eve Bunting, illustrated by Ronald Himler (1993) 	Realistic fiction picturebooks Social media video: <i>Humans of New York</i>
January	Underground Railroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans</i> by Kadir Nelson (2013) • <i>Henry's Freedom Box</i> by Ellen Levine, illustrated by Kadir Nelson (2007) • <i>Follow the Drinking Gourd</i> by Jeanette Winter (1992) • <i>Love</i> by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Loren Long (2018) 	Biography picturebooks Realistic fiction picturebooks Historical fiction picturebooks
February	Segregation Civil Rights (Yesterday and Today)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dear Mr. Rosenwald</i> by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Gregory Christie (2017) • <i>Grandmama's Pride</i> by Becky Birtha, illustrated by Colin Bootman (2016) • <i>Rosa</i> by Nikki Giovanni, illustrated by Bryan Collier (2007) • <i>If A Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks</i> by Faith Ringgold (2003) 	Biography picturebooks Realistic fiction picturebooks Historical fiction picturebooks
March	Civil Rights (Yesterday and Today)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation</i> by Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Brian Pinkney (2008) • <i>Little Rock Nine</i> video, <i>Time</i> magazine • <i>The Little Rock Nine and the Fight for Equal Education</i> by Gary Jeffrey and Nana Li (2012) • <i>Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down</i>, by Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Brian Pinkney (2010) • <i>Freedom on the Menu</i> by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Jerome LaGarrigue (2007) • <i>The Story of Ruby Bridges</i> by Robert Coles, illustrated by George Ford (1995) • <i>A Sweet Smell of Roses</i> by Angela Johnson, illustrated by Eric Velazquez (2007) • <i>Climbing Lincoln's Steps: The African American Journey</i> by Suzanne Slade, illustrated by Colin Bootman (2016) 	Biography picturebooks Realistic fiction picturebooks Historical fiction picturebooks Graphic novels Videos and media
April	Women's Rights		
May	What Is Normal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of literature from the year 	

Units of Study in Ms. Barker's Classroom—Fourth Grade		Text Sets	Genre and Form
August			
September	Multiple Intelligences (text set of picturebooks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon</i> by Patty Lovell, illustrated by David Catrow (2001) • <i>Librarian of Basra</i> by Jeanette Winter (2005) • <i>Welsandia</i> by Paul Fleischman, illustrated by Kevin Hawkes (1991) • <i>September Roses</i> by Jeanette Winter (2004) 	Realistic picturebooks Postmodern picturebooks Biography picturebooks
October	Empathy and Kindness (<i>Wonder</i> by R. J. Palacio)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wonder</i> by R. J. Palacio (2012) 	Realistic fiction, middle-grade novel
November	<i>Ghost</i> by Jason Reynolds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ghost</i> by Jason Reynolds (2016) 	Realistic fiction, middle-grade novel, series
December	[Did not observe in December due to Ms. Barker's schedule]		
January	Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Story of Ruby Bridges</i> by Robert Cole, illustrated by George Ford (1995) • Video on Dr. Martin Luther King, source unknown • <i>Freedom's Ring: King's "I Have a Dream" Speech</i>, Stanford University (http://freedomring.stanford.edu) 	Biography picturebooks Realistic fiction picturebooks Historical fiction picturebooks Videos and media
February	Signs and Symbols (topics addressed: Japanese internment, migrant farm work, Holocaust, loss of mother, global poverty, environmental well-being) (pairing of fiction and nonfiction multimodal texts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Running Shoes</i> by Frederick Lipp, illustrated by Jason Gaillard (2008) • <i>Students Donate Shoes, Books, and Supplies to Help Kids in Another Country</i> by Natalia Barker (2018) • <i>So Far From the Sea</i> by Eve Bunting, illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet (2009) • <i>Japanese-American Relocation in the US During World War II</i> (Newsela) 	Biography picturebooks Realistic fiction picturebooks Historical fiction picturebooks Videos and media
March	Signs and Symbols (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fred Korematsu: Why His Story Still Matters Today</i> (Newsela) • <i>The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark</i> by Carmen Agra Deedy, illustrated by Henri Sorensen (2000) • <i>Amelia's Road</i> by Linda Jacobs Altman and Enrique O. Sanchez (1993) 	
April	Holocaust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number the Stars</i> by Lois Lowry (1989) 	Historical fiction, middle-grade novel
May		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Percy Jackson, Book 1</i>, Rick Riordan (2006) 	Fantasy

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