

# Lesson Study 1: Lesson Plan

Rebecca McKay

Course: ELE 312 Children's Lit Number of Teacher Candidates:12

Instructional Location: William R. Harvey Art Museum Date: February 20, 2021  
Time: 9:00-12:00

**Lesson Goals:** The class will engage in active learning and use reading, writing, speaking, viewing, listening, and thinking skills (language arts) as adult learners to explore a topic of the ethics\* involved in choosing materials and books that mirror the children that they teach. **CIEP Standard 2 Curriculum, 3 Instruction ACTS 2a**, Learning Differences. **3I** Learning Environments., **4b** Content Knowledge

\*Ethics are *moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity*

**Central Focus of Lesson:** Teacher candidates will examine their moral principles that govern their choices of instructional materials, specifically children's literature. Students will use four corners of the room and the readings found there to investigate what African American researchers and writers say on this topic.

**The class will begin to answer the inquiry question: Teachers' Selection of Literature for Classroom Libraries: Does This Involve Ethics or personal morals? What do African American researchers and writers say?**

**Standard(s) Addressed: CIEP Standards: 2 Curriculum, 3 Instruction**

**Focus on standards ACTS 2a, 3I, 4b as listed below:**

**ACTS (2) Learning Differences.** The candidate uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards. (a) The candidate designs, adapts, and delivers instruction to address each student's diverse learning strengths and needs and creates opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in different ways.

**(3) Learning Environments.** The candidate works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation. (I) The candidate understands how learner diversity can affect communication and knows how to communicate effectively in differing environments.

**(4) Content Knowledge.** The candidate understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning experiences that make these aspects of the discipline accessible and meaningful for learners to assure mastery of the content.(b) The candidate engages students in learning experiences in the discipline(s) that encourage learners to understand, question, and analyze ideas from diverse perspectives so that they master the content.

**Content Objectives: CIEP 2.1: In this lesson, teacher candidates act as adult learners and experience the same reading, writing, and oral language activities that they will implement in their future classrooms with their own classes of elementary students.** Teacher candidates demonstrate a high level of competence in the use of English language arts and they know, understand, and use concepts from reading, language and child and human development, to teach reading, writing, speaking, viewing, listening, and thinking skills and to help students successfully apply their developing skills to many different situations, materials, and ideas.

**Language Objectives:**

The language that teacher candidates will be expected to utilize when illustrating their understanding includes the academic language of children's literature with multicultural

considerations, and the words related to advocacy for all of their future students to see themselves in books and classroom materials.

**Key Vocabulary in the Lesson and Upcoming Lessons:** instructional opportunities, bias, developmentally and emotionally appropriate, diverse perspectives, ethics, professional dispositions.

**Lesson Considerations CIEP Standard 2 Curriculum, 3 Instruction ACTS 2a, Learning Differences. 3I Learning Environments., 4b Content Knowledge**

**Materials:** Excerpts from African American researchers and writers, Anchor charts, Chromebooks, clipboards, easels, chart tablets, markers.

**Misconceptions:** Common misconceptions regarding the topics addressed in this lesson are:

- the way materials are chosen and distributed in classrooms are not the teachers' responsibilities.
- children and families do not care about books enough for teachers to develop appropriate classroom libraries to engage students in independent reading.

The learning theory guiding the lesson is Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and his explanation of the use of language to think and to process information and remember.<sup>1</sup> The lesson's integration of Chromebook technology<sup>2</sup> into the teacher candidates' written responses to the lesson's content enables the collection of written reflections as data to be studied by the Lesson Study participants.

**Lesson Plan Details**

**Lesson Introduction -Before: Setting the stage**

The prior knowledge teacher candidates will need to use and build upon to be successful in this lesson include their own experiences as readers, their knowledge of matching readers and their communities to books in the classroom to create classroom library environments with books that support student differences and encourage learners to understand, question, and analyze ideas from diverse perspectives so that they master content.

- The purpose of this lesson and upcoming lessons is for teacher candidates to commit to building the social, emotional, and intellectual growth of learners/teacher candidates through the ethical and the unbiased selection of books and materials that mirror the children in their class as well as supporting the diversity of the class in numerous ways. ACTS 2a
- This beginning lesson is designed to pique interest and/or curiosity by posing this statement: *Teachers' Selection of Literature for Classroom Libraries: Does This Involve Ethics? What do African American researchers and writers say?* and then choosing one of four African American scholars views on the topic of the ethics of representation of all children in the classroom library book selections. Using excerpts from Rudine Sims Bishop, Alfred Tatum, Jacqueline Woodson, and Denene Millner, teacher candidates seek the answer to ethics in selecting children's books.

<sup>1</sup> Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Rothenberg, C. (2008). *Content-Area Conversations: How to Plan Discussion-Based Lessons for Diverse Language Learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

<sup>2</sup> Weise M. R., Hanson, A. R., Sentz, R., & Saleh, Y. (2019). *Robot-ready: Human+ skills for the future of work*. Washington DC: Strada Institute for the Future of Work, Strada Education Network, p. 5.

Retrieved from: <https://www.economicmodeling.com/robot-ready-reports/>

- The plan allows the instructor to activate and build on teacher candidates prior knowledge and experiences related to the topic by sharing teacher candidates' early ELE 312 classroom writings and their selection of books for their author studies. The instructor introduces and explains this strategy/skill so that teacher candidates will understand the how and why through classroom experiences with many books, and finally by designing a model of a classroom library in the Talladega College Children's Book Room in Savery Library.

**Learning Activities - "During":**

Active engagement in meaning making around African American researchers and writers includes teacher candidates reading excerpts, talking about the excerpts, and connecting the excerpts to the inquiry question: Teachers' Selection of Literature for Classroom Libraries: Does This Involve Ethics? What do African American researchers and writers say? Ethics are moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity.

- The teacher candidates work with their groups to create an environment to support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation using the Four Corners<sup>3</sup> (Appendix A) of African American Researchers who are Rudine Sims Bishop<sup>4</sup>, Alfred Tatum<sup>5</sup>, Jacqueline Woodson<sup>6</sup>, and Denene Milner<sup>7</sup>. (Appendix B)
- Supports for the whole class, individuals, and/or teacher candidates with specific learning needs include group work, posters to provide visual access as well as media and video to increase engagement.

**Closure - "After":** Restating the teaching point of Teachers' Selection of Literature for Classroom Libraries: Does This Involve Ethics? What do African American researchers and writers say? Teacher candidates clarify key points, extend ideas, check for understanding among their group as they create anchor charts and quick writes to hold their learning and prepare for further conversation.

Teacher candidates share or show what they have learned in this lesson at their four corners as they build an anchor chart of the key points from their learning.

The teaching point is restated, and discussion of the key concepts drawn from the teacher candidates' anchor charts are presented by the teacher candidates.

Using Chromebook laptop computers, teacher candidates *immediately* engage in a quick write reflection to answer: What is your take-away from today? The question for the instructor is- did this lesson support teacher candidates to commit to building the social,

<sup>3</sup> Reninger, K. B., & Wilkinson, I. A. G. (2010). Using discussion to promote striving readers' higher level comprehension of literary texts. In J. L. Collins and T. G. Gunning (Eds.), *Building struggling students' higher level literacy: Practical ideas, powerful solutions* (pp. 57-83). Newark, DE: International Reading Association. ([Available here as a PDF file](#))

<sup>4</sup> Chenoweth, R. (2019). Rudine Sims Bishop: 'Mother' of multicultural children's literature. Ohio State Education and Human Ecology. Retrieved at: <https://ehe.osu.edu/news/listing/rudine-sims-bishop-diverse-childrens-books/>

<sup>5</sup> Tatum, A. (2008). *Enabling Texts: Texts That Matter*. Retrieved from: [http://www.missionliteracy.com/uploads/3/4/4/5/34456187/enabling\\_texts\\_edge\\_te\\_am2a\\_fwo.pdf](http://www.missionliteracy.com/uploads/3/4/4/5/34456187/enabling_texts_edge_te_am2a_fwo.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Woodson, J. (2019). *Continue to Rise*. In Glory Edim (Ed.), *Well-Read Black Girl: Finding Our Stories, Discovering Ourselves*, (pp. 185-191). Trapeze: London, UK.

<sup>7</sup> Millner, D. (2018). *Black Kids Don't Want to Read About Harriet Tubman All the Time*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/children-literature-books-blacks.html>.

emotional, and intellectual growth of learners through the ethical and the unbiased selection of books and materials that mirror the children in their future classes as well as supporting the diversity of their future classes in numerous ways?

**Assessment:** Assessment promotes continuous intellectual, social, and emotional development of teacher candidates and increases their professional dispositions.

**Evidence and Formative Assessment of Student Learning:** The instructor will know whether teacher candidates are making progress toward the learning goal of **engaging in active learning of the Four Corners Activity and their use of** reading, writing, speaking, viewing, listening, and thinking skills as adult learners to explore the topic of the ethics involved in choosing materials and books that mirror the children that they teach. The instructor will assess the extent to which they have met the goal by their ability to present their response to the class.

I am looking for:

- Citing of **specific quotes** from the researchers' articles. Using **annotation of the excerpt texts** to glean meaning and the answer to Teachers' Selection of Literature for Classroom Libraries: Does This Involve Ethics? What do African American researchers and writers say? In this context, ethics means moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity.
- Active engagement in meaning making around African American researchers and writers includes teacher candidates reading excerpts, talking about the excerpts, and connecting the excerpts to the inquiry question. Amount of talk is measured by decibel analysis<sup>8</sup>, a recorded measure of sound during the lesson that measures more sound as an indicator of active learning.
- Synthesis and oral presentation of evidence that is found in the excerpts in the four corners excerpts supports or refutes that ethics is a part of children's literature selection. Careful observation and evidence gathering by lesson study participants to determine the use of academic language is necessary.
- Quick writes<sup>9</sup> of *take aways* from the lesson provides written reflections on the excerpts and evidence of teacher candidates' use of academic language.

**Assessment Strategy #1:** Evaluation of anchor charts to discern the use of teacher candidates' academic language to respond to this question: Teachers' Selection of Literature for Classroom Libraries: Does This Involve Ethics? What do African American researchers and writers say?

**Alignment with Objectives:** This assessment is aligned to active engagement in meaning making by annotation of the excerpt charts and the design of the anchor charts. Synthesis and oral presentation of evidence appears on the anchor charts as teacher candidates become active and highly engaged with the concept and each other. The active engagement objective(s) is being assessed through the amount of talk and decibel analysis using recordings from each of the four tables as well as lesson study participants' notes.

<sup>8</sup> Decibel Analysis for Research in Teaching: DART. (2016-2018). *What can DART do?* San Francisco State University. Retrieved from: <https://sepaldart.herokuapp.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Content area strategies at work* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

	<p><b>Evidence of Student Understanding:</b>  <i>The scrutiny of anchor charts for academic language that teacher candidates use when illustrating their understanding is evidence. This includes the academic language of children’s literature with multicultural considerations, and the words related to advocacy and ethics for all students to see themselves in books.</i></p>
	<p><b>Student Feedback:</b>  Feedback to teacher candidates on this assessment will be provided on notes on the anchor charts and from observation notes gathered by Lesson Study participants.</p>
<p><b>Assessment Strategy #2:</b> Teacher candidates annotate the excerpt charts in the four corners that provide academic language and supports for the quick writes or the take aways from the lesson.  The instructor looks carefully at the annotations on the excerpt charts and determines the use and quantity/quality of the annotations from the charts. As teacher candidates seek to use academic language in the quick writes, the teacher candidates are able to answer: <b>Teachers’ Selection of Literature for Classroom Libraries: Does This Involve Ethics? What do African American researchers and writers say?</b></p>	<p><b>Alignment with Objectives:</b>  <i>This assessment is aligned to the amount of anchor chart annotations and the use of the excerpts from anchor charts to build the teacher candidates’ quick writes in the final reflections.</i></p>
	<p><b>Evidence of Student Understanding:</b>  <i>This assessment strategy provides evidence of student understanding of the concepts being taught in the annotations that are placed on the charts.</i>  <b>Student Feedback:</b> Student feedback on the quick writes provides guidance for increasing the depth and amount of writing. Feedback will be provided on the teacher candidates’ quick writes in a written note to the teacher candidates.</p>
<p><b>Assessment Strategy #3:</b> Using looking at student work<sup>10</sup> (LASW) protocols (Appendix C), examination of quick writes shows teacher candidates’ knowledge in this beginning phase of answering the question: <b>Teachers’ Selection of Literature for Classroom Libraries: Does This Involve Ethics? What do African American researchers and writers say?</b></p>	<p><b>Alignment with Objectives: This assessment is aligned with this objective:</b> Teacher candidates demonstrate a high level of competence in the use of English language arts and they know, understand, and use concepts from reading, language and child and human development, to teach reading, writing, speaking, viewing, listening, and thinking skills and to help students successfully apply their developing skills to many different situations, materials, and ideas.</p>

<sup>10</sup> O’Shea, M. (2005). *From Standards to Success: A Guide for School Leaders*. Alexandria, VA.: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

	<p><b>Evidence of Student Understanding:</b> Teacher candidates use of academic language and specific quotes from the African American researchers and writers' excerpts in their quick writes indicates beginning understanding of the inquiry question.</p> <p><b>Student Feedback:</b> Comments on stickie notes for teacher candidates to use as feedback.</p>
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**Utilizing Knowledge about Teacher Candidates to Plan and Implement Effective Instruction**

**Building on Personal/Cultural/Community Assets:** Teacher candidate's prior academic learning and personal/cultural/community assets support the connection to new learning regarding the **ethics** of choosing children's literature for classroom libraries. Assets in the community include the culture of the class, the Education Department, and the professors who guide the Talladega College Education Department. Teacher candidates are highly engaged in the Education Department lessons and the activities of the Education Department and they value each other, the college and the Department. The esprit de corps of the group demonstrates that classroom community can be built at the college level. This is a primary tool for retention of teacher candidates.

**Grouping Strategies:** Teacher candidates will select one of four corners that interests them the most. Grouping is self-selection based on interest. The choice of short readings from African American researchers and writers is determined by teacher candidates.

**Planned Supports:** The instructional supports during the lesson that address diverse learning needs in order for all teacher candidates to successfully meet lesson objectives include charts of excerpts from researchers and writers, creation of anchor charts to hold meaning of the excerpts, and conversations in the four corners where teacher candidates determine importance in the excerpts and chart their findings using academic language.

**Supporting Literacy Development**

**Essential Literacy Strategies:** Teacher candidates are making progress toward the learning goal of engaging in active discussions of the Four Corners Activity and their use of reading, writing, speaking, viewing, listening, and thinking skills as adult learners as they explore the topic of the **ethics** involved in choosing materials and books that mirror the children that they teach in their elementary classrooms. *A strategy used to help teacher candidates comprehend is the conversation and the building of an anchor chart to hold the meaning of the excerpts.* Teacher candidates *compose text or a quick write within this lesson.* Requisite Skills are the ability to interact in groups and to have fun with each other as a community of learners.

**Supporting Literacy Development through Language**

**Identify a Language Function:**  
**One** language function essential for teacher candidates to learn the literacy strategy within the central focus is to **analyze** the excerpt that they chose and support or refute the connections to the ethics question cited throughout this lesson.

**Language Supports: CIEP 3.1 ACTS 1 g**  
 The instructional supports during and prior to the lesson task that helps teacher candidates understand and successfully use the language function of analysis of the excerpts, vocabulary, and discourse demands are a repetition of active learning strategies used previously and previous reading from the textbook.

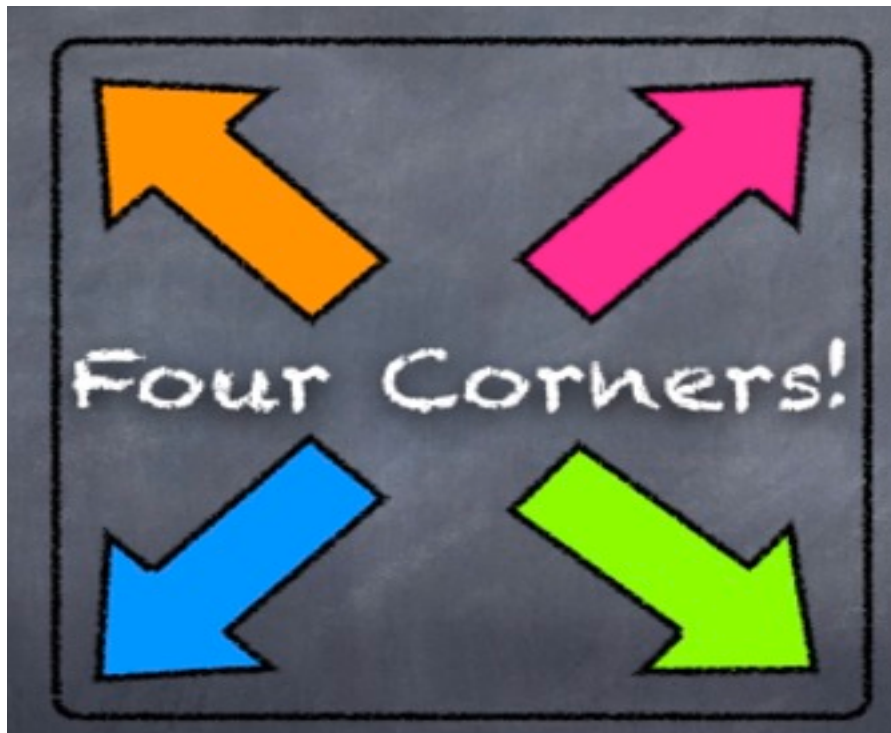
**Acknowledge Sources: See footnotes.**

APPENDIX A  
Four Corners

**FOUR CORNERS**

Four Corners engages people in a semi-structured dialogue around a set of statements intended to provoke critical thinking and sharing. By doing so, participants have the chance to reflect on and articulate their own viewpoints. It also provides a structure for participants to learn, through dialogue, about viewpoints that may differ from their own. This activity fosters communication, listening, and leadership skills. By using statements that are designed to be intentionally ambiguous and effective at dividing the group by different perspectives, this activity helps participants to dialogue. This workshop can work well for a variety of settings and purposes, most often to focus on issues of cultural background, political viewpoint, values, race, class, gender, religion, and other issues. It promotes active listening and articulate community building skills.

This is an excellent activity for use in meetings of formed or forming coalitions, in order to introduce dialogue related to important issues.



**INQUIRY: Which corner resonates with you the most? Why? How are you going to use Four Corners to answer the questions: Teachers' Selection of Literature for Classroom Libraries: Does This Involve Ethics? What do African American researchers and writers say?**

## APPENDIX B

Four Corners excerpts from African American Researchers and Writers  
These excerpts will be handouts at the Lesson Study.

Chenoweth, R. (2019). Rudine Sims Bishop: 'Mother' of multicultural children's literature. Ohio State Education and Human Ecology. Retrieved at: <https://ehe.osu.edu/news/listing/rudine-sims-bishop-diverse-childrens-books/>

<sup>1</sup> Tatum, A. (2008). Enabling Texts: Texts That Matter. Retrieved from: [http://www.missionliteracy.com/uploads/3/4/4/5/34456187/enabling\\_texts\\_edge\\_te\\_am2a\\_fwo.pdf](http://www.missionliteracy.com/uploads/3/4/4/5/34456187/enabling_texts_edge_te_am2a_fwo.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> Woodson, J. (2019). Continue to Rise. In Glory Edim (Ed.), *Well-Read Black Girl: Finding Our Stories, Discovering Ourselves*, (pp. 185-191). London, UK: Trapeze.

<sup>1</sup> Millner, D. (2018). Black Kids Don't Want to Read About Harriet Tubman All the Time. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/children-literature-books-blacks.html>.



## Appendix C Looking at Student Work

# National School Reform Faculty Learning from Student Work An Overview

*Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.*

*“To be a teacher in the right sense is to be a learner. Instruction begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner, put yourself in his place so that you may understand what he understands and in the way he understands it.” — Soren Kierkegaard*

### **Principles of Looking at Student Work**

- Students’ work in schools is serious
- Students’ work is key data about the life of the school
- Must be connected to serious changes in curriculum, instruction and professional development

### **Purposes of Looking at Student Work**

- Professional Development
- Accountability (determining effectiveness of curriculum and instruction) • Setting standards
- Reflecting on student learning and development

### **Protocols What?**

- Guidelines for conversation
- Vehicle for building collaborative work

### **Why?**

- Creates a structured environment for: speaking, listening, questioning • Makes the most of limited time
- Promotes deep, meaningful conversation about teaching and learning

### **How?**

- Incorporate into your study group meetings/grade level meetings/staff meetings
- Connect it to crucial teaching and learning issues in your study group/grade level/school • Practice it regularly

### **Results**

Teachers who present work typically find:

- Some of their own impressions about student work are confirmed
- They are likely to gain new insights into the thinking of their students • The strengths and weaknesses of their assignments

### **Other teachers who participate**

- Develop a sense of the kind and quality of the work going on inside their school • Learn about students they will teach in future years
- See how students they taught in previous years have developed
- Gain new ideas for their own classrooms Begin to develop a shared understanding of standards in different domains and the steps students go through to meet them Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community such as a Critical Friends Group® and facilitated by a skilled coach.

# National School Reform Faculty

## Looking at Student Work Team Report



*Developed by Ruth Mitchell, The Education Trust.*

Team Date:

Who was present?

We looked at these pieces of work:

We used these standards:

What we discovered about the quality of student LEARNING:

What we discovered about the quality of INSTRUCTION:

What are the implications for change in the CLASSROOM and SCHOOL?

What is our action plan to make these changes?

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community such as a Critical Friends Group® and facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty website at [www.nsrffharmony.org](http://www.nsrffharmony.org).



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# Rudine Sims Bishop: 'Mother' of multicultural children's literature

**BY** ROBIN CHENOWETH  
September 05, 2019



Professor Emerita Rudine Sims Bishop in her home's library, a short distance from the Columbus Campus.

# The legacy of a scholar, and what the esteemed professor emerita thinks of children's books today

A short stroll from The Ohio State University's Columbus campus, a stately Victorian house serves as a keeper of treasures.

A stunning collection by African American children's book illustrators lines the walls.



Floor-to-ceiling shelves hold volumes about famous painters, the black American experience; books written by Alice Walker, Ismael Reed and Henry Louis Gates. And then there is all the children's literature.

When she was teaching at the College of Education and Human Ecology, from 1986 to 2002, Rudine Sims Bishop could have walked to campus from her house. But she always had so many books to carry.

"I read them to my graduate students," she said. "Picture books. The whole thing in one sitting."

Cynthia Tyson, '91 MA, '97 PhD, was one of those students. Now an Ohio State professor of [multicultural and equity studies in education \(https://ehe.osu.edu/teaching-and-learning/academics/multicultural-and-equity-studies-education/\)](https://ehe.osu.edu/teaching-and-learning/academics/multicultural-and-equity-studies-education/), she says people gasp when she tells them Bishop was her advisor. They want to know what it was like.

"It is like sitting and learning at the feet of an angel," she tells them. "She is for me the epitome of what it means to think and question and learn with the mind, body and spirit."

Soft-spoken, erudite and unassuming, Bishop has somewhat of a cult following among educators, researchers and graduate students.

"We call her the mother of multicultural literature," said Ruth Lowery, interim chair of the Department of Teaching of Learning. "If you're my doctoral student, you have got to read (Bishop's) *Shadow and Substance* to understand where multicultural literature came from."

Her scholarship focused on the need for black children to see themselves in the books they read. It brought her and the university international acclaim, and made Rudine Sims Bishop a treasure in her own right.



Bishop with her husband, James Bishop, among their art collection in their home.

## Lifting as she climbed

The professor emerita gives visitors to her home a lesson in black American art. Her voice just above a whisper, she says the fanciful piece in the library was a gift from Columbus artist Aminah Robinson. Throughout the house, works by Jerry and Brian Pinkney, Tom Feelings, Floyd Cooper and James Ransome — to name a few — tell stories from inside their frames. Bishop translates them all.

The tours have been ongoing for years. In the 1990s, Bishop, her husband James and colleague Janet Hickman hosted renowned authors and artists as part the college's children's literature conferences. And they entertained celebrated illustrators — their friends — when they came to town. Always looking for opportunities for her graduate students, Bishop invited them, too, and told them to mingle, "just like we were guests," Tyson said. "That's the kind of mentor she was and continues to be — lifting as she climbed truly is a large part of her legacy."

Tyson met Tom Feelings, author and illustrator of *The Middle Passage*, at a small gathering. "I thought I was going to pass out," she said. "I couldn't even put two words together to make a sentence."

Black artists' work is an integral part of the scholarship Bishop introduced 40 years ago. Books like theirs were in short supply when she was growing up in the anthracite coal country of Pottersville, Pennsylvania. "I spent a lot of time in the public library when I was a child," she says. "I didn't find myself in those books."

As a young researcher at Wayne State University in the late 1970s, she began looking at representation of African Americans in children's literature.

"I got every realistic fiction book that I could lay my hands on," she said. "It turned out there were about 150 books" featuring black children. "I read them."

*Shadow and Substance* ([https://openlibrary.org/books/OL3486933M/Shadow\\_and\\_substance](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL3486933M/Shadow_and_substance)) established a framework for analyzing literature about people of color; it remains a standard in the field.

Some of the books she studied, by white authors for white children, portrayed black people as exotic or "different." Others ignored cultural differences and connoted sameness. "You wouldn't know the characters were black unless you saw the pictures," she said.

Roughly a third of the books she examined — about 50 out of several thousand children's book titles at the time — were what Bishop calls culturally conscious.

These were rich in cultural memes, language and familiarity with true African American identity. The passages and illustrations reflect what children of color see in their everyday lives, and thus validate their experiences. Most were written and illustrated by African Americans. The art hanging in Bishop's home is a nod to them.

Mirrors, windows and sliding doors



## A reflection of who we are

At Ohio State in the 1990s, Bishop famously promoted literature as a tool of self-affirmation for all children.

“Books,” she wrote, “are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange.”

“These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author.”

But if the light is right, the window becomes a mirror.

“Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience.”

The metaphor continues to be cited in academic journals, textbooks, conference presentations and university classrooms. It's the subject of TEDx talks and blogs. Teachers the world over stock classroom bookshelves based on its insights.

“Her words, so subtle yet powerful, became a rallying cry of sorts among academics, librarians, critics, scholars, and reviewers who advocated for the inclusion of ‘multicultural literature,’” wrote Violet J. Harris in *Language Arts*.

She was inducted into the Reading Hall of Fame and received the International Reading Association's Arbuthnot Award. In 2017, she received the [Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement \(https://ehe.osu.edu/news/listing/bishop-receives-lifetime-achievement-award/\)](https://ehe.osu.edu/news/listing/bishop-receives-lifetime-achievement-award/).

As chair of the Coretta Scott King committee that awards prizes to black authors, and on selection committees for Newbery Book Medals and Caldecott Medals, Bishop has had manifold books cross her doorstep.

In them, she looks for the seeds of self-reflection her scholarship calls for. “It's the issue of authenticity,” she said. “You feel it. You recognize it. It mirrors something in your own experience or life.”

All children need that, she said.

Page by page, she lately has found something she rarely saw when she began her studies: stories that represent a variety of cultures, faiths, families and perspectives.

**Dr. Alfred W. Tatum** began his career as an eighth-grade teacher, later becoming a reading specialist and discovering the power of texts to reshape the life outcomes of struggling readers. His current research focuses on the literacy development of African American adolescent males (*Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap*, 2005, and "Building the Textual Lineages of African American Male Adolescents," 2007), and he provides teacher professional development to urban middle and high schools. In this first article, Dr. Tatum draws upon his qualitative research with high school students to make the case for using diverse and challenging texts that matter to students, such as the texts included in *Edge*. In his second article starting on page 61, Dr. Tatum draws on his professional development work with teachers to recommend assessment strategies to more effectively develop students' reading abilities.



## Enabling Texts: Texts That Matter *by Dr. Alfred W. Tatum*

**WHILE VISITING A BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOL,** I asked more than 120 teenagers to construct their textual lineages, that is, a visual representation of texts that have found to be significant in their lives. On average, the students identified two texts that held significance throughout their entire, albeit young, teenage lives. The reasons the text held significance converge on three major themes: **personal connection, empathy, and identity shaping.** The following comments provided by the students illustrated the three themes:

I love *The Skin I'm In* (Flake, 1998) because it's something that has to do with me and the girls in that book act like me.

The book, *Forged by Fire* (Draper, 1998), is a book that all young black males can relate to of how your life can go from negative to positive.

Just like any other book, *Tears of Tiger* (Draper, 1994), got me reading more and got me crying.

I like a *Child Called "It"* (Pelzer, 1995) because I learned that my life is not so bad compared to other people, especially David's.

The poem, "Our Deepest Fear" (Williamson, 1992) had me rethinking myself because I fear a lot.

I like the poem "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou (1995) because it reflects the pride of women and how they don't care what others think about the way they look.

Sadly, however, more than 30% of the adolescents did not identify a single text they found significant. Several of the students explained they did not believe they were encountering challenging, meaningful texts. One student shared, "It ain't going down. I don't see how just reading is going to help me,

I need something more academic." Another student offered, "We need to learn harder vocabulary. [The vocabulary] is the same we learned in elementary school." The students were complaining about the text because "teachers [were giving] books that were boring and when the class [didn't] want to read, [the teachers] [got] aggravated."

The students ascribed the absence of meaningful texts in their lives to teachers' refusal to acknowledge their day-to-day realities couched in their adolescent, cultural, and gender identities. A young man offered that "I need to read interesting topics like teen drama, violence, something you can relate your life or other people's lives to." A young woman commented, "They give us different books than we would read; the books are boring."

Summing up the sentiments that many of the adolescents held towards texts disconnected from one or several of their identities, a student shared, "I read them, but I do not care what they say." This reflects a stark contrast to the students who found value and direction in the text, as reflected this young woman's comment, "*The Skin I'm In* reminds me of real life in school. A girl so black in school, and she wanted to kill herself. If I was in her school, I would be her friend. Even the teacher hated her."

High school students need and benefit from a wide range of texts that challenge them to contextualize and examine their in-school and out-of-school lives. I agree with Apple (1990) who argues that ignoring text that dominates school curricula as being simply not worthy of serious attention and serious struggle is to live in a world divorced from reality. He asserts that texts need to be situated in the larger social movements of which they are a part.

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*Instead of trying to score with reading, schools have focused on increasing reading scores.*

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Unfortunately, many high school students who struggle with reading are encountering texts that are characteristically *disabling*. A disabling text reinforces a student’s perception of being a struggling reader. A disabling text also ignores students’ local contexts and their desire as adolescents for self-definition. Disabling texts do not move in the direction of closing the reading achievement gap in a class-based, language-based, and race-based society in which many adolescents are underserved by low-quality literacy instruction.

It is important to note that meaningful texts, although important, are not sufficient to improve literacy instruction for adolescents. High school students who struggle with reading and lack the skills and strategies to handle text independently need support to become engaged with the text.

## Powerful Instruction

One of the most powerful techniques is to *use the text to teach the text*. This is a productive approach to help struggling readers become engaged. It simply means that the teacher presents a short excerpt of the upcoming reading selection—before reading—and then models skills or strategies with that text. For example, if the instructional goal is to have students understand how an author uses characterization, the teacher could use an excerpt of the text to introduce the concept. (See Figure 1.)

There are several pedagogical and student benefits associated with using the text to teach the text, namely nurturing fluency and building background knowledge. Because students

are asked to examine an excerpt of a text they will see again later as they read independently, rereading has been embedded. Rereadings are effective for nurturing fluency for students who struggle with decoding and for English language learners. Secondly, the students are introduced to aspects of Langston Hughes; writing that will potentially shape their reading of the text. Having background knowledge improves reading comprehension. Using the text to teach the text provides a strategic advantage for struggling readers while allowing teachers to introduce the text and strategies together. It is a win-win situation for both teacher and student.

## Conclusion


It is difficult for many teachers to engage struggling adolescent readers with text. I hear the common refrain, “These kids just don’t want to read.” There are several reasons adolescents refuse to read. Primary among them are a lack of interest in the texts and a lack of requisite skills and strategies for handling the text independently.

It is imperative to identify and engage students with texts that pay attention to their multiple identities. It is equally imperative to grant them entry into the texts by providing explicit skill and strategy instruction. The texts should be as diverse as the students being taught. The texts should also challenge students to wrestle with questions they find significant. This combination optimizes shaping students’ literacies along with shaping their lives, an optimization that informs *Edge*. ❖

Figure 1

**BEFORE READING** Thank You, M’am  
short story by Langston Hughes

**Characterization**  
When you read a good story, you feel as if you know the characters. That’s because authors use **characterization** to reveal, or show, what a character is like.



**Look Into the Text**

Hughes describes the woman's physical traits.

Hughes uses actions to show what she is like.

She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but a hammer and nails. It had a long strap, and she carried it slung across her shoulder. It was about eleven o'clock at night, dark, and she was walking alone, when a boy ran up behind her and tried to snatch her purse. The strap broke with the sudden single tug the boy gave it from behind. But the boy's weight and the weight of the purse combined cause him to lose his balance. Instead of taking off full blast as he had hoped, the boy fell on his back on the sidewalk, and his legs flew up.

The large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned sitter. Then she reached down, picked the boy up by his shirt front, and shook him until his teeth rattled.

How does Hughes show the impact of her action on the boy?

An example of using the text to teach the text before reading – a powerful instructional technique.



Video: <https://www.jacquelinewoodson.com/>

Jacqueline Woodson  
Continue to Rise

When I was six or seven years old, I came across a book called *Little Match Girl*. It was about a girl who was really poor, and she was trying to sell matches to make some money to buy food and clothing. In my head, our lives were similar even though I'd never been that poor. But my mom was a single mom, and we struggled financially. Still, even though I came from this underserved family, there was a sense that my life was not as bad as the life of the *Little Match Girl*. The devastation of her life was heartbreaking and I had this deep empathy for her. My teacher had first read the book to us in class, but I wasn't satisfied with the narrative.

I wanted to change the world that girl had to live in—see if I could dream up a new ending so it would be different for her this time. My siblings and I went to the library after school every day. My mom worked full time and the library was our “after school program.” We waited there five days a week until 5:45 when my mom picked us up. So every day I would go to the library, find that book, and reread it. I just wanted to see if I could get the *Little Match Girl* back to a happily ever after. After all, when that story entered my life, most of the other books I read ended with everything being all right. I used to make up stories all the time as a kid and read them to my best friends, Maria and Diana—both of whom I'm still very close to. “You know, you're really good,” they'd say. “You should definitely be a writer.” My mom, on the other hand, didn't want me to be a writer. She often told me that it was not a lucrative career.

My mom had come through the Jim Crow South and then through the Great Migration. What she wanted most for us were economic and academic safety nets. To her, a freelance career couldn't possibly offer the former. She wanted me to be a reader, though, and she pushed me hard to read. Even though I read slower than anyone I knew and had to read sentences again and again sometimes before I finally got to meaning, I slowly plowed through Toni Morrison and Mildred Taylor and Carson McCullers and Eloise Greenfield. These women writers showed me how to be a human and not losing sight of that. And so, regardless of what my mother said, I wasn't really trying to listen to her about not becoming a writer. When I got to high school I started writing for my school's literary journal, and by the time I was in my junior year I became the editor.

Then, in college, I majored in English and took a lot of creative writing classes. During one summer, I took a children's writing workshop at the New School, and I found out it was the same one that all these writers I had read as a young person had gone through. People like E. L. Konigsburg and Judy Blume—this was the place they went to write and workshop their work, and to listen to new writers. I had started writing *Last Summer with Maizon* in college, and we dissected the manuscript in that workshop. There was an editor in the class from Bantam Doubleday Dell who pulled me aside one day and said, "I want to buy that book." I can't even explain the amount of excitement I felt when she said those words. I was thrilled. It was surreal. But at the same time, I had never doubted that this day would come. I had first seen my name in print in fifth grade when a poem I wrote won a contest. Then in middle school, in poems that were mimeographed. Then in high school and college in the schools' journals and literary magazines. I had published stories in other journals while still in college. Publishing my book felt like the obvious next step. And I think that eagle-eyed gaze on the prize (or maybe a deep stubbornness) was extremely helpful in my early days. It kept coming back to joy—how could I live a life filled with it? And always, the answer that came back to me was "Write." So, before I was even out of school my first book was sold. It took a long time for it to get published—endless revisions, a change in editors—but by then I was already on my trajectory. I knew this was what I was going to do. From that point on, even though in the beginning I had other jobs to pay the rent or buy clothes or feed myself, everything I did went toward writing. I had a job to be able to write at night. I was able to put a roof over my head so that I could have a place to write. Being a writer became the endgame. When I was writing as a young person, I was writing for who I was as a child. I remember, so many times growing up, asking myself: "Wait a second. Why is everything black bad and everything white good?" Why did my brother come home with stories from camp about how messed up it was that getting a black card when you did something wrong was the worst kind of punishment?

Why did I watch *The Brady Bunch* and *The Partridge Family* and not see any Black kids on it? Where were we? Something was messed up about are growing up with a sense of who people are in a different way than when I grew up. But at the same time, they still have a sense that there's some stuff that's not right in this world, that they themselves have work to do. So much depends on us remembering our past. We live in a country that likes to forget—likes to forget who was here before us, likes to forget who built the country, likes to forget who this country was stolen from. And so, for me as a writer, it's important to know that I'm standing on the shoulders of the writers that came before me, the queer folks who

died before me, my friends who passed away because of HIV, cancer, lack of access to decent healthcare. I am here because of the indigenous people of this country, because of the enslaved people who were here before me, the young people of the civil rights movements who fought hard to get me to this moment.

My biggest responsibility is to recognize that I am part of a continuum, that I didn't just appear and start writing stuff down. I'm writing stuff down because Audre Lorde wrote stuff down, because James Baldwin wrote stuff down. Because Toni Morrison and Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen and Virginia Hamilton—and all of the other people who came before me—set the stage for my work. I have to keep all of that in my heart as I move through the world, not only for the deep respect I have for them, but also for my own strength. So, my advice to other young writers: Read widely. Study other writers. Be thoughtful. Then go out and do the work of changing the form, finding your own voice, and saying what you need to say. Be fearless. And care. The fact that the young people continue to rise brings me so much joy. They are where I look to find my hope. Every day that I sit down to write, I think: "I'm just here to give them a couple of tools to negotiate the future. But other than that—they got this! They're good."



## OPINION

# Black Kids Don't Want to Read About Harriet Tubman All the Time

By Denene Millner

March 10, 2018

Atlanta — I'm pretty sure I hadn't even wiped the sonogram goop off my belly before I rushed off to pick out dresses and books for my unborn child. I was on a mission: My daughter was going to need all the pink dresses and all the books with brown babies.

Finding adorable dresses was easy. Finding children's literature with pictures of children of color was not.

Books with white children and, like, ducks, were de rigueur, which I guess was fine for parents who were having white babies or ducks. But this was not going to work for my brown baby, who would spend a lifetime looking for her image in a pop cultural landscape that all but ignored children who looked like her. I wanted — needed — her to see her beautiful brown self reflected in the music and stories I hoped to feed to her as consistently as food. In my house, she would be visible.

Eventually, a friend helped me track down Ezra Jack Keats's "The Snowy Day," and the lovely " 'More More More,' Said the Baby." And my stepson gave his copy of Nikki Giovanni's "The Sun Is So Quiet" to his baby sister. I eventually discovered the treasure trove that is Just Us Books, and works by Andrea Davis Pinkney and Eloise Greenfield. Still, the pickings were slim.

That was 20 years ago. Now adding more color to the pages of children's books has become the talk of blog posts and book conferences, thanks to groups like We Need Diverse Books and people like Marley Dias, a voracious reader who, at age 11, started the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign. All that talking produced some results: Of the 3,500 children's books published in the United States last year, 319 featured black characters, according to the Cooperative Children's Book Center. That was a slight improvement from previous years. Still, only 116 of them were written or illustrated by black people.

There is another story to be told here — one that goes beyond the numbers and into the words. The "diverse" books making it to the shelves aren't very diverse at all. With few exceptions, the same stories are being told again and again, fed to children like some bowl of dry, lumpy oatmeal with just a sprinkle of brown sugar to make it go down a little easier.

The typical children's picture books featuring black characters focus on the degradation and endurance of our people. You can fill nearly half the bookshelves in the Schomburg with children's books about the civil rights movement, slavery, basketball players and musicians, and various "firsts." These stories consistently paint African-Americans as the aggrieved and the conquerors, the agitators and the superheroes who fought for their right to be recognized as full human beings.

Don't get me wrong, I appreciate those kinds of books; our history deserves an airing with all children. But I'm not trying to have my kid float off into dreamland with visions of helping runaway slaves to freedom, or marching through a parade of barking dogs and fire hoses, or the subject matter of Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" — yes, there is a children's book devoted to this song protesting lynching.

Meanwhile, stories about the everyday beauty of being a little human being of color are scarce. Regardless of what the publishing industry seems to think, our babies don't spend their days thinking about Harriet Tubman, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and black bodies swinging; they're excited about what the tooth fairy will leave under their pillows, contemplating their first ride on the school bus, looking for dragons in their closets.

They want to read books that engage with their everyday experiences, featuring characters who look like them. Just like any other child. White children, too, deserve — and need — to see black characters that revel in the same human experiences that they do.

Real diversity would celebrate the mundane — like a little kid going out after a snowstorm — rather than the exceptional.

One of my first books, "Early Sunday Morning," about a little girl overcoming her jitters as she prepares to sing her first choir solo, was roundly rejected by editors when I pitched it back in 2003. They just couldn't connect with the black-family-getting-ready-for-church ritual that starts on Saturday. They didn't get how black Baptist church communities devote themselves to nurturing children in ways beyond the Bible.

And I have to presume that they couldn't see past skin color to embrace the story's lesson: Pushing past fear is hard, but, with the help of family, you can learn to be courageous. It's a universal lesson for all little humans, no matter their race.

All this led me to create my own children's book imprint. We published "Early Sunday Morning" last year, and many of the black parents and children who are buying it now have told me they are grateful for the story.

I've been grateful for a number of recent books, including Vanessa Brantley-Newton's "Grandma's Purse," and Bunmi Laditan's "The Big Bed." Everyone can relate to the subjects here — the magical bond between children and grandparents, and a pushy kid's takeover of the parental bed. Color is of no consequence to the stories, but it still matters to black children looking for themselves in the pages.

The success of these books proves that parents, teachers, librarians and children are craving stories that celebrate the humanity and everyday experiences of black children and families. There is a demand — just look at the excitement around the new movies "Black Panther" and "A Wrinkle in Time," both starring black characters — even if some in the industry have struggled to recognize it.

Change is happening. This year, Jacqueline Woodson, whose stories about black life have racked up prestigious awards, was named the national ambassador for young people's literature. And several publishing houses have recently announced "diversity" imprints they insist will fill the void.

But if the same editors at the same publishing houses are pushing the same tales about Harriet Tubman, Dr. King, Muhammad Ali, and how black people "overcame," often written and illustrated by white writers and artists, well, they will have missed the opportunity to really nourish our children.

Let the kids eat.