



TEACHING THROUGH BOOKS

ANTI-RACISM

BY LILA ARMSTRONG, ANDREA LAPOINTE, AND REBECA RUBIO

LEARNING FOCUS

Anti-racism is the practice of actively identifying and opposing racism by challenging the systems, structures, policies, and practices that uphold the power of some and systematically deny it from others.

Identity: Which racial/ethnic group(s) do I belong to that shape who I am? How can I find and share my voice, lived experiences, and beliefs?

Skills: How do I respectfully engage in learning about all races and ethnicities? How can I challenge my thinking of what I now believe about people different from myself?

Intellectualism: How can reading stories from people of other races/ethnicities about their lived experiences help me develop my understanding of others and myself? How can I better understand why some voices are silenced and others are elevated?

Criticality: In what ways can I be part of making change happen to existing racist structures and systems?

Joy: How will taking pride in who I am contribute to anti-racism in my community? In what ways can I show my appreciation for others and their uniqueness?

THEME: Diversity
SUB-THEME: Anti-Racism
GRADE LEVELS:
Elementary (K-3)
Middle School (4-8)
High School (9-12)



ANTI-RACISM | ELEMENTARY LEVEL

BY LILA ARMSTRONG

FEATURED BOOK



French Toast by Kari-Lynn Winters, illustrated by François Thisdale (Pajama Press, 2016)

Also available in FR: *Pain-Doré* par Kari-Lynn Winters, illustré par François Thisdale (Éditions de l'Isatis, 2018)

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

MINDS ON PROVOCATION

To introduce the featured book, you are going to talk about food. Make a chart on the board with several sections (e.g. warm and cozy, celebration, sick days, hot weather, etc.). Ask students to share the foods that they have for special events, or when they want to feel cozy, etc. Add more sections if students have items that do not fit into the categories on the board.

Wrap up the activity by asking if anyone connects those foods to the person/people who make it for them. Share a special food of your own that makes you think of the person who makes it for you and add it in. Take a moment to appreciate aloud all of the different foods that make up the group share.

READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

Show students the cover of *French Toast*. Ask them to predict what the book is about. Start reading, but stop as soon as the class learns that others are making fun of the main character, Phoebe. Model your thinking aloud. Why would they be using food names to make fun of her? Is this ok? Ask students to name this behavior and define it. Take a few minutes to let many voices be heard.

Before reading the rest of the book, preface it with a conversation that might include these cues:





- “Now, we have discovered that this book is going to include parts about making fun of someone due to the colour of their skin. The author is trying to teach us about racism. Let’s take a moment to talk about racism. What does that word mean?” Tailor your discussion to the age and experience of your students.
- “When we read books about important issues like this, it’s also crucial to ask questions that get us thinking. Here’s one to start: How can reading stories about the lives of those who experience racism help us understand the world around us?” Allow some time for reflection and a few shares.

Reread the entire book without stopping. Once you have finished, ask students why they think that Phoebe used food to describe skin colours? Why did she choose french toast at the end when she had been mocked with that food name? What did her grandmother help her to understand?

MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

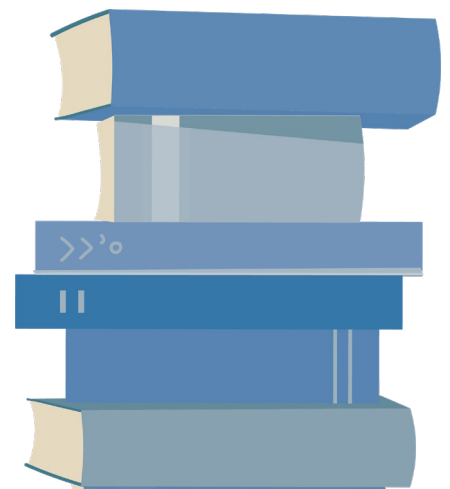
In this activity, students will be creating their own exact skin colour using paint. Students will need to mix paints and test the resulting colour against their skin (or beside). Students do not need to mix a lot of each colour, just enough to paint a piece of paper. They will be making their own paint chips. Depending on the paper you have available, a 5” x 7” or postcard size would be ideal. Once students have matched their skin tone as closely as possible, they will paint the paper.

Ask students to name the colour they’ve created after a special food they eat, or suggest that they come up with a unique name for it (i.e. does not have to relate to a food). Write the name of the colour on the paint chip, but choose a location (i.e. bottom right) that’s standard for all. Display the paint chips on a wall of the classroom to reflect the diverse colours of your students.

REFLECT AND CONNECT

Using the Learning Focus goal for joy as the anchor/centrepiece for your display, ask students: “How will taking pride in who I am contribute to anti-racism in my community? In what ways can I show my appreciation for others and their uniqueness?” Depending on your students, the goal could be simplified. For example: “How can I celebrate the uniqueness of those around me?”

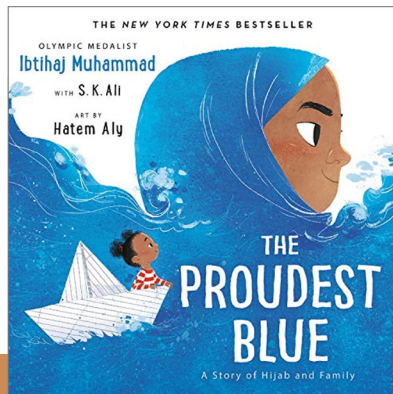
Ask students to think of words that describe the wall of colours. Write these words on slips of paper, or have students do it themselves. Post these words up on the wall alongside the colours (or mixed in, depending on your aesthetic). Celebrate the diversity of your class and ask students to take a few minutes to appreciate that every colour is special and has a different story.



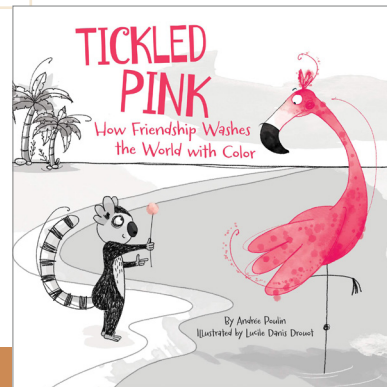


As an optional extension activity, ask students to consider this question: “How can I use my voice to be part of making change happen?” Students can then add an extra circle around the colour display with anti-racist statements or words that they can refer back to as an ongoing learning goal.

ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS TO SUPPORT THIS SUB-THEME



The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family by Ibtihaj Muhammad and S.K. Ali, illustrated by Hatem Aly (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2019)



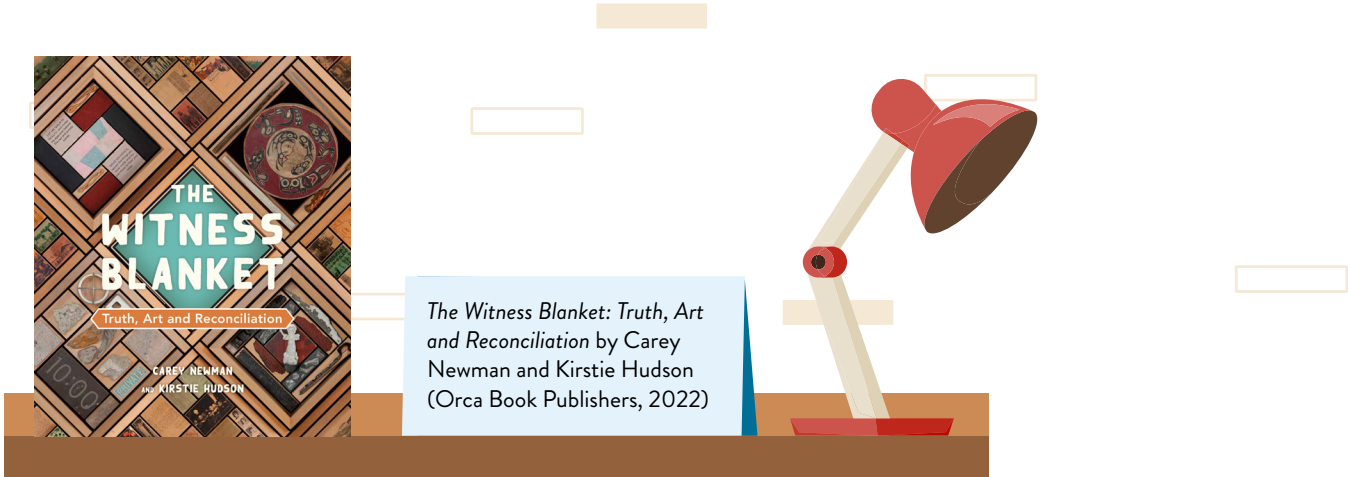
Tickled Pink: How Friendship Washes the World with Color by Andrée Poulin, illustrated by Lucile Danis Drouot (Pajama Press, 2020)
Also available in FR: *Ils ne veulent pas jouer avec moi !!!* par Andrée Poulin, illustré par Lucile Danis Drouot (Dominique et compagnie, 2019)



ANTI-RACISM | MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

BY ANDREA LAPOINTE

FEATURED BOOK



LEARNING EXPERIENCE

MINDS ON PROVOCATION

Explore the stories behind at least three artifacts through *The Witness Blanket's* [website](#). While doing so, engage in the thinking routine known as [The Explanation Game](#) for each artifact.

READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

1. Students will develop a print or digital journal for drawing/sketching.
2. One at a time, read chapters 1-9 of Carey Newman's *The Witness Blanket* aloud to your class. Save chapter 10 for later.
3. During reading, have your students draw/sketch what they are hearing, thinking, and feeling. Words, phrases, or quotes can be added. The goal is to provide students with the opportunity to build empathy for the experience Indigenous children had in residential schools.
4. After reading, ask: "How does hearing this part of the story of *The Witness Blanket* help you better understand Indigenous peoples and understand yourself?" Also have students write a one-sentence summary on their drawing/sketch. A one-sentence summary includes: who, how, what for, and, in this context, how you feel about it.





For example, learning that the yellow bowl tells the story of kids in residential school being fed sour, uncooked mush helps us understand why they would steal apples or bread crust to survive.

5. You may need to lead mini-lessons on writing one-sentence summaries, or on building emotional vocabulary.
6. Explain that the residential school system was one way the Canadian government colonized the country. Ask students what they know and what they wonder about colonization. Record their answers. Design lessons to build background knowledge where necessary. The goal is to help students understand that colonization established European settlers in a position of power over Indigenous peoples. Visit the [Indigenous Peoples](#) page on the Canadian Encyclopedia website for a starting resource.
7. To help your students understand power and privilege, engage them in one or more of the following activities:
 - In the gym, have students line up against one wall. Assign different physical abilities to the students (i.e. full physical ability, no use of one leg, no use of sight). Have them race to the other end of the gym. The winners will receive extra time at recess to play.
 - In a lesson where you use textbooks for learning, put students into different groups. In one group, each student has their own textbook. In another, two students share a textbook, another group will have five students sharing one textbook, and so on. As students finish their work, they get free time in the class.
 - For one day, all the students who have birthdays in January and February get to go first whenever an opportunity arises (line up, get lunch, etc.).
 - Engage in the [Waste-Paper Basket lesson](#).

After, host a circle discussion to unpack the activities and connect students' experiences to how various groups of people might feel as a result of being overpowered or underprivileged.

8. Using Sylvia Duckworth's [Wheel of Power and Privilege](#), have students consider pieces of their identity and position of power or privilege (or lack thereof). Have students write a reflection using these prompts:
 - "My position of power and privilege can be described as..."
 - "Knowing my position of power and privilege makes me feel..."
 - "Knowing that others have different levels of power and privileges makes me wonder..."

MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

1. Read chapter 10 of *The Witness Blanket* and have students complete their final drawing/sketch and one-sentence summary in their journal. Write the quote from page 76 on the board: "The pieces on the *Witness Blanket* each represent a different



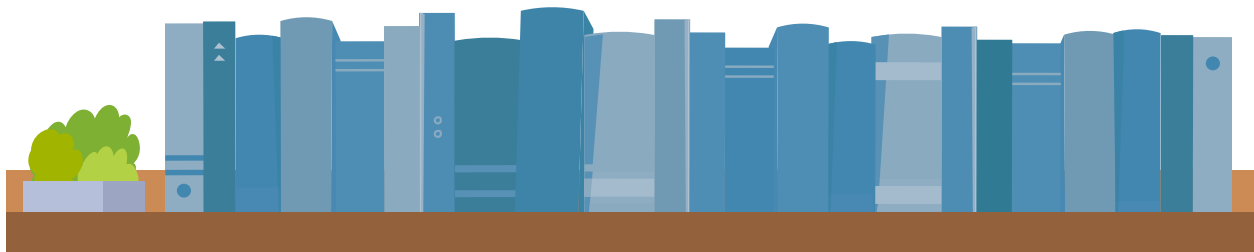


story, a different person and a different place.” Discuss how the *Witness Blanket* is going to preserve the stories of the people and their experiences at residential school. Connect that all stories, people, and cultures are important and worth preserving.

2. Introduce the goal of preserving and celebrating each student’s culture through building a class Witness Blanket. Each student will create a square that reflects who they are, using artifacts or creations to represent themselves, their identity, and their culture. Allow students to create their square using whatever tools, materials, or forms they feel best represent them. The process is more important than the product.
3. To start, have students brainstorm what part of their culture (language, food, dress, ways of knowing and being, art, recreation, etc.) they want to preserve and what parts of their identity they want to share. Students can refer to their previous work using the Wheel of Power and Privilege.
4. Give students plenty of time to plan, create, represent, and share their piece of the class Witness Blanket. Consider inviting other classes in your school to view the final product while your students share and celebrate their learning and themselves.

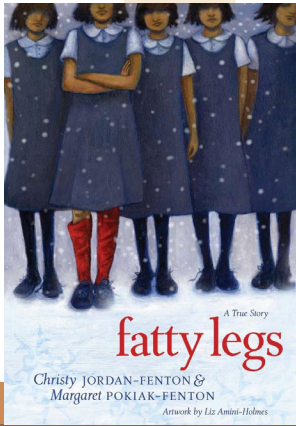
REFLECT AND CONNECT

Provide your students with an opportunity to write a reflection on the process of creating their piece of the Witness Blanket. Scaffold this writing to be a celebration of each student’s unique identity and culture as necessary to build and preserve a diverse and equitable society.





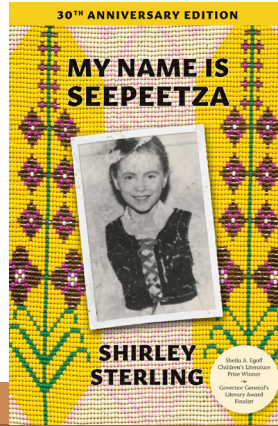
ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS TO SUPPORT THIS SUB-THEME



Fatty Legs: A True Story by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, illustrated by Liz Amini-Holmes (Annick Press, 2010)
 Also available in FR: *Les bas du pensionnat : une histoire vraie* par Christy Jordan-Fenton et Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, illustré par Liz Amini-Holmes (Éditions Scholastic, 2011)



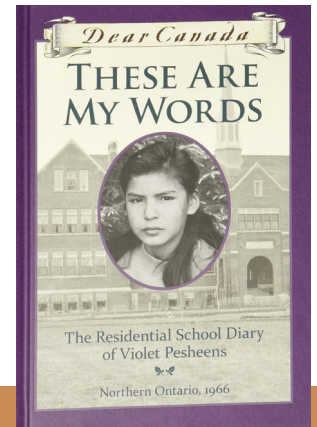
Phyllis's Orange Shirt by Phyllis Webstad, illustrated by Brock Nicol (Medicine Wheel Publishing, 2019)
 Also available in FR: *Le chandail orange de Phyllis* par Phyllis Webstad, illustré par Brock Nicol (Medicine Wheel Publishing, 2020)



My Name is Seepeeetza by Shirley Sterling (Groundwood Books, 1992)



The Orange Shirt Story by Phyllis Webstad, illustrated by Brock Nicol (Medicine Wheel Publishing, 2018)
 Also available in FR: *L'histoire du chandail orange* par Phyllis Webstad, illustré par Brock Nicol (Medicine Wheel Publishing, 2018)



Dear Canada: These Are My Words: The Residential School Diary of Violet Pesheens by Ruby Slipperjack (Scholastic Canada, 2016)
 Also available in FR: *Cher Journal : Les mots qu'il me reste : Violet Pesheens, pensionnaire à l'école résidentielle* par Ruby Slipperjack (Éditions Scholastic, 2016)



ANTI-RACISM | HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

BY REBECA RUBIO

FEATURED BOOK



LEARNING EXPERIENCE

MINDS ON PROVOCATION

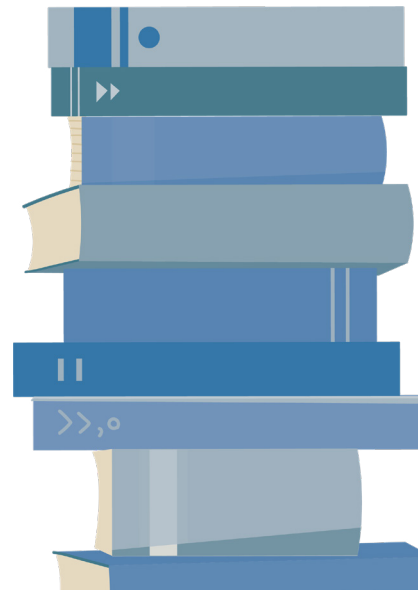
As a class, discuss why groups or individuals might leave their homeland. What are the “push and pull” factors? Consider such reasons as natural disasters, war, climate change, employment opportunities, personal safety, government policies, etc.

In small groups, students will watch the following author interviews and picture book read-alouds about refugee and immigrant experiences.

- [Picture book reading](#) of *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey* by the author, Margriet Ruurs
- [Interview](#) with Thao Lam, author of *The Paper Boat: A Refugee Story*
- [Interview](#) with Jen Sookfong Lee, author of *Finding Home: The Journey of Immigrants and Refugees*

Have students discuss the personal impact of leaving one's homeland as expressed in these videos. They should consider the following questions:

- What challenges did the individuals face?
- What conflicting emotions did they experience?
- What other challenges do you think refugees and immigrants might experience as they adjust to their new lives in new countries?





READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

1. Abu Bakr and his family faced many joys and challenges in their new life in Canada. Have students track both their successes and struggles. How do they compare and contrast to Abu Bakr's life in Syria? What insight can students gain about the complexity of life as an immigrant/refugee?
2. "The true measure of a society is in how it treats its most vulnerable members."
—Mahatma Gandhi

Explain to students that anti-racism is the practice of actively identifying and opposing racism by challenging systems, structures, policies, and practices that uphold the power of some and systematically deny it from others. Around the world, governments have varying policies regarding immigration and the granting of asylum to refugees. Often, these systems are seen as racist, as they commonly exclude BIPOC refugees. Students will research the current Canadian government's policy on refugees and immigration, and explore statistics about country of origin, gender, age, etc. Have them record their findings and thoughts.

MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

"UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people" ([About UNHCR](#)).

Invite students to explore the UNHCR [stories](#) of Canadian refugees.

In groups, have students interview a new immigrant to Canada, exploring both the push and pull factors that brought them here, and the personal impact of the migration. Students can then choose how to share their findings:

- In the same format as the UNHCR stories
- As a podcast
- As a video
- As a piece of art
- As a piece of literature (short story, poem, spoken word)

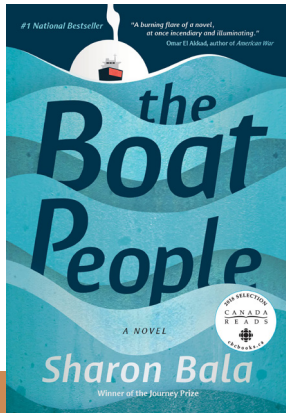
REFLECT AND CONNECT

1. How will taking pride in who I am contribute to anti-racism in my community? In what ways can I show my appreciation for others and their uniqueness?
2. How has Abu Bakr's story influenced my thinking about newcomers in a society? How has it impacted my impression of the people in my own community?
3. In what way do Abu Bakr's experiences connect to my own experiences and life story? My family's experiences and life story?

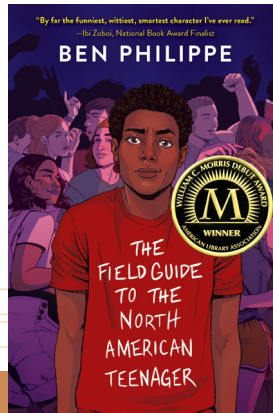




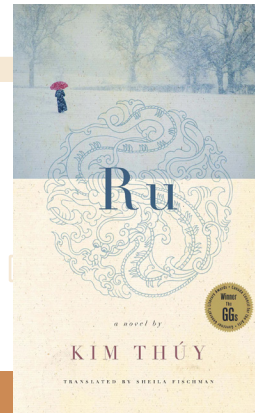
ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS TO SUPPORT THIS SUB-THEME



The Boat People by Sharon Bala
(McClelland & Stewart, 2018)



The Field Guide to the North American Teenager by Ben Philippe
(Balzer + Bray, 2019)



Ru by Kim Thúy (Vintage Canada, 2015)
Also available in FR: *Ru par Kim Thúy* (Libre Expression, 2009)

MORE RESOURCES FOR ALL GRADE LEVELS

- [Emotional Word Wheel](#): Resource for building emotional vocabulary by Geoffrey Roberts.
- [How to Start Talking About Race in the Early Elementary Classroom](#): An Edutopia article on ways to start conversations with young students.
- [How to Talk to Kids About Race](#): A three-minute YouTube video created by the *Atlantic* on the importance of talking to kids about race and taking action to show them why racial justice is important.
- [One-sentence summaries](#): Template by Brooke Khan found under “GIST summary.”
- [Tackle Racism with Canadian Books](#): From Bibliovideo, this is a short video featuring Canadian books that discuss the issue of racism.

