Using Cultural Responsive Teaching and Diverse Text to Cultivate a Love for Reading

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Culturally Responsive Teaching & THE BRAIN
Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Zaretta Hammond

Foreword by Yvette Jackson
Using the following two passages to do close readings and to do predictions about what the stories will be about. (Allow students to read the entire stories.)

“The First Day” by Edward P. Jones
(First page of the short story “The First Day”)

On an otherwise unremarkable September morning, long before I learned to be ashamed of my mother, she takes my hand and we set off down New Jersey Avenue to begin my very first day of school. I am wearing a checkered like blue and-green cotton dress, and scattered about these colors are bits of yellow and white and brown. My mother has uncharacteristically spent nearly an hour on my hair that morning, plaiting and replaiting so that now my scalp tingles. Whenever I turn my head quickly, my nose fills with the faint smell of Dixie Peach hair grease. The smell is somehow a soothing one now and I will reach for it time- and time again before the morning ends. All the plaits, each with a blue barrette near the tip and each twisted into an uncommon sturdiness, will last until I go to bed that night, something that has never happened before. My stomach is full of milk and oatmeal sweetened with brown sugar. Like everything else I have on, my pale green slip and underwear are new, the underwear having come three to a plastic package with a little girl on the front who appears to be dancing. Behind my ears, my mother, to stop my whining, has dabbed the stingiest bit of her gardenia perfume, the last present my father gave her before he disappeared into memory. Because I cannot smell it, I have only her word that the perfume is there. I am also wearing yellow socks trimmed with thin lines of black and white around the tops. My shoes are my greatest joy, black patent-leather miracles, and when one is nicked at the toe later that morning in class, my heart will break.
It was December—a bright frozen day in the early morning. Far out in the country there was an old Negro woman with her head tied in a red rag, coming along a path through the pinewoods. Her name was Phoenix Jackson. She was very old and small and she walked slowly in the dark pine shadows, moving a little from side to side in her steps, with the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock. She carried a thin, small cane made from an umbrella, and with this she kept tapping the frozen earth in front of her. This made a grave and persistent noise in the still air that seemed meditative, like the chirping of a solitary little bird.

She wore a dark striped dress reaching down to her shoe tops, and an equally long apron of bleached sugar sacks, with a full pocket: all neat and tidy, but every time she took a step she might have fallen over her shoelaces, which dragged from her unlaced shoes. She looked straight ahead. Her eyes were blue with age. Her skin had a pattern all its own of numberless branching wrinkles and as though a whole little tree stood in the middle of her forehead, but a golden color ran underneath, and the two knobs of her cheeks were illumined by a yellow burning under the dark. Under the red rag her hair came down on her neck in the frailest of ringlets, still black, and with an odor like copper.
Diverse novels and Short Stories to build Empathy

1. *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin
2. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston.
3. *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini
4. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini
5. *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho
6. *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel
7. *Funny in Farsi* by Froze Dumas
8. *Under the Feet of Jesus* by Helena Maria
9. *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Adichie
10. *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe
11. *Black Like Me* by John Howard
12. *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates
13. *Losing My Cool* by Thomas Chatterton Williams
14. *The Short and Tragic Life of Robert Peace* by Jeff Hobbs
15. *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson
16. *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Nelle Harper Lee
17. *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds
18. *When I Was the Greatest* by Jason Reynolds
19. *Thirteen Reasons* by Jay Asher
20. *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi
21. *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
23. *This is how you Lose Her* by Junot Diaz

Also, you can plenty of book suggestions on my blog: [www.theseaisfull.com](http://www.theseaisfull.com)
Ideas from Culturally Responsive Teaching that you can practice NOW!

• Pick a student who triggers you and really think about why?
• Change your seating.
• Give more talk time.
• Chunking more.
• Listen more.
• Remember more.
• Tell Stories.
• Establish “This is what we do.”
• Give more choice.
• Help students to set goals.
Suggested Assignment to go with the books!

Each group will pick a book (or a pair of books) to analyze and present to the class. With these books, you will go beyond surface meanings, and will explore what message or messages that the authors are exploring through these works. Each group will decide which book it will read, and the work for that book is due, in google classroom, on the date assigned.

NOTE: The work can be turned in early but cannot be turned in late.

Individual work:

The work will be completed for each novel and put into google classroom. (Do not share work!)

- **Themes**: Write at least three themes for each book, in complete sentences. Then explain in a paragraph or more for each theme, how the author develops the theme.
- **Problem/Solution**: Present at least three problems in the book and give possible solutions for each problem. *(One paragraph or more for each problem)*
- **Thoughts**: In a page or more, split into paragraphs, write some of your thoughts that you had about this book. *(DO NOT give plot summary nor tell us if you liked it.)*

Group Work:

In a PowerPoint,

- Each group will formulate a question, and write a thesis for the question that covers both books and try to explain how the books answers the questions.
- You will talk about how the two books complement each other.
- You will explore themes, characterizations, use of language, motifs etc.
- Identify one or two societal problems and address and how they are dealt with in the books.
- You will select one passage from each book, and ask a questions such as what is the theme and what literary devices is the author using to develop the theme in order to discuss writing style. *(We should be provided time to read the passage, mark the text, and have a class discussion.)*
Taking Vacation Discoveries Back to the Classroom

BY JACQUELINE STALLWORTH
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Recently I took a trip to Martha’s Vineyard in Massachusetts, and some friends told me about this Polar Bear experience I just had to have while on the island. They would not tell me much about it, but the warmth with which they described this experience convinced me it was something to try.

The Polar Bear experience has been taking place for more than 60 years at the Inkwell, a beach on Martha’s Vineyard with strong African American ties. It opens the fourth of July and closes Labor Day weekend. According to the Vineyard Gazette, there are three types of Polar Bears who meet at 7:30 a.m.: swimming bears, nonswimming bears (“bear-watchers and talkers”), and the exercise bears.

I met my friends early in the morning to be an exercise Polar Bear. We walked to the Inkwell, and there were people, mostly African American women, holding hands, making their way into the water. As I approached the water, one of my friends said, “Let me hold your hand,” and we proceeded into the water to join the others.

Instantly, I felt part of the family. From holding of hands, songs, chants, and movement, to the engaging leaders who seemed to truly “see” all of us, I felt like I was part of this family.

I thought, “This is a perfect example of culturally responsive teaching that can used in classrooms all across the United States to reach all students, but especially those who have been marginalized by society and those who come from communal backgrounds such as African American and Hispanic students.”

Here are the Polar Bear lessons we can take into our classrooms:

Create community in the classroom

Oftentimes we tell students, especially high school students, to work independently. However, many of our minority students come from communal backgrounds, and we thrive and grow when we can help each other. With the Polar Bear experience, the more experienced were helping the new bears, instantly creating a sense of community. At one point, the new Polar Bears were asked to move to the middle of the circle. Being
new, I was reluctant, and an older Polar Bear took my hand and went with me to the middle of the circle. Even I, a grown woman, needed this gesture to ease my anxiety.

**Establish routines and rituals**

People thrive off of routine, and they work in any classrooms along with norms that help students to feel they belong. Whenever I start singing, “Started from the bottom, now we’re here,” my students instantly join in and know that we would be referring to Bloom’s taxonomy. The Polar Bears sang their same songs, at the same time, and there was a sense of comfort in my next visit, because I knew exactly what to expect. Oh, the joy I felt in being able to help new Polar Bears.

**Celebrate individuality**

It is important that students are viewed not only as individuals but also as part of the group. It is important to celebrate differences in the classroom: culture, family dynamics, race, religion, gender, and so forth. Near the end of the Polar Bear session, there is a chant. People are called upon to call out a dance or move for the group to do. This is the part of the routine where individual personalities are highlighted and celebrated. Because a sense of community and trust was established, this was the time when people took risks and allowed their “little light shine.”

I had been on vacation and looking forward to lots of rest and relaxation, but because of the sense of community I felt at the Polar Bear experience, I got up most mornings to attend those 7:30 sessions. When we create community in our classrooms, establishment routines, and celebrate individuality, our students will continue to want to come back home—*to our classrooms*.

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