BC Teachers' Federation | May/June 2023

Teacher

TAKEOVER EDITION

IN THIS ISSUE

Joy
Power
Victory
Solidarity
Challenge

BCTF

Kids Matter
Teachers Care

IN THIS ISSUE

Volume 35, Number 5—May/June 2023

EDITOR'S NOTE

Language associated with identity, like identity itself, evolves over time and can be represented in many ways. Throughout this edition there are terms and styles, including IBPOC and BIPOC (Indigenous, Black, people of colour), used interchangeably and alongside more specific references to personal identity. Identity-related terms were not edited for consistency in this edition to honour authors' choices in using language they feel is most representative of their identities.

MEMBERS PICTURED

Front page, clockwise from top left: Amanda Anderson, Natasha Dandiwal, Nisha Gill, Coreen Loe, Derek Lam, Carolina Ganga, Lucy Yang, Michael Musherure. **Back page, clockwise from top left:** Su Chang, Allison Hotti, Litia Fleming, Michelle Ahoy, Edie Chang, Kimberley Jung, Aaron Anthony, Chiana van Katwijk, Rick Kumar, Maria Dawson, Jasreen Janjua.

THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE

Do you enjoy writing? Have a story to tell? Know of a project at your school or in your local you want to share with colleagues? Then consider writing for *Teacher*, the flagship publication of the BCTF! To get started, email *teachermag@bctf.ca* with your idea.

We also welcome letters to the editor. Send your letter to *teachermag@bctf.ca*.

Teacher reserves the right to edit or condense any contribution considered for publication. We are unable to publish all submissions we receive.

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Sept/Oct issue	July 28, 2023
Nov/Dec issue	Sept 22, 2023
Jan/Feb issue	Nov 10, 2023
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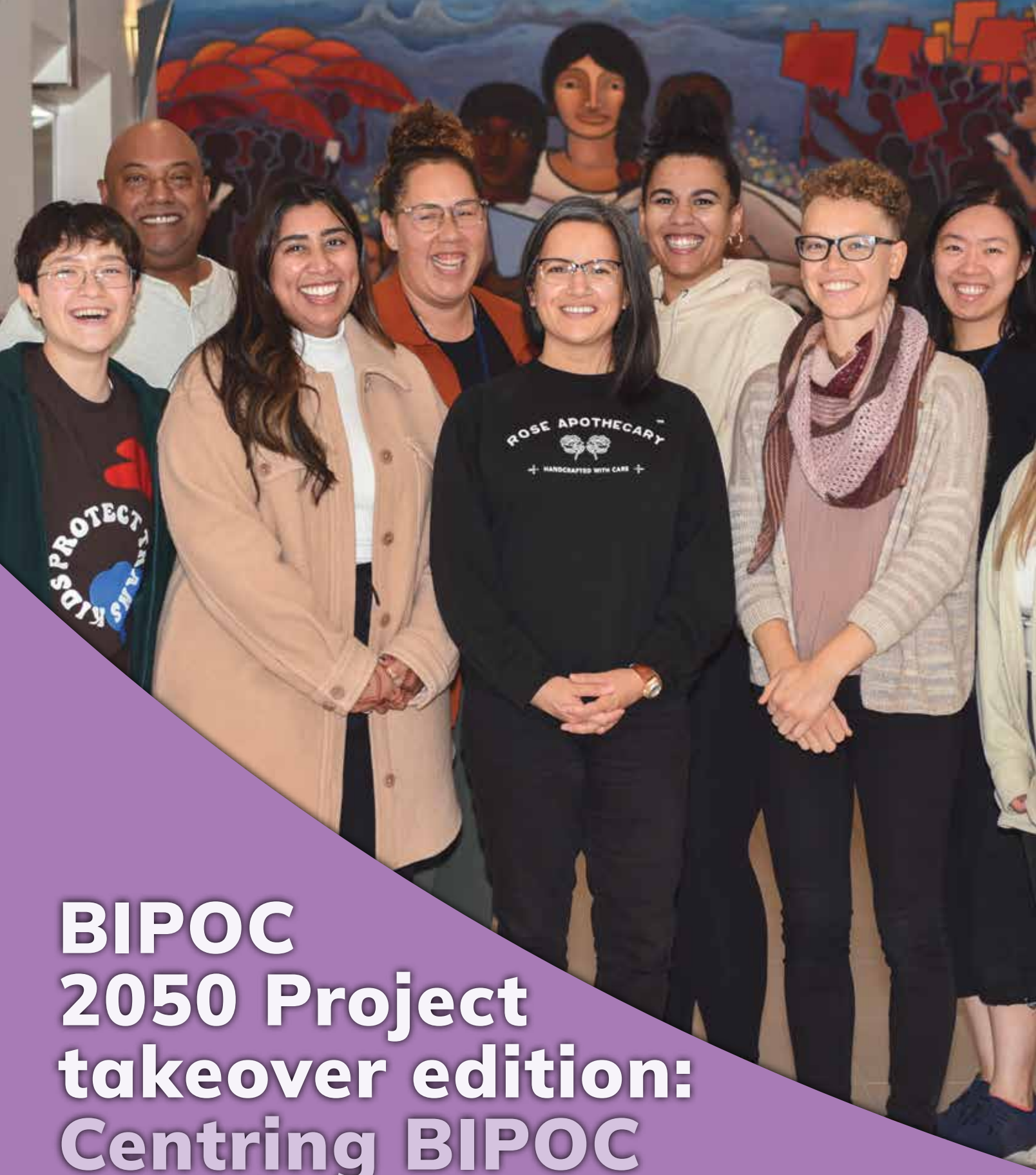


BIPOC 2050 Project takeover edition: Centring BIPOC voices and experiences

Members of the BIPOC 2050 Project at the BCTF building in Vancouver, L to R: Melissa Illing, Aaron Anthony, Serena Pattar, Litia Fleming, Carolina Ganga, Chiana van Katwijk, Jamayca Whalen, Judy Yuen, Kimberley Jung, and Nisha Gill. Marilou Strait photo.

This edition of *Teacher* magazine is a first for the Federation: it is the first written entirely by and about teachers who identify as Indigenous, Black, or People of Colour (IBPOC/BIPOC).

The purpose of this edition is to gather in community, both for our students and ourselves. It is a way to unabashedly celebrate the triumphs, joys, power, and solidarity among our beautiful, inspiring, and multilayered identities. We have fought for our rights in every community, every school, and every union space. And we continue to fight to have our voices heard and to find a sense of belonging.

The idea for this "takeover" edition was generated during a meeting of the BIPOC 2050 Project team. The BIPOC 2050 Project evolved from a different initiative called the BCTF Project 2050: Engaging New Teachers. The goal of the original research project, which ran in the 2018–19 school year, was to find ways to engage new members in the coming decades. Member-led focus groups with new teachers were a central part of that initial project.

At one of the early BCTF Project 2050 meetings, three members, Litia, Aaron, and Kimberley, brought forward an idea to include a specific focus on new members of Colour. The focus groups from the initial Project 2050 also brought awareness to the fact that experiences of BIPOC teachers are often underrepresented. To capture a more holistic and inclusive lens, a new iteration of the project was started in 2021 that focused solely on engaging BIPOC teachers: the BIPOC 2050 Project.

The BIPOC 2050 Project has evolved significantly since its inception. Engaging new BIPOC teachers remains a central theme; however, the project scope has expanded to include experienced BIPOC teachers as well.

Unionism is not easy to navigate, even for seasoned unionists. The BIPOC 2050 Project gives BIPOC teachers an accessible and meaningful way to engage with their union through new avenues centred on community building and sharing lived experiences.

While each of us had our own unique motivations and aspirations when we signed up for the project, we all agree that the desire to connect with other BIPOC educators, and empower other BIPOC educators, was integral to our work on this project.

Spaces where BIPOC members are safe and can share their stories and experiences without judgment are not easy to come by. The BIPOC 2050 Project set out to create these safe spaces at BIPOC events across the province. If we can do this at an in-person event, why not in a publication? With this mindset, we set out to create a special edition of *Teacher* that would highlight the voices and stories of BIPOC teachers.

In creating a BIPOC voices edition of *Teacher*, we hope to disrupt the status quo of what constitutes education across various subject areas. BIPOC teachers and students are present in every school and every classroom in this province. Our stories and our experiences deserve to be acknowledged and included in curriculum, pedagogy, resources, and learning spaces. The articles in this edition share some ideas on how to ensure BIPOC experiences are included in your teaching. Thank you to the many BIPOC teachers who contributed their work, creations, and perspectives in this edition.

This edition is also a calling-in to all teachers across the province: we can and we must continue to develop safe spaces for our learners, our communities, and our colleagues.

To our fellow BIPOC teachers: there are other BIPOC teachers just like you who want to support and empower you. It feels like we are finally getting the mic passed to us. Our voices matter. Our experiences are valid and real.

In solidarity,
BIPOC 2050 Project members

In solidarity and with support,
Clint Johnston, BCTF President


Kimberley Jung

BIPOC teachers supporting students

By Kimberley Jung (she/her), teacher, West Vancouver

WE GATHERED some perspectives from former students who were a part of Rockridge Secondary's Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice last year. We asked them about what their experiences were like having the support of BIPOC teachers before, and moving in to, their post-secondary lives.

How has having BIPOC teachers changed your perspective on education?


Twyla Frid Lottenberg

Twyla Frid Lottenberg

"It is hard to say one thing when it is everything. There is a fellowship to seeing someone at the front of the room who is a BIPOC teacher and has an understanding beyond the Eurocentric cannon. Seeing a teacher who looks like me shows me what could be possible for myself. As a young woman of Colour, having female BIPOC teachers has been so impactful, and having a teacher who intentionally tries to bring in diversity into the curriculum means the world. I know about safe spaces, but now I want brave spaces. BIPOC teachers hold brave spaces for BIPOC students."


Zoie Bhalloo

Zoie Bhalloo

"West Vancouver is not a hard place to grow up. I have no problem admitting my privilege, and I am able to see how privileged everyone around me is. My high school was a predominantly White school, and although the students were given these advantages by a society shaped by bias and inequalities, that doesn't take away from the fact that they are there. Having BIPOC teachers who I was able to connect with and learn from, allowed me to better understand my own identity in this confusing environment. I often lacked the ability to advocate for myself and found that at times it was easier to avoid the subject of identity and background. By surrounding myself with teachers who I know understand me, I have gained a wider definition of education. Education is not just learning how to correct your grammar or solve a math problem: it's learning from others with a different perspective, gaining empathy and open-mindedness of how not everyone experiences the same advantages and privileges."


Maeya Jones

Maeya Jones

"Throughout school, the most honest and powerful conversations on topics of social justice, race, prejudice, etc., have always been with BIPOC teachers. As I engaged more and more with BIPOC teachers on these concepts, my perspective on education changed. I became more consciously aware that BIPOC teachers are often left with the burden of carrying out challenging and important discussions regarding larger historical and political issues."

Maeya Jones photos

"Education is not just learning how to correct your grammar or solve a math problem: it's learning from others with a different perspective..."

Visit *yaij.org* to learn about the Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice.

How have BIPOC teachers had an impact or influence on your experiences in school?

Twyla Frid Lottenberg

"BIPOC teachers have had an impact on my learning in high school, and it has extended into my university experience. At Columbia University, three out of my four professors have been women of Colour so far, and there were parallels in the approach to learning that were so different and important. As a junior teaching assistant (TA), I now find myself connecting even more so with these professors with commonalities in our identities. I am in a joyful space with two other women of Colour (professor and associate TA). Teachers of Colour bring perspective and joy into learning that can be missed in predominantly Eurocentric learning. Anti-oppressive learning structures open up ways of learning. Education can be a path of liberation and joy, and that has been reflected in teachers of Colour and their pedagogy."

Zoie Bhalloo

"As I grew older, I was able to identify the issues taking place in my school that were not okay. I felt that a lot of these issues were brushed off because they had been going on for years, and not of concern to a lot of the staff at the school. Having BIPOC teachers, those that I could discuss anything with, allowed me to have a safe space where I could communicate these issues, with the reassurance that they would understand me. With a perspective of more than just instilling the school curriculum into their students, these teachers made it a mission to spread kindness and make every student (no matter who they were) feel accepted and heard.

Without these teachers, many of the clubs at my school could not continue running. An example is the Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice school club. Both of the teachers helping to run this were committed to educating and helping the students in the club understand a wider range of issues going on in the world. The most impactful lessons for me were the ones where we discussed broader issues beyond the standard curriculum. I hope that every student has the chance to learn from teachers like I did, because it significantly bettered my experience at my high school. I feel confident in my ability to face these prevalent issues in the real world, because I was exposed to them at a younger age."

Maeya Jones

"BIPOC teachers have influenced my experiences at school by providing me with a safe space to question, reflect, and truly understand the extent of my racial privilege. It has been within this space where I have learned to listen and deepen my understanding of the experiences of marginalized people—it is where I have learned to be an ally. Learning from BIPOC teachers has given me a clearer idea of my place in the world and what I care about. I have learned how to better address topics of prejudice and racism inside and outside the classroom. I am more aware of how to use my privilege in a meaningful, confident, and compassionate way."

Calling all BIPOC teachers and teacher-allies!

THE YOUTH ALLIANCE FOR INTERSECTIONAL JUSTICE (YAIJ) is a non-profit organization that is a Black, youth-led collective of racialized youth, adults, and allies amplifying the voices of Black and Indigenous youth at the intersections of race and ability. YAIJ's mission is to create and support Afro-centred safe spaces across Vancouver and Toronto in which BIPOC youth with intellectual and/or developmental dis/abilities navigate the education, technology, and entrepreneurial systems through meaningful, engaging community-supported, and youth-led projects, programs, and research. Two of our BCTF BIPOC 2050 Project team members are a part of the team of this non-profit organization.

There are multiple ways for teachers to get involved with YAIJ in the classroom and beyond. A way to get involved with YAIJ in the classroom is by sharing YAIJ as a resource with students that you think could benefit from this organization. To get involved with YAIJ at a school level, teachers can sponsor a school YAIJ club and connect with the organization through the website to find opportunities for students. Lastly, opportunities for close involvement with YAIJ are available through the website, such as volunteer applications for the non-profit organization and/or by donating. Visit ***yaij.org*** for more information.

As a federally incorporated non-profit, YAIJ depends on donations (no matter the size) from supporters. We couldn't do this without your support! Donations go toward transportation for youth to travel to/from work and employment training, a central space for youth to gather safely among allies, life skills development, civil rights awareness and self-empowerment training, activities supporting emotional and mental well-being, and programs promoting lifelong leadership skills. •

Building belonging for Indigenous students

By Rick Joe, teacher, Chilliwack

IN MY FIRST CLASS, on my first day in the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (UBC NITEP) in 1995, the professor asked me, "Why do you want to be a teacher?" I said, "To make a safe place for Indigenous students to learn and have a sense of belonging." My commitment to Indigenous youth has never stopped and continues to drive my teaching practice even today.

At the start of this school year another Indigenous teacher, Christina Billingham, asked to meet with me about some ideas on what can we do in our school to support Indigenous students. We met one lunch break to brainstorm ideas that could build on some of the supports and options already available to Indigenous students at our school. We came up with an idea for an Indigenous leadership course.

The Indigenous leadership course was intended to provide an avenue for Indigenous students to access the language and culture experience credit and/or fulfill the new Indigenous graduation requirement; both are new initiatives announced by the Ministry of Education and Child Care over the past year. Currently, the process for Indigenous students to receive experience credit is not easy. I spoke in person with four elected council members in four different First Nations communities, and each shared that they had trouble completing the paperwork for students' experience credits, because the form is designed for teachers or administrators who are familiar with the curriculum.

The questions and language on the form are also very colonial. Growing up on my First Nations reserve, no one ever said they were an "expert" and did not refer to their knowledge as "expertise," which is the language used on the experience credit form. For example, I coached cedar dugout war canoe training and took youth aged 5–16 in races every weekend, starting from the May long weekend and ending with the September long weekend. We trained two to three times per week after school. Over the five months, some youth trained and worked to help fix the canoes and paddles. Overall, youth would put in approximately 400 hours of working and learning in and around canoes and canoe life. I did this for 12 years, but I would not call myself an expert at this. In this way, the language on the paperwork to receive experience credit is a barrier.

The new Indigenous leadership course is a way for me to use my position to honour the students for the work they are already doing in their community and school.

Christina and I booked a meeting with the Chilliwack School District Indigenous Advisory Committee to present our idea. The idea was accepted, and a subcommittee was tasked with guiding the process of creating this new course and ensuring local Indigenous communities are part of the process.

For this school year, we started a pilot Indigenous leadership course that is off timetable, meaning we meet after school hours. Currently, seven students who have self-identified as Indigenous are enrolled in the course. Students are working on self-location projects to learn about their Indigenous heritage. Once the projects are completed, the students will present their family histories to the group.

I frequently bring my lived experience as a Lil'wat Hand Drummer and my connections and experiences with the Stó:lō community into the classroom for students to learn from and draw from as they explore their own identity. For example, I am a hand drummer and have all of the teachings around this. I can teach someone how to take care of a hand drum, how to make one, and so on. While I am in Stó:lō territory, I call on my friend to come and teach how to make a hand drum, as we are in his territory; most of the teachings are the same, but not all. This also ensures that we are following local protocols around ceremony. I always ensure that local First Nations are part of each event we host, and that the events are planned in a way that we would hold ceremony. The family gathering and mini pow-wow was our way to invite the local Indigenous community to our school. We shared a meal and had time to just talk. Each month we will either go to the community or invite the community to our school.

Events Indigenous leadership students have planned and participated in so far

Have a Heart Day

Students and staff signed a letter to the Prime Minister to support First Nations children on reserves. The main message was to provide clean drinking water to all First Nations reserves. In April 2021, Semiahmoo First Nation, in White Rock, BC, announced the end of their long-term boil advisory.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Memorial March

At lunch break, students and staff participated in drumming and singing in front of the school to reflect and remember the thousands of Indigenous women and girls who have gone missing or been murdered in Canada.

Family gathering

Three hundred Indigenous students and their families were invited to a gathering to learn more about how to navigate high school.

Mini pow-wow

This event was open to all members in our community; approximately 500 people showed up on a Tuesday night for a celebration of Indigenous cultures and to honour Indigenous resilience against colonialism.

HOBIYEE!

HOBIYEE! Is the start of the Nisga'a new year. They invite all nations to celebrate the new year. This year there were 800 First Nations dancers in full regalia representing 80 different nations. Students volunteered for five hours, helping each group get ready to drum, sing, and dance. We also helped classes attend by guiding them to their seats.

"The leadership course creates opportunities for students to learn about their identities while actively practising First Nations protocols and bringing Indigenous culture into the community."

The leadership class also has several other events planned for this school year. We are planning to harvest inner cedar bark and root and cottonwood bulbs for Salve. We will also attend the Moose Hide Campaign Day, and our year-end event will be Paddle Day, with a local First Nations school on June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day. All First Nations used water as the highway. Each region had a watercraft to get around. On Paddle Day, we provide a variety of watercraft for youth to try out, including war canoe, outrigger canoe, kayak, paddle boards, and dragon boats to celebrate the continued use of the water.

By the end of the year students will have the opportunity to lead parts of events and know the planning process, as well as local First Nations protocols with organizing events. The leadership course creates opportunities for students to learn about their identities while actively practising First Nations protocols and bringing Indigenous culture into the community. Reflecting on this year, I can already see the leadership and sense of belonging that this small group of youth are bringing; other students are also starting to join in and plan. I am so thankful to the students for their dedication and the work they do above and beyond their full-time course load. •

Opposite: Rick Joe (far left) and Christina Billingham (far right) with students in their pilot Indigenous leadership course. **Below:** Rick Joe with students volunteering at HOBIYEE! Photos provided by author.

"I don't think I would have gotten involved if someone didn't invite me in. I needed someone to show me that this is my union as well; it's not just for a select few—it's for everyone."

– Marilyn Ricketts-Lindsay

Rich Overgaard photo

Putting your name forward:

Q&A with Rick Kumar and Marilyn Ricketts-Lindsay, recently elected to the BCTF Executive Committee, about navigating union spaces as BIPOC members

How did you get involved in union work? What motivated you to get involved with your union?

Marilyn: Every stage of my union involvement started with an invitation. Four years ago, I was working at a school that didn't have a staff rep. I invited the local vice-president to come for a school visit and share information about what was going on in the union. The local vice-president invited me to sign up to be the staff rep at the school. At that time, I knew nothing about what the job entailed. When I started attending union meetings and learning more about union work, I connected with colleagues who later invited me to join committees. From there, my involvement in the union grew. Layer after layer, I kept getting more involved, but it all started from the staff rep role. I don't think I would have gotten involved if someone didn't invite me in. I needed someone to show me that this is my union as well; it's not just for a select few—it's for everyone.

The reason I keep signing up and volunteering is because I've learned so much over the years. This is my 17th year of teaching; I feel I've experienced the most growth during the years I volunteered with the union. There is so much to learn, and I believe union work is the best professional development. I'm more confident as a teacher and a professional, and I feel more empowered within my profession.

Rick: I had very limited, and negative, experiences with unions before I became a teacher. But during my practicum, there was a teacher across the hall who, over the course of several lunch hours, shared what union work can look like. She encouraged me to find ways to get involved in the union. The day I signed my contract to work as a teacher in Surrey was the same day as the Surrey Teachers' Association Annual General Meeting. I decided to show up and I was so impressed. There was free food and a whole bunch of people who were really friendly and wanted to invite me in. I remember thinking, "Wow, people are asking my opinions on things." I felt listened to.

Photo provided by Rick Kumar

What are some challenges in putting your name forward for union leadership? Why did you decide to do it?

Marilyn: Unionism is a very steep learning curve for someone who is not familiar with the structures and processes. Initially, I didn't understand how the union worked, but I leaned heavily on my colleagues to navigate union meetings, and it took a while for me to start feeling confident in my own understanding of the union. Even when I felt I understood the structures and processes, it took time to get comfortable in union spaces, and sometimes it's still uncomfortable.

BIPOC teachers, especially Black teachers, are under-represented in union spaces. I didn't think I would be welcome. But now that I'm active in the union, I want Black teachers to see themselves represented and feel motivated to pursue union involvement. I want them to know they belong, and that they can take on leadership roles within their union too. I want to encourage BIPOC teachers to take up space, use their voices to amplify their lived experiences, share their stories, seek collective care, and advocate for their rights. You don't have to know everything to participate. You just have to be willing to learn, make mistakes, and have a strong will to protect our collective agreement, advocate for social justice, and defend an equitable public education system.

Rick: Unions can be very intimidating spaces. I remember attending a Representative Assembly and not understanding what was being talked about. There were acronyms I had never heard of, and people would go up to the mic and captivate the audience for three whole minutes. I didn't think I could ever do that. My peers encouraged me to put my name forward, and when people start saying over and over again that you can do it, you start to believe it. I think about my students a lot when I do this work too. So many kids in my school are trying to figure out their lives. If they see me take a risk to do work that I really believe can make a difference, then they can do it too.

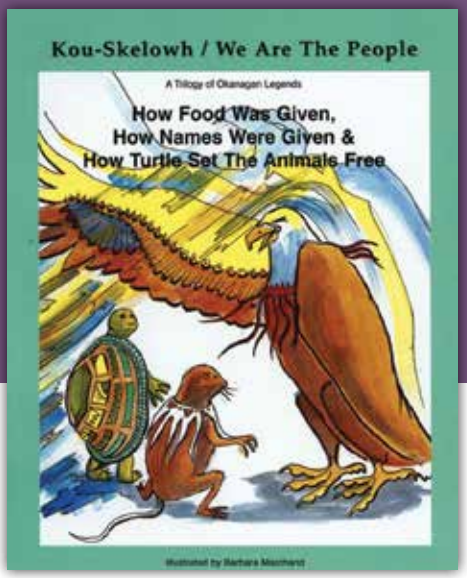
One of the biggest challenges for me is understanding that I'm working in a system that wasn't made for me. I meet so many people who have very different ideas than me. Building connections and reshaping people's thinking doesn't happen when I'm yelling at them. It happens when we're shaking hands and creating mutual understanding. I absolutely feel there should be no space for racism, but I can accomplish the most when I meet people where they are and pull them as far as I can my way.

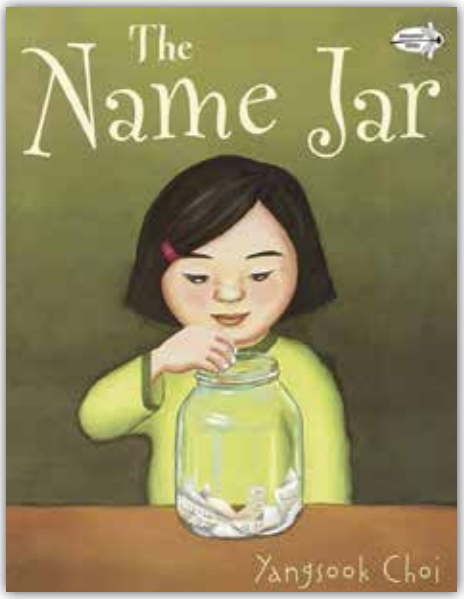
The pressure of representation is also a big challenge. Everyone has a different idea of how they want to be represented. I'm a BIPOC teacher; I've experienced the racism and the struggle. But all I know is my own story. It can be stressful to navigate the pressure of representing BIPOC teachers in this space. I want to honour all their stories and fix the whole system, but it's tough to include so many different perspectives and experiences in my work and advocacy.

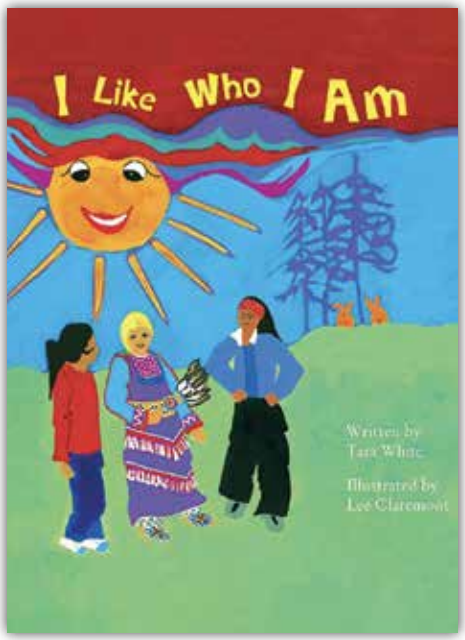
Do you have a concluding message for BIPOC members?

Marilyn: If you want to feel connected, and if you want to develop professionally, getting involved in the union is a great pathway. You also get to make a big impact on improving public education in the province. It's amazing to witness how the decisions made by members at governance meetings directly affect schools; I can see our collective voices having a positive effect on teachers and students. It doesn't happen right away, but there are a lot of positive changes that happen because of teacher advocacy locally and provincially.

Rick: I use this phrase a lot, but it really resonates with me: your existence is resistance. Being you and being in this space is showing others that it can be done. You are allowed to be here, no one can hold you back on that. •







Celebrating community identity

By Ashley Aoki (she/her), teacher, grateful to be living, playing, learning, and working as a settler and guest on the traditional, unceded, ancestral territory of the Okanagan syilx's peoples, and in particular the Penticton Indian Band

UNTIL RECENTLY, I didn't quite understand why creating a classroom community centred around equity mattered to me. I grew up in a white neighborhood, and most of my classmates were white. It took a long time for me to even admit I was embarrassed that my family didn't look like other families in my school. During my graduate studies, I was reminded how important it is for children to see themselves mirrored in their learning and have a window to others' experiences. Seeing oneself reflected in the curriculum can help validate and strengthen BIPOC students' concepts of self and identity, and help build classroom community, connection, and empathy. I aim to evoke these elements in my instructional practice by looking for connections in the curriculum and finding links between subject matter and self-exploration.

My instructional practice is guided by the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and the project discussed in this article is centred around the principle that "Learning requires the exploration of one's identity." I've also adopted the mindset that "Learning involves patience and time," and that projects won't necessarily be completed simply because a term ends. This shift in my thinking has allowed me to travel to deeper places of learning with the students. We have the opportunity to breathe life into learning topics that often feel rushed and slow down in the places that deserve extra time.

I was inspired to introduce a name and cultural identity project while looking at a world map and asking myself, "Who are my learners?" and, "What are my learners' stories?"

In pursuit of answering these questions, I developed two assignments for my learning community. The first invited my students to learn about who they are in relation to their names. Recognizing that some of my learners might not have access to all of the stories about their name, including the answer to "Why were you given the name __ ?" I chose to instead ask them questions such as, "What do you like about your name?" "What are three important facts about your name?" and, "What does your name mean?" Several of these questions could be answered by researching online, and many learners chose to extend their research by working on the assignment at home with their families.

During the first phase of the project, Bonny-Lynn Donovan, Indigenous literacy support teacher, joined our class regularly to share a variety of stories authored by Indigenous and/or BIPOC peoples that connected to our name project. For example, she shared *How Names Were Given* (a syilx story), *The Name Jar* (a Korean story), and *I Like Who I Am* (a Mohawk story) with the class. Learners shared reflections and asked questions about each author and the stories. The questions were written down and answered in follow-up lessons.

Bonny-Lynn also shared important information about the authors, including what lands they were from and the stories of who they are. She reminded us that a person's context (and story) matters and influences the stories that they share with their audience. Through each story shared, learners deepened their understanding about their own story and the stories that exist within our classroom community.

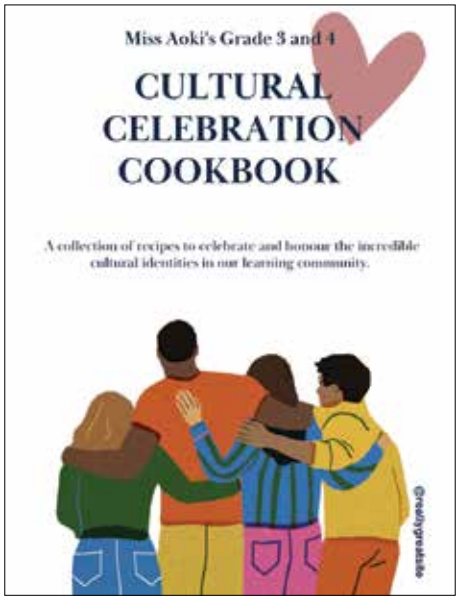
The project discussed in this article is centred around the First Peoples Principle of Learning, "Learning requires the exploration of one's identity."

The second activity invited students to learn more about their cultural identity. Because they had spent quite a bit of time learning about their name, several had learned that their last name was often connected to a country of origin (unless the spelling of the last name changed). Learners researched questions about their families' countries of origin, learned facts about the types of meals that are typically eaten, and shared what makes their cultural backgrounds unique. When the second activity was complete, students wove the two activities together in a formal piece of writing titled "All About Me."

To display the pieces, I wanted to visually represent each learner's cultural roots. It would become my "launching point" when discussing the fur trade, why people emigrate/immigrate, and the communities on Turtle Island (presently known as Canada) that have been affected by settlement and colonization. I designed the display with special attention to each child's identity. Their pictures were taken on Orange Shirt Day and placed around the outside of the atlas. A piece of string connected them to one of the countries named in their picture. This display has been outside of our classroom for a couple of months now, and other children stop and ask questions about the display such as, "What country is that?" Some students will look at the pictures and trace the string back to the student's country of origin. I love that this learning display generates wonder and connects learners in my class to the broader school community.

After spending over four months on this project, I knew I wanted to create time for learners to celebrate who they are and what they learned. I suggested that on Valentine's Day, we hold a cultural celebration, and each person could bring in a dish that connected to their cultural identity. When I brought the idea forward, one of the students raised his hand and asked if we could create a cookbook with all the recipes. It was a perfect request to celebrate the unique and beautiful cultures in our community! On February 14, 2023, food that connected to the children's cultural identity was brought in. Everything from waffles, egg tarts, karjalanpiirakka, and more. My parents joined us and several of the students made Japanese rice balls, which is a special recipe that connects to a tradition shared by my late Grandpa Aoki.

After our cultural celebration, I asked families to email me the recipes that were brought in. I wove all the recipes together into a cultural celebration cookbook. At the end of the cookbook, I took photos of each child and created a mosaic of photos, which is now the end piece of our book. A remarkable wrap up, for an even more remarkable project, tying each of us together while celebrating the uniqueness we bring to the community! •




Ashley Aoki

About the author

Ashley Aoki (she/her) is an elementary educator in School District 67 (Okanagan Skaha). She holds a graduate degree in Literacy and Language Arts from the University of Victoria and is in the process of completing her Educational Leadership Certificate from Queens University. On her paternal side, Ashley is fourth generation Japanese Canadian and on her maternal side she's fifth generation European (German and Swedish).

From language to action:

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ANTI-RACISM AND ANTI-OPPRESSION OFFICE

A conversation with
Milan Singh (she/her), Director, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Office and **Nikitha Fester** (she/her), Assistant Director, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Office

About the authors

Milan Singh has a PhD in communication studies with a focus on systemic discrimination, policy, and cultural identity.

Nikitha Fester's undergraduate studies focused on public policy and community services, and she is currently completing her master's in diversity, equity, and social justice education.

THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Office (ARAOO) at the BCTF was created in recognition of structural and systemic discrimination within society and our organization. The office is currently leading a systemic review of racism designed to begin dismantling systemic racism and advancing racial justice across the Federation's structures, practices, and policies. This project will be informed by a review of existing policies and projects, a series of dialogues with members, and a questionnaire.

Through the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Office, the BCTF has both the opportunity and the responsibility to go beyond responding to incidents of racism and to dive into the deeper work of systemic, foundational change.

ARAOO is led by a small team of three women who each identify as either Black, Indigenous, or racialized. Our intersections bring a unique lens to how we go about our work.

Why is it important to focus on anti-racism and racial justice, and what does it mean to be anti-racist?

Nikitha: This question is interesting to me because I feel like so much information has been given to us around anti-racism.

Milan: Absolutely! Scholarship related to race, culture, and identity—especially feminist scholarship in this area—helps us understand how lived experiences at the intersections of race, ethnicity, indigeneity, ancestry, gender expression, sexuality, disability, class, caste, age, and other social conditions are central to understanding forms of systemic racism.

To focus on anti-racism and racial justice means to identify and dismantle systemic barriers that prevent equal access and participation for racialized and other marginalized groups. To be an anti-racist, then, requires us to take the actions needed to achieve this goal.

Nikitha: I agree with that last point you said about *taking* action. When I think about racial justice, for me, it implies an action and change. It's no longer enough to have the knowledge, but to make these understandings practicable. This also requires a bit of our imagination, so that we can operate differently.

Milan: For sure, being an anti-racist involves a reimagining of new systems and processes to remove the barriers that cause harm. Understanding experiences of racism and other forms of marginalization are key to creating systems, processes, and organizations that not only include every person, but also allow us to thrive as our full, diverse selves.

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Nikitha: If being anti-racist means you are bringing your full self, your skill set, and your understandings to improve the experience of others, then it should also mean that when you enter a space (or an organization) and you feel comfortable, you should endeavour to make others feel comfortable as well.

Milan: If I can share, an additional point for us to think about is that actions toward racial justice require us to think about equitable processes *and* equitable outcomes. The work not only involves creating pathways for action, but also the need to maintain an urgency for change.

What language do we use to speak about racism and systemic racism, and why is it important for this language to keep evolving?

Milan: For this question, I would like to rely on the amazing work of Stuart Hall, who describes race as something that is given meaning through language; he suggests that the language of race and racism is used to create and maintain categories of difference that organize us in the societies we live in. This framing has been really profound for me because if language has been used to create and maintain race and racism, then language can also be used to challenge it. In other words, Aboriginal or Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities can (and are!) deliberately using language that shows their agency and power through their lived experiences.

Nikitha: The question around language reminds me of a discussion that happened in my classroom. When participating in a student workshop put on by Out in Schools, a student asked why the acronym LGBTQ+ (at the time) kept changing. The presenter asked my student what their favourite colour was; the student said blue. The presenter pressed, "Specifically, what is your favorite colour?" The student replied, "Well I guess violet blue, kinda light, but not too violet…like periwinkle, I think." The presenter responded, "So blue isn't your favourite colour. Your favourite colour is actually quite specific: it's periwinkle. If you can understand why it's important to be specific about your favourite colour, can you understand why it's equally important to be specific about your identity?"

Milan: This example is helpful because current terminology around racism is doing this very thing. For example, anti-Indigenous or anti-Aboriginal racism helps us identify how colonization has resulted in current forms of systemic racism, while language that describes anti-Black racism draws attention to specific forms of systemic harm that may disproportionately affect Black people. The intent here isn't to create a hierarchy, rather a way to recognize and name the distinctions about how racism manifests around us. These distinctions help us work in solidarity with one another.

Nikitha: The understanding and nuance around the language we use and the labels we choose to carry, or discard, is a small but empowering way for folks to tap into their agency and work to disrupt those structures you mentioned. Further, taking the time to understand the etymology of the words we use equally helps us understand how language is connected to our rights. Specific language is embedded within the legal apparatus, and therefore the explicit use of certain terms guarantees access to rights and services. I think sometimes we take language for granted, but as you've pointed out, Milan, intentional word use can have very meaningful consequences.

How do we move the anti-racism dial forward?

Milan: I see the act of dismantling systemic racism as collaborative. Here's what I mean by this: while the voices and actions of those affected by racism should be elevated and empowered to drive change, the work to achieve this is required by everyone.

With that said, I see our role at the Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Office as a place that helps create the conditions and environment for members to move racial justice work forward in ways that are impactful to them. It's also a place that can help elevate members voices in ongoing, consistent, and meaningful ways.

Nikitha: To build off your ideas, I feel like we all have a role to play, not only in stepping up and contributing, but also empowering those who are doing so within their capacity. Just a second ago, we were talking about the importance of words, and I think one word that is important to our union is **solidarity.** Solidarity is defined as "union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests, as between members of a group or between classes, peoples, etc."[1] Thus, as an office our goal is to act in fellowship to the Federation, which means empowering the members and leadership to make positive change within the organization. •

1 *www.dictionary.com/browse/solidarity*

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Anti-racism in science class

By J. Aaron Anthony (he/him), teacher, West Vancouver

IT MAY SEEM like anti-racism is best left to the humanities, but that is not true. There is an urgent need for anti-racist science teaching. Not only has racism influenced science, but science has been used to install and maintain systemic racism. Because scientific rationality was held up as evidence of European superiority over Indigenous Peoples, there is a strong connection between Western science and violent colonial oppression.

Also known as modern science, or sometimes just science, Western science has been constituted as being opposed to Indigenous ways of understanding nature. The dichotomy between "modern" Europeans and "primitive" Indigenous people is an invention that is meant to rationalize colonialism. Colonial practices have combined presumed objectivity with the absorption of Indigenous knowledge and peoples by right of superiority. The assumption of scientific objectivity and neutrality has provided cover for the subjectification and inferiorization of Indigenous Peoples while benefiting from Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous bodies. An anti-racist and anti-colonial science education must acknowledge that by reinforcing notions of "proper" modern scientific inquiry the local knowledges and practices of colonized peoples are assigned the status of "backward, uncivilized, and premodern."

Historically, biologists, including geneticists, have been complicit with colonial and racist ideology. Charles Darwin himself wrote his impactful works on evolution within a racist environment. He tried very hard to prove an evolutionary cause for racial categories. Darwin had a theory called "constitutions selection." As the theory goes, variations on skin colour among the races correlated to resistance to diseases endemic to the places where a particular race was predominant. For example, he thought that dark skin may have been related to resistance to tropical diseases, such as yellow fever. Despite resourcefully making use of racial health data provided to him by British Navy doctors, he could not prove his theory.

A century earlier, Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish taxonomist, not only took advantage of Indigenous knowledge to invent the classification and naming systems for organisms used by scientists to this day, but he also divided humanity into four racial categories: Europeans, Africans, Native Americans, and Asians. Linnaeus also ascribed personality traits to those racial categories. Unsurprisingly, Europeans were ascribed the most virtuous traits, such as "active" and "inventive," while the other races were disparaged as being "foolish," "obstinate," "melancholy," and so forth. The same racist ideas were then used to justify colonialism. The thinking was that it was in

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humanity's best interest for Indigenous races to give way to superior Europeans.

In science class, examples of how racism has influenced science and vice versa are opportunities to engage with the core competencies. Students can engage in critical thinking when challenging and decentring colonial knowledge hierarchies. They can practise communicating by having courageous conversations and discussions about race. And they work on personal and social development by building their understanding of racial identity. These core competencies are common across all subject areas.

How can we implement these core competencies through anti-racism education in science class? As a settler and the son of immigrants from Fiji, a former British colony, I have to reconcile or rethink my relationship to these Indigenous territories. My people were not invited here by the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, or Qayqayt. Rather, our presence was facilitated and approved by the colonial Canadian government. As a teacher, I am committed to doing my part to "build student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect," as put forth in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 63rd Call to Action. There is a curricular competency that relates to that. It asks us to "apply First Peoples perspectives and knowledge, other ways of knowing, and local knowledge as sources of information." It has been challenging for me to give students adequate opportunities to engage with it, but over the past few years, I have made some progress.

A breakthrough insight for me was that "First Peoples perspectives and knowledge" includes the perspectives of First Peoples about how they use science and how they are affected by uses of science. Therefore, I should include Indigenous perspectives on science, as well as traditional knowledge. According to the Indigenous scientist Kim Tallbear (Sisseton-Whpeton Oyate), the various elements of science must start with "the lives, experiences, and interpretations of marginalized subjects."[1] Dr. Tallbear's particular expertise is in how genetic science is co-constituted with notions of race and indigeneity.

In Science 10, one big idea, and the one that is related to biology, is that "DNA is the basis for the diversity of living things." You could say that this big idea refers to DNA as the basis of the diversity of different organisms, such as octopuses and sword ferns. However, the word diversity is often colloquially used in reference to racial diversity among humans. Therefore, this is a valuable opportunity for teachers and students to grapple with persistent genetic conceptions of race.

There is actually no genetic basis for socially constructed racial categories. Even though the superficial physical traits associated with the races have genetic causes, human genetic variation as a whole does not fit well into racially defined groups. That is because race and races are socially constructed, meaning that they are products of social thought and relations.

These class conversations can be difficult though. For example, when I highlighted the prevalence of the genetic condition known as sickle cell anemia in Black populations, it may have made students overestimate how much genes have to do with race.

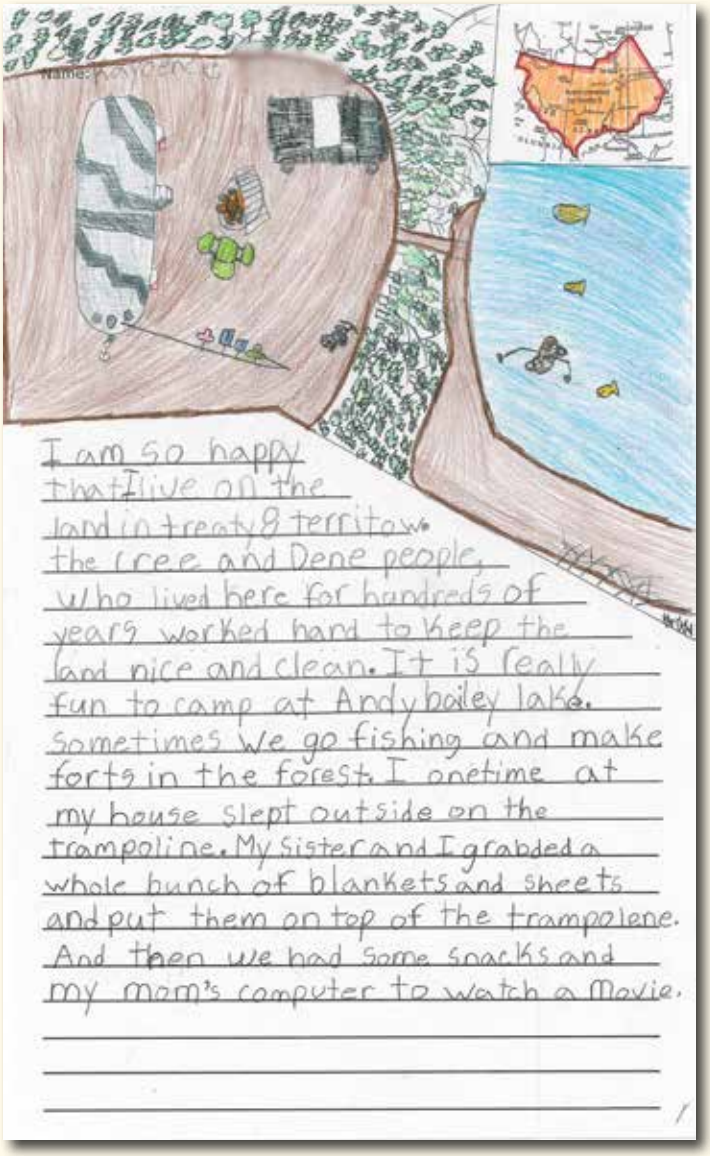
To complicate things, direct-to-consumer genetic tests are often used to determine ancestry. In some cases, genetics could inaccurately determine a person's belonging to a particular ethnic and/or Indigenous group. These issues, which students may have experienced, are fertile grounds for discussing how science is used to construct race.

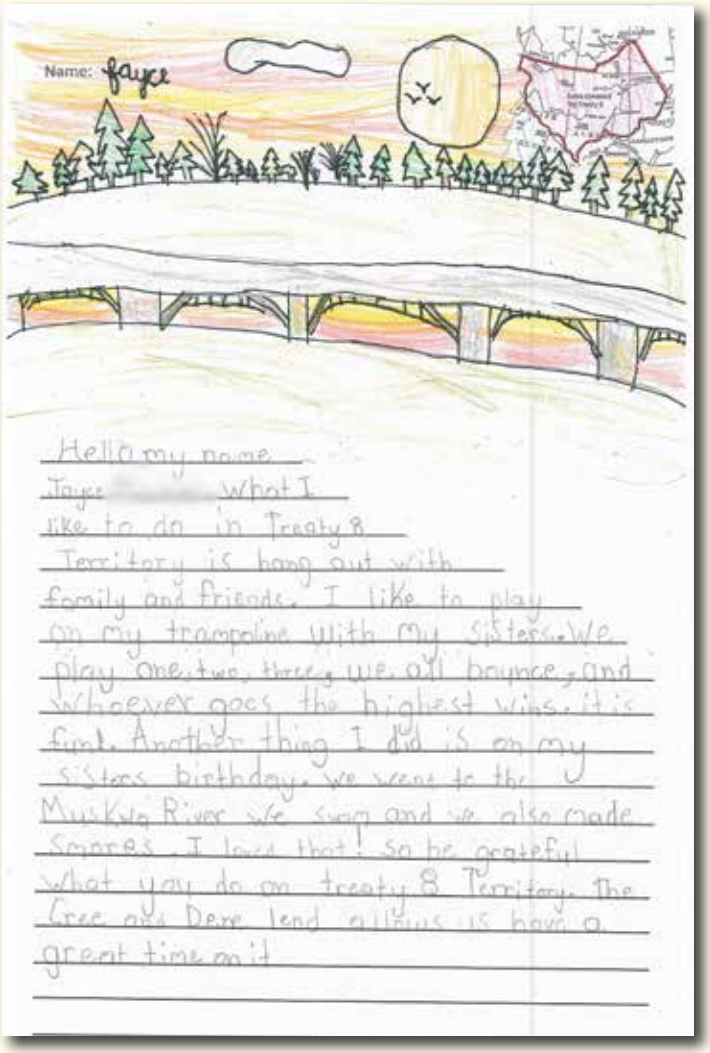
According to Cree scientist Jessica Kolopenuk, it is necessary to not only critique race as a social construction, but to critically consider the ways that it orders biorelations between bodies and also within them.

Race is not genetic, but race is biological due to the disparate health experiences of racialized people. Biology provides some of the strongest evidence of racism. In the US, where racial health data is commonly collected, race is more correlated to health than it is to genetic diversity. The spread of tuberculosis among Indigenous populations because of the horrid living conditions brought on by the *Indian Act* is another example of how race is biological.

These examples of the biology of race versus scientifically dubious genetic conceptions of race provide opportunities for students to have courageous conversations about race (communication) and to build their understanding of racial identities. Exposing students to the perspectives of Indigenous scientists, such as Dr. Tallbear and Kolopenuk, allow students to "apply First Peoples perspectives and knowledge" while learning about DNA and diversity. Critical thinking about the role that science has had in racist ideology and how science can be used to disrupt racism is beneficial to all students because those activities can disrupt misconceptions about racial hierarchy and promote the development of science identities for diverse students. •

1 Kim Tallbear, "Standing With and Speaking as Faith: A Feminist-Indigenous Approach to Inquiry," *Journal of Research Practice*, Vol. 10, No. 2, July 1, 2014, p. 17: *jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/download/405/407*





Student land acknowledgments

By Coreen Loe, teacher, southern most Dehcho Dene community in northeastern BC, Treaty 8 Territory

THE STUDENTS in my Grade 3–4 class have been learning about local Indigenous cultures of the Cree and Dene speaking people in Treaty 8 Territory, the northeastern part of BC. Students have learned about the important connection that Cree and Dene people have to the land, so it was fitting to for them to learn about land welcomes and land acknowledgments.

The students spent time learning about how local Indigenous people cared for this land, long before any of us lived in our current homes: they didn't over hunt the animals, kept the water and land clean, always gave back to the land by respecting it, and only took what they needed from the land, such as plants, animals, wood, etc. Once that understanding was there, students could begin grasping the idea that there were people who lived here for hundreds of years, and that they all took good care of the land.

By going through the process of brainstorming and working collaboratively to decide what is important to each of them, students were able to write their own personalized land acknowledgments, some of which are included here.

The students have been offering land welcomes/acknowledgments at monthly assemblies and special events within our school environment. My hope is that by understanding that Indigenous Peoples have been living in this area for many years, students will gain a genuine appreciation of the local Indigenous communities. This is one small step toward reconciliation. •

Student land acknowledgments clockwise from top left: Kaydence, Jayce, Jaxson, Olivia, Marisol, Jackson. Students and parents have consented to the printing of these acknowledgments.

Hi my name is Jaxon
and I is lives in Treaty 8
Territory Cree and Dene I'm 8 years old
and I like to go hiking with my aunty at
Muncho Lake. We have a cabin and a nice
trail to walk on That's why I like to live in
Treaty 8 Territory

The grass, leaves,
dirt and snow I walk on is
part of the Treaty 8 Territory
where the Cree and Dene people
live. I am proud to live in such a beautiful
place. But we need to respect where we live
and rember that the animals were here first.
But what I do on the land is that in the
winter me and my friends go build snow
forts. Plus in the summer me, Mike and
my mom go camping and we roast
marshmallows.

At the Hot Springs I found tadpoles
at the cold end. I bike all around the
Hot Springs. I make a fire and roast marsh mellows
to make smores with my brother and friends I
love Treaty 8 Territory and am thankful for the
Cree and Dene people who lived here before me.

My name is Nariel.
I live on Treaty 8 Territory
I love to go hiking with my dad in the
wilderness in the mountains. We
usually go hiking near Summit Lake
I am grateful we live where the
Cree and Dene people did for hundreds of

“So often, the question ‘Where are you from?’ signals othering, as though you don’t truly belong here and now.”

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, members involved in the BIPOC 2050 Project have hosted gatherings for BIPOC members from across the province. These gatherings were intended to:

- listen to BIPOC teachers in a space that does not require convincing or rationalizing.
- create platforms and places where BIPOC teachers’ voices were foregrounded.
- invite critical perspectives about social justice discourses and practices within the BCTF.

These meeting spaces were not to obligate teachers to speak about trauma, to offer proof that racism exists, or to burden them with the responsibility of “doing” anti-racism work. Rather, the aim of the 2050 sessions was to create an affinity space to gather and be in each others’ company in a welcoming union space.

Teachers were invited to share their stories through poetry, artwork, and artifacts. Teachers brought artifacts to these meeting spaces that revealed something about their identity, experience, and/or contributions as a BIPOC teacher in BC. They shared their stories with one another in community and listened in solidarity.

Drawing inspiration from George Ella Lyon’s poem, “Where I’m From,” and the I Am From Project, participants were invited to write a poem speaking to the question “Where are you from?” Using a template, participants wrote a counter poem celebrating their histories, communities, memories, and identities.

The framing of this poem is powerful and important. So often, the question “Where are you from?” signals othering, as though you don’t truly belong here and now. The response poems follow the prompt “Where I am from.” In this way, the speaker makes a statement as the subject of the poem, rather than the object of a question.

While sharing poems, artwork, and artifacts were welcome at these events, they were not a requirement. Being together in community to celebrate joy, power, victory, and solidarity was the aspirational hope of these gatherings.

Some teachers provided their informed consent to publicly share their poetry; those poems are included on the pages that follow.

I am from black culture
From Ajono drinking population
I am from cattle keepers
and rural home background
I am from the drummers' clan
Music as a means
I am from the spear and shield
from Irarak people
who address most issues through story and song.

Where I am from

POETRY AND REFLECTIONS FROM THE BIPOC 2050 PROJECT

I am from Manila, Winnipeg, and Vancouver
from beautiful morena skin and butterfly-sleeved dresses
I am from a home filled with dogs, birds, my pet duck and pig
I am from mangoes and sampaguitas
whose sweet smells filled the neighbourhood and my belly
I am from "tabos" and "outside showers"
cleansing and comforting our bodies and souls
from my lola and lolo, feeding me fried chicken and pancit every Tuesday
and from "mano po" food pushers
unyielding hospitality, sometimes aggressive
From faith in the good of the world
humour, positivity
I am from throwing large handas
Big parties full of food, joy, more food, and karaoke
Sweet spaghetti and Jollibee
from Debut, our own version of quinceañera
from Todos los Santos, our day to honour and listen to our ancestors
sugared buttered pan de sal, eaten every day after school for merienda.

“It felt special. It felt scary. It felt important. It felt sacred. It felt new. It felt needed.”

Members shared that the BIPOC 2050 Project created a connection and space of kinship

Carolina Ganga

I am from hummingbird and wildrose
I am from steel drums and fresh baked bread
from safe teddy bear friends
I am from a place of quiet solitude and inspiration
And brothers who walked with me on my path
I am a lady slipper
who defiantly grows, even in the snow
I am from round roti lesson and never-ending piano practice
From the McNeils and Andrew clans, from the lost at sea
ancestors from the Ganga dynasty
and from roots set deep in time
and intruding on land that is not mine
and never was
from patiently examining what it means to be a good ancestor
I am from goddess Ganga and golden canola fields
shimmering under bright blue skies
from aloo and chana and turkey dinners
from enslaved peoples with lost histories
and from Mongroo Ram & Harrilal & Geria Ganga
from soccer games and tea parties
I am from the moments of existing in the middle
never fully fitting here, never fully fitting there...
My existence is resistance
I am from steel drums
endless sugarcane fields and canola fields
shimmering under bright blue skies
I am patiently examining what it means to be a good ancestor
I exist.

Musherure

I am from banana growing community
from drinking milk and eating matooke
I am from Rwemiyonga, the land of plenty
and surrounded by loving neighbours
I am from avocado tree
Which stands strong
I am from rearing cows bare-footed
from Muruga and Bahindi
who love to run and talk
and dance and sing
I am from chant and worship
while mingling millet
A skill passed on
by Bizimu my legendary grandmother
I am from moments of joy, laughter, and fun.

iStock.com/sources

Y

I am from an old wooden broken piano
from glasses and coin wallet
I am from the quietest place during the day
small two bedroom apartment
shared rooms
huge pine tree in the front yard
guardian protecting my family home
I am from sticker book, the only thing I brought with me from my country
with my ABC booklet in my other hand
from hard working and calm
from letting go of emotions
Going to Christian church, Sunday and at-home services
from kimchi and samgyupsal
from ancestors fighting in war to protect our country
riding a bike to show their granddaughter
polly pocket doll
I am from the moments of keeping my Tamagotchi alive.

Rick Kumar

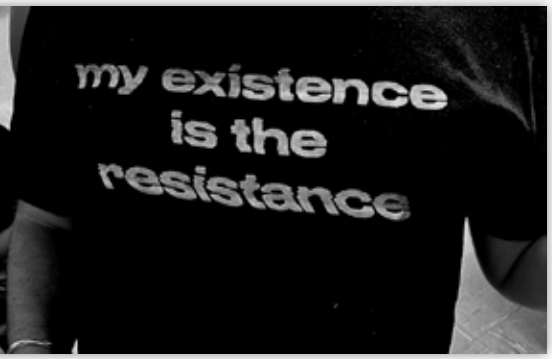
I am Hanrick Maharaj Kumar, but you can call me Rick
I am from the 20lbs rice sack that sat in the corner of the kitchen
From the piece of oblong jade my mother bought during a Saturday adventure to
North Vancouver
I am from the peeling and breaking stucco surrounding the warmth of home
and the uneven steps that lead to the backdoor
I am from the pair of pear trees in the background
Fruit, freshly sweet, nectar on my lips
I am from mango flavoured penny candies
and the mortar and pestle we used to grind spice
And from working 'til my fingers stung
taking on the world's inconveniences.

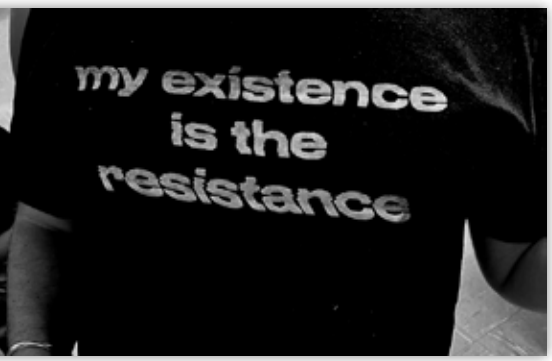
"The takeaway from this experience is that our mere existence is important and space is important. Participants needed a space to be amongst each other safely, rather than focusing on providing products for people to consume."

Chiana Martine

I am from mom's sewing machine
from Dutch cheese and Ikea couches
I am from cozy, made for two,
Opa and Oma right upstairs
I am from blackberry bushes
whose rough fingers scratched my knees
I am from PS2s and Walmart jeans
from Agnes and Dirk, Carol and George
from "Do you want coffee?"
I am from a wild head of curls and a wilder heart,
from winding canals and the deep Southern heat
I am from storybooks and jammies on Christmas eve
from pannenkoeken and sweet potato pie,
I am from the moments cuddled in my mama's arms
held tight and knowing I am loved.

"There has never been a space like this."





I'm me, be you

A free-verse monologue on identity, representation, and self

by Rick Kumar (he/him), teacher, Surrey

I WAS INTRIGUED by the simplicity, and so, when my best friend, Calvin "Kalvonix" Tiu, told me the name of his new album, I was curious. We like the cinematography of Nicolas Winding Refn films, the thrill of ghost hunting, and the sound that music has when played on vinyl. Growing up alongside one another I sometimes forget he has a disability. He has cerebral palsy and sure, he's short, so what, I'm tall. He rolls in a wheelchair and I walk. He raps and I write poetry. Maybe that one isn't too different at all. He's Filipino and I'm Fijian. He is him, and I am me. So when he said his album is going to be called "I'm Me, Be You," I hit an interesting new juncture in what my identity meant. It seemed all too simple.

Something something we're the sum of all parts, or something like that. My identity is defined by my relationship to Cal, to my family, my partner, my work, but who really am I? At the BIPOC 2050 Project event I participated in, I wrote a poem and realized that I am the roti that I eat. Or perhaps the Hindu celebrations I get ready for. I surely must be the "nice" biscuits that sit out on a plate in front of me that I'm not allowed to touch until our visiting family have eaten their fill. If not that, I am the smell of incense and the feeling of safety that came from holding my mother's scarf as we lined up at the temple. So many strangers, superstitions, and traditions, and in it was my little fist grasping my mother's flowing scarf.

Isn't it funny how we can teach so much, but know so little? I wonder how many Fijians have been in this room. How many Pacific Islanders? I wonder how many Mauritians, how many Trinidadians, how many South African Indians sat in this room. How many people were torn from their homeland and sent somewhere else they couldn't come back from? Where we all went there is no *Ancestry.com* for, no map back. I envy those who descended from John A. MacDonald. Not because he was any such person deserving of admiration or exaltation, but because that hard black line is straight and clear.

Their heritage is written in pen, and mine in pencil.

One day I might find out, for now I must be content with knowing that I am what I was made to be. A product of India, Fiji, Canada, of poverty and providence, of caste systems and hierarchy abolitionists, of labour and disruption, of good troublemaking and of being the son of inconvenience. I am as the world made me and as my culture and threads of heritage shaped me, and if these broad shoulders were made for anything good it was to widen the path as I move forward so those who come after can walk a little easier.

This room wasn't built for me, but that doesn't mean I won't make it my home. I will scrape together each scrap, each torn quilt, each woven strand, build my nest and then change these walls. Paint them with my colours and the colours I hadn't seen here before. As I sit in these hallowed halls, I wonder how many Fijians sat here. I think back on Cal, he would say that it's time to be me. When I'm spiraling on tangents, he always knows what to say. I figure he must be right. So, I "be me." I wear my flags, my causes I champion, and I sit here and think that it's okay because even if they didn't sit here before, they're sitting here now, I'm sitting here now.

I feel better knowing that.

Today I lament, tomorrow I will be the inspirational quote on the wall to another life, and then one day they'll become the person who they needed to see. The four seasons pass and come to pass again. •

Photo provided by
BIPOC 2050 Project members

The burden of representation

By **Litia Fleming,** teacher, Rossland

STANDING OUT as the only person of colour in a room is not a new experience for me. I attended a predominately white high school, and am from a predominately white family. However, I am biracial and visibly not white. Though I was always aware of the ways in which I looked different than my white classmates, I lived in Vancouver growing up and didn't feel hypervisible. Now, I teach in a rural community as one of only a few BIPOC teachers in the district. My hypervisibility, and the burden of representation I place on myself, have never been more acute.

Every year, early in the school year, students inevitably ask me if I am black. The first time I answered this question, my response was beyond what my students could grasp. I've workshopped my answer over the years, so I am ready to engage in a conversation with students about identity, and layers of identity, when this question comes up. Now, I find this conversation is a starting point for learning about identity throughout the year.

Identity is a big piece of my anti-racism pedagogy. So often, in communities like mine where the demographic is predominately white, conversations about racism and anti-racism are completely omitted from wider discourse. Whether it is in community spaces or school spaces, very few people and very few resources are committed to anti-racism because it is viewed as irrelevant to the wider population. However, many of the Grade 8 students I teach are consuming culture online that is not their own culture. While this is a very normal practice in today's ever-connected world, it becomes problematic when students are not aware of their own positionality in relation to the culture they consume and sometimes reproduce.

So how do we engage students in conversations about positionality, anti-racism, and identity?

"The labour of anti-racism work is not and should not be the sole responsibility of BIPOC folks. However, we often take on this responsibility because we are the ones with the most to lose..."

I think the first step is relationship building. I make an effort to acknowledge students' thoughts and feelings even if I find them problematic. By doing so, students know I view them as intelligent individuals with unique opinions and valid feelings. We focus on growing together and learning about why and how some of their ideas may be problematic through an open dialogue that is judgment-free and grounded in empathy.

I also find connections to anti-racism across all subjects and learning opportunities, including media and culture that students consume outside of my classroom. It's important for students to see the breadth and scope of anti-racism work, and how it applies to all facets of their lives.

This generation is the most identity-aware generation yet. They are interested in figuring out who they are and encouraging each other to be their authentic selves. They are open to learning if we as teachers are willing to step into the uncomfortable spaces of facilitating challenging conversations. They need the prompt to begin thinking about anti-racism, but once the conversation is on the table, they are open-minded and engaged.

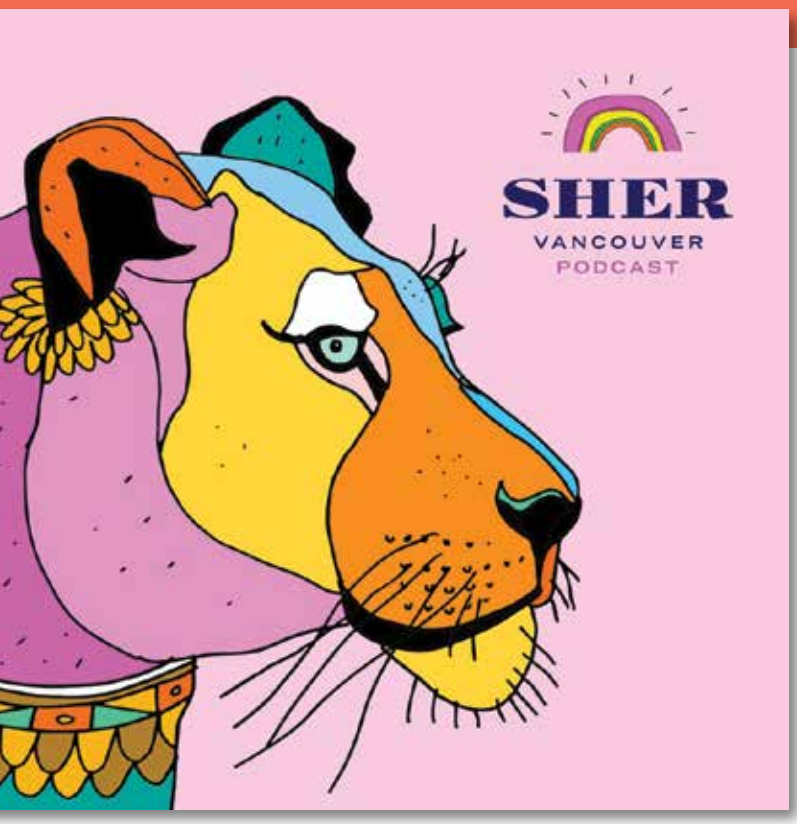
I find I have a much harder time approaching conversations about racism and anti-racism with adults than I do with students, even if both groups have similar experiences and knowledge of BIPOC stories and experiences. I take it more personally when an adult has opinions that are racist or homophobic compared to a student with similar opinions. Even still, I take on this work with adults when I can because, in my small community, I know these conversations will not happen unless someone makes a concerted effort to initiate them.

This is the burden of representation. The labour of anti-racism work is not and should not be the sole responsibility of BIPOC folks. However, we often take on this responsibility because we are the ones with the most to lose if anti-racism is not woven into our work, our community, and our peer groups.

Leading the way in anti-racism can be a lonely experience. Already, in many predominately white communities, BIPOC teachers can have a hard time finding belonging and connection. I often search outside my community to find opportunities to connect with other BIPOC teachers who can validate my experiences, share my ideas, and empower my work. The BIPOC 2050 Project has been a source of community and strength for me. It's a space where I don't feel the burden of representation.

The work of anti-racism belongs to everyone. As teachers, we have to start these conversations with our students and colleagues so we can bring change to our communities. The omission of race from any type of conversation in education is a form of racism. We must talk about it in order to change it. •

Sher Vancouver Podcast:
Celebrating queer and trans BIPOC stories



By Sharon (she/her), teacher by day, podcaster by night, Surrey

AS EDUCATORS, it is our hope that all students and staff feel comfortable and safe at school. With the inclusion of SOGI in the BC curriculum, we have seen a positive change in our schools. There are many gestures that allow queer and trans students to feel safe in schools, such as pride stickers, pride flags, gender-neutral washrooms, and Gay Straight Alliances. However, sometimes it feels that all this comes alive only during Pride Month in June. How about the other nine months at school? What are we doing to support, include, and celebrate queer and trans folks on a regular basis?

I wanted to learn more about what I could do as a teacher to celebrate and honour students and colleagues. This is why Neery, the podcast's co-host, and I sat and chatted with both a Surrey school educator and Surrey school student to learn more about their commitment to inclusion and celebration of queer and trans folks beyond Pride Month. We are two queer South Asian cis women on a mission to celebrate and uplift queer and trans BIPOC (QTBIPOC) folks in our local community to create positive change.

I am one of the co-hosts for the Sher Vancouver Podcast. The Sher Vancouver podcast is a safe space for BIPOC 2SLGBTQ+ individuals and allies. When we learned about the amazing work happening in our community to advocate for and create safe spaces for QTBIPOC people, we knew we absolutely needed to highlight and celebrate it.

For one episode, we spoke with Annie Ohana, a proud public school educator and Indigenous Department Head at LA Matheson Secondary. Annie is an anti-oppression curriculum specialist and devoted community activist. She founded and directs Mustang Justice, an anti-oppression and justice-oriented youth service leadership group, which is now in its 10th year. Annie challenges educators and says, "If we are not teaching to transform, then why are we teaching?" After this episode, I felt fired up and wanted to dive deep into more activism work within my school and community. Annie has inspired me to be more visible and to be a support system for students in my school.

In addition, we also spoke with Finn Liu, a transgender and Chinese high school student who is on a mission to spread awareness and inclusion for trans-identifying individuals within the Asian community. Currently in Grade 11 at Fraser Heights Secondary, Finn is heavily involved in and out of school and in extracurriculars defying a typical high school student's schedule. Finn's resiliency and driven attitude is what got him selected to speak at TEDx Surrey 2023 as the youngest speaker!

Speaking with Finn, I felt so much hope for our future generations. Finn speaks about changing the narrative of queer and trans folks being victims, and instead focusing on celebrating the successes and joys of queer and trans individuals. Finn shares steps on how we can break down barriers and work toward better trans inclusion in our schools. Our students can be encouraged by our smallest gestures, such as a small pride sticker on our doors. Finn shares how educators can continue to better support all students in schools to ensure safe and thriving environments for all. If you want to learn how you can better support your queer and trans students at school, I highly recommend tuning into this episode to get a student's perspective on how we are doing.

It's time to inspire more change for the better.

You can find Finn and Annie's episodes on the Sher Vancouver podcast, along with several other great episodes highlighting the stories, experiences, and voices of QTBIPOC activists and community leaders, on ***shervanpodcast.com***. You can also find us wherever you listen to podcasts. •

Beyond the calendar:

Teaching holidays through themes for cultural understanding and empathy

By **J. Yuen** (she/her), teacher, Richmond

"By focusing on the theme ... rather than individual holidays, you can help your students appreciate the diversity of cultural traditions while also finding commonalities that connect different cultures."

GROUPING HOLIDAYS by themes can be a great way to teach about different cultural traditions and celebrations in a more comprehensive and meaningful way. When compared to teaching individual holidays throughout the year, theme groupings can allow teachers to create a more inclusive classroom community that celebrates cultural traditions in a holistic and integrated way. Here are some examples of how holidays can be grouped by themes:

Harvest festivals

This theme can include holidays such as Thanksgiving, Sukkot, and the Mid-Autumn Festival, which all celebrate the bountiful harvest season.

Spring celebrations

Several cultures celebrate the arrival of spring and the renewal this brings. This theme can include holidays such as Easter, Passover, Nowruz, and Holi.

Light festivals

The use of lights as symbols of hope and celebration bridge cultures from across the globe. Light festivals include holidays such as Diwali, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa.

New year celebrations

This theme can include holidays such as Chinese New Year, Rosh Hashanah, and Janmashtami, which all mark the start of a new year according to different calendars.

Day of the dead celebrations

Holidays such as Día de los Muertos in Mexico, Chuseok in Korea, and Obon in Japan all honour and remember deceased ancestors.

Winter solstice celebrations

This theme can include holidays such as Christmas, Yule, and Dongzhi, which all celebrate the longest night of the year and the return of longer days.

This approach of grouping holidays by theme can help to promote cultural awareness, respect, and empathy among students. A popular theme that some teachers use for winter holidays is the theme of lights. Here are some ideas for how to incorporate this theme into your classroom across different subject areas. A similar approach could be used for any of the theme groupings listed above.

Introduction

Begin by introducing the theme of lights as a common element across different winter holidays. Explain how different cultures use light as a symbol of hope, joy, and peace during the darkest time of the year.

Research

Ask your students to research different winter holidays that involve the use of lights, such as Hanukkah, Diwali, Kwanzaa, and Christmas. Encourage them to explore the origins, customs, and traditions of each holiday.

Art projects

Have your students create art projects related to the theme of lights, such as making paper lanterns, designing holiday cards with lights, or creating a class collage of different types of lights.

Storytelling

Read stories or folktales related to winter holidays and the theme of lights, such as the story of Hanukkah, the legend of Diwali, or the history of Christmas lights.

Music and dance

Have your students learn traditional songs and dances related to different winter holidays, such as the Hora dance for Hanukkah, the Bhangra dance for Diwali, or Christmas carols.

Culinary traditions

Encourage your students to explore the culinary traditions of different winter holidays that involve lights.

By focusing on the theme of lights, rather than the individual holidays, you can help your students appreciate the diversity of cultural traditions while also finding commonalities that connect different cultures. Similar activities could be used for any of the themes listed above. This approach can promote cultural understanding and empathy, while also making learning more engaging and fun. •

Reflections on teacher identity:
Race, gender, and the struggle for "legitimacy"

By Lucy Yang (she/her) and **Natasha Dandiwal** (she/her), teachers, North Vancouver and Delta

OVER SPRING BREAK, Natasha and I met to catch up—and discuss facets of our teacher identity. We worked together as secondary English teachers in Delta, connecting immediately as women of the IBPOC community. As our careers progressed, we turned to each other for support and collaboration. Our conversations were wonderfully validating, filled with an ease that was refreshing and welcome. This came from a deep understanding and appreciation of the affordances and challenges of teaching as women of Asian descent. This conversation focused on cultural and professional identities, things we have both had to balance throughout our careers.

Having come to Canada as a child, I have always been aware of the hybridity of my cultural identity as a one-and-a-half generation immigrant, where the rules of the home differed from and often contradicted the rules of public spaces, such as schools. Students like me learned to code switch, linguistically and culturally, based on what was appropriate and expected in particular contexts. Learning these different codes of behaviour was our responsibility, and there was an obligation and pressure to demonstrate cultural competence that aligned with mainstream values and norms, while maintaining the home language and culture.

When I started training as a teacher candidate as a young East Asian woman, the necessity to demonstrate such cultural competence and legitimacy became immediately apparent, to "off-set" prevailing narratives of my race and gender. On the first day at my practicum school, I was mistaken by a staff member as an international student. One of my fellow teacher candidates, a Caucasian man in a suit, was taken to be the new vice-principal.

In terms of cultural identity, I am hyperaware of narratives of the docile East Asian woman. Negotiating and challenging stereotypes of passivity often require the use of external markers of legitimacy and authority as designated by dominant Anglo-Canadian and patriarchal norms. For example, I may speak slowly and loudly, consciously deepening my voice while adhering strictly to the local accent, to assure students and staff that "despite" my ethnicity and associated

MY BACKGROUND is in both English and social studies; however, I have noticed a difference in how I and my pedagogical approaches have been perceived in both areas. My ability, knowledge, and experience have not been questioned when teaching social studies. That has not been the case when it comes to teaching English. During our café chat, Lucy and I came to the conclusion that our approaches being questioned could be because two Asian women are teaching English, the language of the colonizer. It is not our ancestral language; our families were forced to learn and adapt to the language, not by choice, but by necessity, in order to survive the complexities of the world. Therefore, having an IBPOC person teach that language is in conflict with the perceptions of colonial society, and this creates an environment where we can be questioned on our pedagogical intent.

Many years ago, I came across a situation where I had difficulty in engaging a group of international students. I approached the school's international co-ordinator and her response was unexpected: the students told her that they had come to Canada to learn English from a "Canadian," not an "Indian."

Recently, I was questioned by parents on why my English pedagogical focus was on diverse texts dealing with IBPOC issues, why I was approaching it through an anti-racism and social justice lens, and if I would be presenting opposing viewpoints. This was after senior students were asked to reflect on their intersectionalities, how they were privileged in society, and asked to question the systemic and institutionalized discrimination that exists. My pedagogical approach was to focus on Indigenous authors and authentic stories, look at the stereotypes that are present in fairy tales and nursery rhymes, and critique Shakespeare's *Othello.* I stated that everything was thoroughly checked to ensure that my lessons aligned with Ministry standards and BCTF recommendations. This was emotionally difficult for me, as I was aware that many of my White colleagues were teaching and approaching the subject in a similar manner. We had collaborated together on the lessons, content,

"...my cultural identity, combined with the entry-level associations of teaching on call, compound the need to anticipate and resist assumptions."

assumptions, I have a justifiable claim to my position as an English teacher. However, this type of justification is more a reinforcement of established narratives and structures than it is a challenge to the inherently problematic nature of legitimizing one set of norms and values over another. Why should, for example, speaking in higher pitches or with an unfamiliar accent be any less authoritative?

Having recently changed school districts and positions, I find myself on a journey of re-establishment and relegitimization of my teacher identity in new spaces and roles. Working as a teacher teaching on call, my cultural identity, combined with the entry-level associations of teaching on call, compound the need to anticipate and resist assumptions. Moreover, there is often an expectation of a linear and unidirectional movement in teaching: from on-call, temporary, part-time, to eventually full-time permanent work. Any reversal of this order, especially to teaching on call, needs to be explained and justified at the request of administrators and colleagues. In fact, in some school districts in BC, a reversal is not allowed—once a teacher has attained a permanent position, they cannot subsequently choose to work on call, unless they resign and reapply.

I wonder what this suggests about how we view and value different teaching roles and identities, and to what extent this unidirectional movement in the teaching career reflects the kind of work ethic and culture epitomized in the past. Perhaps it would be beneficial to rethink this structure to better support today's teachers and their multifaceted professional identities.

Photos provided by authors

and assessment. Yet, my colleagues' pedagogical approaches were not questioned. Why was it that I had to justify myself? How could I not consider that the colour of my skin played a role?

Experiences like this take a toll on IBPOC bodies. We begin questioning our abilities, questioning whether we have the right to teach the way we do, we begin to overcompensate by going beyond what is expected of us. I have become hyperaware of my surroundings and my interactions with colleagues, students, and parents. I feel as though I have to justify and prove that I am worthy, when my credentials should be enough. While we as a profession have autonomy over our pedagogical approaches, that I as a POC do not have the same level of autonomy as my White peers.

I have been teaching for 18 years across three provinces. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, a Bachelor of Education in Secondary Education with specialization in social studies and English, and a Master of Education in Equity Studies. In each position I have held over the course of my career, I

"...we continue to downplay the prevalence of racism, in all its facets, in our classrooms, in our halls, and in our professional careers."

have directly experienced or witnessed microaggressions and blatant racism from parents, students, and colleagues. This may seem harsh considering there is a concerted effort to incorporate equitable, anti-racism, and social justice principles within education. However, we continue to downplay the prevalence of racism, in all its facets, in our classrooms, in our halls, and in our professional careers. We would like to believe that we are progressive, diverse, and inclusive, but that is not the reality. Many IBPOC educators have to compensate for what we experience, reducing it to a moment that we should ignore, despite the physical and emotional toll that it takes. Many of us believe that we do not have the same privilege to vent frustrations, in fear that our actions will solidify our place within the established stereotypes associated with our race. For me, that is the stereotype of being the aggressive, loud, Brown South Asian woman with an agenda.

Change cannot come to fruition until those within the structures of education are educated on the harms and the normality of the racial experiences of IBPOC teachers. But herein lies the problem: teachers are not mandated to participate in anti-racism training. Unfortunately, those who would gain the most from interacting with, learning about, and reflecting on systemic racism within our educational structures are often absent at work-shops and learning opportunities centred on anti-racism. As a result, the changes that many believe have been implemented are left at the surface. So what must we do as educators? How do we ensure the safety and the emotional health of our IBPOC teachers? How do we continue to confront racism without being dismissed as another "loud" or "docile" IBPOC teacher? •

BIPOC 2050 PROJECT PLAYLIST

This playlist was created by the BIPOC 2050 Project team for BCTF members, and it spotlights BIPOC artists whose work touches on themes of challenge, victory, joy, power, and solidarity. Please note that some songs contain profanity/explicit language.

CHALLENGE

Be Free, J.Cole
Blue Lights, Jorja Smith
Don't Shoot, Shea Diamond
How Many, Miguel
Lockdown, Anderson .Paak
Red Sky at Night, Snotty Nose Rez Kids
What's Going On, Marvin Gaye
The Blacker the Berry, Kendrick Lamar
Leave Me Alone, Calypso Rose & Machel Montano (ft. Manu Chao)
Confrontation, Damian Marley
Iron Bars, Stephen Marley
The Virus, The Halluci Nation (ft. Saul Williams)
I Try, Talib Kweli (ft. Mary J. Blige)
Don't Touch My Hair, Solange (ft. Sampha)
Midsummer Madness, 88rising
I Wouldn't Know Any Better Than You, Gentle Bones

VICTORY

Celebration, Kool & the Gang
I Gotta Feeling, Black Eyed Peas
One Moment in Time, Whitney Houston
Respect, Aretha Franklin
Simply the Best, Tina Turner
Something Else, Snotty Nose Rez Kids
Something's Got a Hold on Me, Etta James
Started from the Bottom, Drake
Winning, Santana
About Damn Time, Lizzo
For Once in My Life, Stevie Wonder
Chinese New Year, MC Jin

JOY

Black Habits, D Smoke (ft. Jackie Gouché)
Diamonds, Rihanna
Happy, Pharrell Williams
i, Kendrick Lamar
Juice, Lizzo
Wild Boy, Snotty Nose Rez Kids
Oh Yay, Olatunji
Wonderful, Burna Boy
Africa, Yemi Alade (ft. Sauti Sol)
Bacchanalist, Kerwin Du Bois
Wotless, Kes
Vivir Mi Vida, Marc Anthony
Gotta Be Loving Me, The Hamiltones
Crush, Yuna and Usher
Me to You, Tim Be Told

POWER

Alright, Kendrick Lamar
Boujee Natives, Snotty Nose Rez Kids
Black Happiness, Yoon Mirae
Carry It On, Buffy Sainte-Marie
Freedom, Beyoncé ft. Kendrick Lamar
Glory, Common ft. John Legend
HiiiPower, Kendrick Lamar
Rescue, Yuna
Survivor, Destiny's Child
You Gotta Be, Des'ree
Like ah Boss, Machel Montano
Immigrants (We Get the Job Done), K'NAAN
When Someone Loves You, Tim Be Told

SOLIDARITY

Formation, Beyoncé
Lift Me Up, Rihanna
War Club, DJ Shub (ft. Snotty Nose Rez Kids)
We Are Circling, Buffy Sainte-Marie
BLACK BLACK BLACK, KRS-One
West Indies, Koffee
Sweet Melanin, V'ghn
YAH Know, Chance the Rapper
March Outta Babylon, Anthony B
La Gozadera, Gente de Zona (ft. Marc Anthony)
Goddess Gang, Sa Roc
Put Your Records On, Corinne Bailey Rae

To find the playlist, scan the QR code or visit the link below: *qrco.de/bdwJGu*

iStock.com/fotostorm

What solidarity means to us

By Preet Lidder (she/her), teacher, Burnaby,
and **Shanee Prasad** (she/her), Local President, Burnaby

THE LABOUR RALLYING CRY,

An injury to one, is an injury to all!

has always struck us as strange. If this call to solidarity was true, then perhaps our working conditions would not be typified by racism. As racialized teachers that identify as women, we have sought refuge in our union, because in our working lives we have had to experience one injustice after another. Much of the difficult and uncomfortable work involved in speaking out against racism, demanding resources focused on BIPOC experiences, and fighting for equitable rights and opportunities falls on BIPOC teachers. The net result is acute fatigue, anxiety, and demoralization.

When we advocate for anti-racist and anti-oppressive schools, our work is synonymous with the BCTF's position on better working and learning conditions. The role of racism in shaping working and learning conditions is undeniable, and improving working and learning conditions is at the centre of all union work. Thus, it was natural that we would turn to our union for sanctuary.

It is here where we learned an awful, but necessary truth: racism is systemic, so even our union is not free from it. Governance meeting after governance meeting, workshops, one-to-one interactions, all have the residue of systemic racism. To be tokenized and then dismissed all at once is a grievance that we can not file, yet a violation of human rights law we live with every day. Policy and procedures serve the interest of the dominant group. We then raise the question, "What is solidarity?"

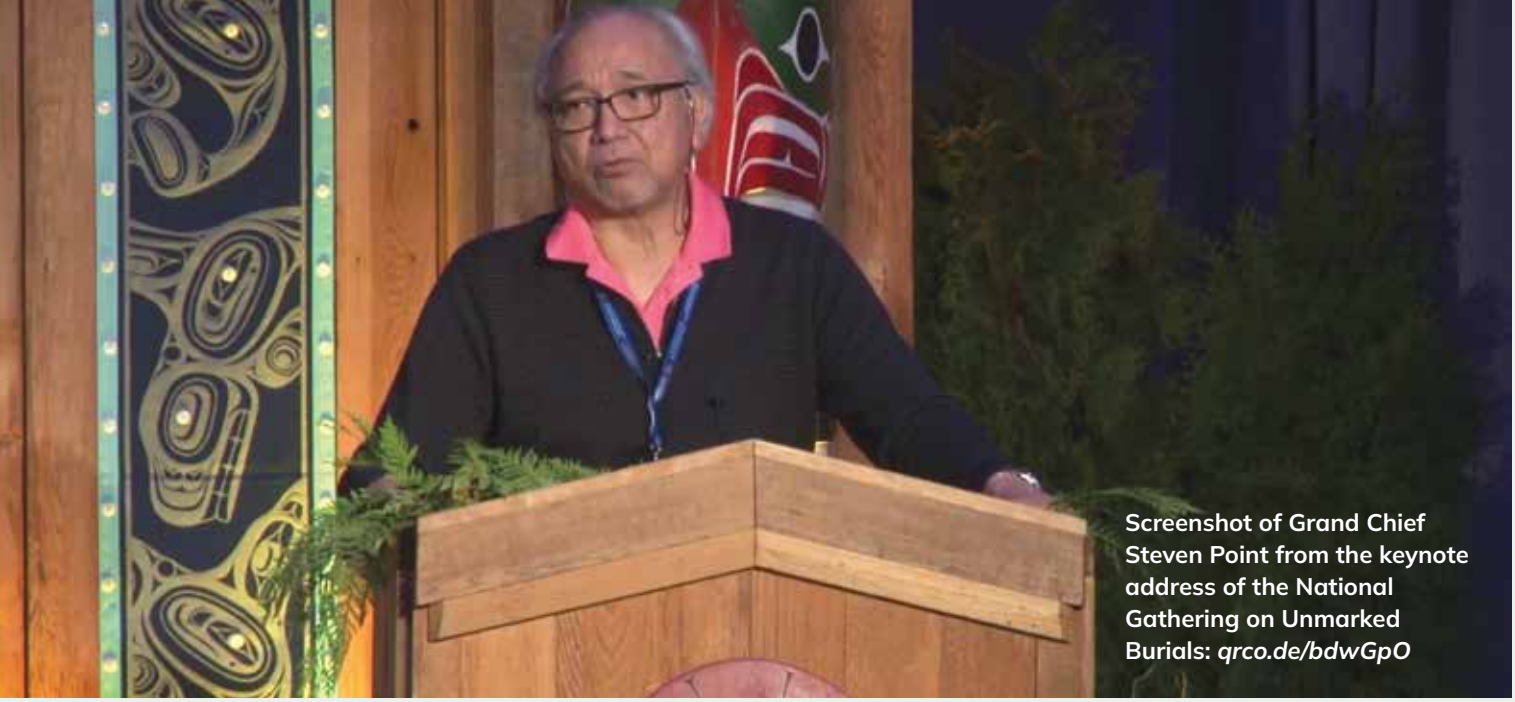
The truth is we all care about our schools; we care about the standard of education in BC, and we know we must do better, as a union and as a province. The only way we are going to do better is to work together, all of us united. The Federation's Commitment to Solidarity lays the framework for what unity and diversity within democracy can look like. The principles of equitable treatment, mutual respect, and safety and dignity for all members are noble ideas that are within reach if we listen to the excluded ones: we are the ones who know how integral solidarity is. Our collective voice is strongest when it includes *all* members. Racism needs to be viewed as an injury to all, not just a misfortune that falls on some.

We are in a better position to achieve the gains we need as teachers when we are anti-racist and anti-oppressive.

This work is guilt-free, shame-free, blame-free; it is about responsibility and accountability. As long-time organizer, educator, and abolitionist Mariame Kaba said in her June 2020 interview with Rebel Steps, "... I don't believe in allyship, and I'm super bored with the concept of performativity. I believe in strugglers and I believe in co-workers and I believe in solidarity."

We seek to show that the injury of oppression is a detriment to all, and we need all hands on deck to be the collective for social justice that we profess to be. •

Photo provided by authors



Screenshot of Grand Chief Steven Point from the keynote address of the National Gathering on Unmarked Burials: *qrco.de/bdwGpO*

Truth telling

By Peggy Janicki, teacher, Mission

DR. NICOLA CAMPBELL eloquently shared, "It is a sacred responsibility to witness, recount, reflect and carry knowledge embodied within Indigenous stories because **they are alive** and the voices and knowledge of our ancestors are embodied within them."[1] My view of Indigenous stories is informed by Dr. Campbell's arguments that stories are medicine. I believe stories can be powerful forms of living medicines, specifically living medicines with *directions.* Stories push us all toward ethical purposes like justice, by way of truth telling, and decolonization. Stories also come with responsibilities.

Justice has had a paradigm shift after the foundational Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc press release in May 2021. Since that first press release, there have been many, *many* press releases sharing research findings from ground-penetrating radar. For that reason, many institutions have recentred their focus on documents like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, and local policy and procedures.

Disappointingly, a group of Indian Residential School denialists have now created an anonymous "research group" that appears to have no credible experts among them and focuses on Indian Residential School denialism. With the rise in denialism, I feel the erasure, specifically, the erasure of my and my families' lived experiences. To say that it is hurtful and harmful is an understatement. Now, more than ever, it is important to keep bringing Indigenous stories into classrooms, libraries, meetings, dialogues, and staffrooms.

For this reason, I feel justice means to *keep* sharing the truth, specifically, that Indian Residential Schools were a key component of genocide in Canada.

Another task that stories give is to decolonize: decolonize our professional spaces; decolonize our curriculum; decolonize our biases. A broad definition of decolonization intertwines two ideas: a time before colonization; and how we were colonized and what that means for our past, present, and future.[2] But a specific definition, as it relates to curriculum, is to *reveal Indigenous resistances*.[3] I have found that this is sometimes difficult to do because some of these stories are held by family or community and not widely shared in mainstream texts. Although, social media, news media, and publishers have shown amazing promise with regards to sharing these new-to-mainstream stories.

It's also important to answer the call of story responsibilities. Campbell "maintains that the continued retelling of stories of despair perpetuates negative stereotypes about Indigenous people."[4] Therefore, it is our responsibility to ensure students have opportunities to engage with stories that depict the beauty, strength, and sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples.

We also have a responsibility to ensure that the resources we share and use in our classrooms are engaged in reciprocity. Reciprocity considers the following: Does the project/idea/approach have a two-way process for learning and research exchange with Indigenous Peoples? Is it co-creating with Indigenous Peoples? Are Indigenous Peoples also benefiting? How does this project give back to Indigenous Peoples or communities once it is complete? These questions are important to consider when evaluating and reviewing stories and resources.

I heard the weight of responsibility in Uncle Steven's words, when I watched him online after the confirmation of the unmarked graves in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, saying:[5]

“The story has to be told over and over again. There needs to be a Mount Rushmore of monuments built to memorialize these children. Because … it should never have happened to begin with.”

– Grand Chief Steven Point

“You and I have an obligation to become the ambassadors and the voice for these children,” and, “[t]he story [of Indian Residential Schools and the children buried there] *has to be too loud*. The story has to be told over and over again. There needs to be a Mount Rushmore of monuments built to memorialize these children. Because … it should never have happened to begin with.”

To tell this story, I wrote a book titled *The Secret Pocket*. It is the true story of my mother, Mary, who attended Lejac Indian Residential School. The story begins with joy, love, and community where the main character, at age four, is cuddled and feels loved. It centres strength-based storytelling and highlights the resistance and ingenuity employed by children at residential schools. For example, the book highlights how my mother, along with other girls, used their ingenuity to design a system to secure their food supply to survive at Lejac Indian Residential School.

To prevent erasure and denialism, I use the word “genocide” in my book. This is important because we are all called to continue telling the truth about Canada’s history. As Dr. Sean Carlton says, “In heeding the calls of the TRC and Indigenous writers such as [Arthur] Manuel and [Lee] Maracle, I believe that we all have much to gain from continuing to put *truth before reconciliation* and learning to work toward justice, decolonization, and our future liberation.”[6] Therefore, I encourage you all to acknowledge the power of stories and to hold space for truth in your classrooms.

Much like ceremonies that end on a happiness round, it is important to state, we [Indigenous Peoples] are still here. I often think of a dear Uncle that reminded us that our responsibility is “to have a good life.” An idea reinforced by Uncle Steven’s words, “that we are here today after the impacts of colonialism.”[7] We are still here. We. Are. Still. Here. •

The Secret Pocket

As an act of reciprocity, 90% of the author’s contract from *The Secret Pocket* go directly to Nak’azdli Whuten Elders Society.

orcabook.com/The-Secret-Pocket

1 N. I. Campbell, “Indigenous storytelling and literary practices,” doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2022, p.167: *open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0422505*
2 L. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed., Zed Books, London, 2012.
3 J. Conrad, “The Big History Project and colonizing knowledges in world history curriculum,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 1–20.
4 N. I. Campbell, “Indigenous storytelling and literary practices,” doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, 2022, p.167.
5 S. Point, “Honouring Children Found in Unmarked Graves: Those that did not Survive Indian Residential School,” keynote address given at the National Gathering on Unmarked Burials: Affirming Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Community Control over Knowledge and Information, Toronto, Ontario: *www.facebook.com/OSIBISinfo/videos/honouring-children-found-in-unmarked-graves-those-that-did-not-survive-indian-re/1395285451219659*
6 S. Carleton, *Lessons in Legitimacy: Colonialism, Capitalism, and the rise of State Schooling in British Columbia*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 2022.
7 S. Point, “Honouring Children Found in Unmarked Graves: Those that did not Survive Indian Residential School,” keynote address given at the National Gathering on Unmarked Burials: Affirming Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Community Control over Knowledge and Information, Toronto, Ontario.

Why representation matters

By **Jen Gage** (she/her), teacher, Vancouver Island

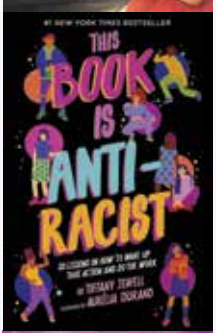
I GREW UP in a suburb of Toronto in the 1980s and 1990s as the daughter of Caribbean immigrants, and the only Black student in my class. I grew up in a time period of racial colourblindness and the United Colors of Benetton ads. After the murder of George Floyd, I began to reflect on my life as a Black female. It finally became clear why I felt invisible for 41 of my 43 years: when people kept telling me that they "didn't see colour," it meant they didn't see me.

Nyah, Grade 5

I have always been an avid reader, but I realized that my home library had very few books with or by people that looked like me. I decided to focus on reading books by BIPOC authors both for myself and for my two biracial daughters so that we could see ourselves represented in words, stories, and characters.

Reading books by BIPOC authors has allowed me to reconnect with my inner child. It has allowed me to see myself in many different roles that I never imagined possible. When I was a kid, I never thought that I could be an author as I was never exposed to Black authors in school.

I want my girls and all BIPOC students to dream big and to know that anything is possible. This is why representation matters. •



RESOURCE LIST

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.
– Maya Angelou

Picture books

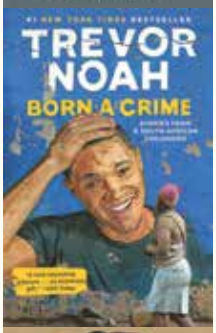
Don't Touch My Hair by Sharee Miller
I Am Enough by Grace Byers
Hair Love by Matthew A. Cherry
Eyes That Kiss in the Corner by Joanna Ho and Dung Ho
The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi

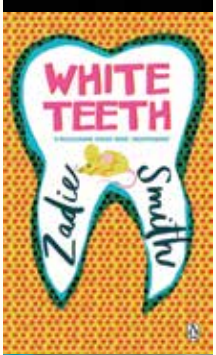
Books about anti-racism

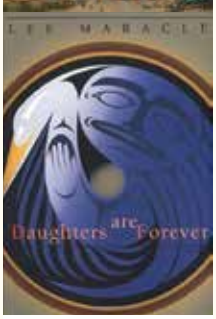
The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person by Frederick Joseph (12+) (Also a great book for adults and comes with an educator's guide online.)
This Book is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action, and Do The Work by Tiffany Jewell
The Antiracist Kid: A Book About Identity, Justice and Activism by Tiffany Jewel

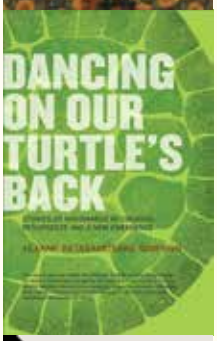
Class read-aloud novels by BIPOC authors

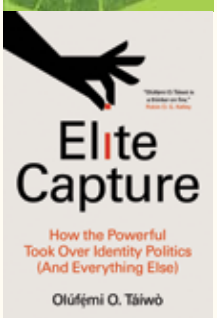
Born A Crime by Trevor Noah
Front Desk by Kelly Yang
Blackbird Fly by Erin Entrada Kelly

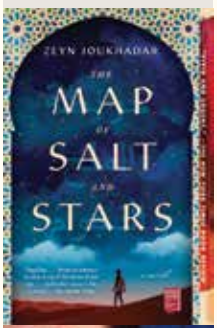


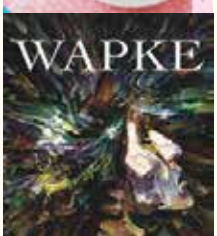












SUMMER READING LIST

BIPOC AUTHORS RECOMMENDED BY BIPOC READERS

RECOMMENDED BY MILAN SINGH

The Map of Salt and Stars by Zeyn Joukhadar

This book is a beautiful mapping of two parallel journeys by Nour and Rawiya across geographies, histories, and mythology. Through the eyes of Nour, we learn about the hardship, joy, and resilience of a young woman and her family as they leave Syria as refugees to New York.

Dancing on Our Turtle's Back by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

Simpson provides readers with a generous and poetic mapping of Anishinaabe teachings, histories, and experiences as an approach toward Indigenous cultural resurgence and resistance.

RECOMMENDED BY CHIANA VAN KATWIJK

White Teeth by Zadie Smith

I love this book because it addresses the complexities and joys of growing up in a biracial family, and how our parents' life experiences colour and shape who we are.

RECOMMENDED BY LUCY YANG

AlliterAsian: Twenty Years of Ricepaper Magazine, edited by Julia Lin, Allan Cho, and Jim Wong-Chu

This is an anthology of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry published by *Ricepaper Magazine*, a literary magazine based in BC that celebrates Asian Canadian literature and culture by established and emerging writers and artists.

RECOMMENDED BY MAYANA AMBERS

Daughters Are Forever by Lee Maracle, the late Stó:lō (Salish) author

Lee was one of the first Indigenous Canadian female authors to be published back in 1975 with her book *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*. Further to this, she was an activist in the Red Power movement, a poet and a professor, and published short stories, novels, and collaborative anthologies. She has been referred to as one of "Canada's most prolific Indigenous writers" and is a personal hero to me.

RECOMMENDED BY MELISSA ILLING

Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (And Everything Else) by Olúfémi O. Táíwò

The book breaks down how oppression and identity politics have been commodified and restructured to benefit those in power. It provides an analysis of how the powerful have been able to weaponize solidarity and social justice movements to further divide marginalized groups to keep the status quo.

Convenience Store Woman by Sayaka Murata

This novel focuses on an oddball woman who is obsessed with convenience stores and questions what it means to have a fulfilling life. It is an anxious love story.

RECOMMENDED BY STARLEIGH GRASS

A Snake Falls to Earth by Darcie Little Badger

Nina (an asexual Lipan Apache youth) uses her technological savvy to help Oli (a shape-shifting snake from an alternate dimension) in a quest to save his friend. This novel is wholesome, heartwarming, and adorable.

Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction, edited by Joshua Whitehead

In this anthology of utopian short stories, Two-Spirit and queer Indigenous authors "equipped themselves with beaded breastplates in order to tell you their stories."

Wapke: Indigenous Science Fiction Stories, edited by Michel Jean and translated by Kathryn Gabinet-Kroo

Quebec's first collection of science fiction stories by Indigenous authors. Originally written in French, the collection is also available in English.

RECOMMENDED BY JUDY YUEN

Finding Junie Kim by Ellen Oh

This young adult novel is based on the true experiences of the author's mother during the Korean War. This emotional and suspenseful story explores one generation's past and how it can influence, inspire, and create hope for the present day.

RECOMMENDED BY JONI RAZOTE

America Is in the Heart by Carlos Bulosan

Carlos Bulosan was a Filipino farm worker who immigrated to America in the 1930s. His stories of poverty, racism, and labour struggle still stand today and provide impetus for today's generation of union activists.

RECOMMENDED BY NISHA GILL

Trailblazers: The Black Pioneers Who Have Shaped Canada by Tiyahna Ridley-Padmore

This is the one book I always ensure I read to my students each year. Over 40 Black trailblazers are highlighted with beautiful poems in this book. It shines a light on Canadian histories that are usually left in the shadows. There are so many stories that simply make you say "wow" and serve as a reminder of how far Canada has come and where we still have work to do.

RECOMMENDED BY SERENA PATTAR

Born a Crime by Trevor Noah

This is one of my favourites, a really insightful look at his upbringing during the apartheid in South Africa. He manages to share pretty intense themes with humour, compassion, and understanding.

The Marrow Thieves by Cherie Dimaline

A great dystopian fantasy with strong Indigenous characters; it's an engaging book that's easy to get through in one sitting.

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