What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

Afrika Afeni Mills's book fills an important gap in the arena of diversity, equity, and inclusion. She helps us understand why White students need to build their cultural competence if we are to truly have a society that is bias-free. If you're a White educator or parent, this book will help you to let go of the things that no longer serve you and to teach your students to embrace those things that will help create welcoming environments where all feel a sense of belonging.

—Zaretta Hammond, author Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor

Afrika Afeni Mills expertly offers just the right blend of reflective questions for increasing racial consciousness, with numerous resources, and asks us as White educators to heal ourselves so that we might provide a more accurate racial understanding for all of our students. Doing the exercises within this book is a must-do for any educator who wants to further the work of racial justice in schools.

—Jenna Chandler-Ward Co-Founder, Teaching While White

In this book, White teachers have an answer. The work of being pro-human is hard and in some ways requires that teachers reinvent the wheel. Afrika Afeni Mills has done a fantastic job of laying out a process for these teachers to follow. From the prologue to the very end, there are nuggets of wisdom and powerful examples that offer concrete ideas. Considering the struggles our schools are facing and the needs White students have for ABAR learning, this is a timely and necessary book.

—Lorena Germán, author Textured Teaching: A Framework for Culturally Sustaining Practices

Afrika Afeni Mills's *Open Windows*, *Open Minds: Developing Antiracist*, *Pro-Human Students* is a must-read for K–16+ educators who want not only to espouse antiracism practices but also to do the deep transformative work required for this within schools and communities in a way that orients us all toward freedom and liberation.

—Anneliese Singh

Associate Provost for Diversity and Faculty Development/Chief Diversity Officer
Office of Academic Affairs & Provost, Tulane University

Afrika Afeni Mills's work is, in short, exceptional. She guides her readers through some of the most important reflections that we can undertake, often with a clever approach that places our answers in conversation with other thoughtful educators around the country. Next, she guides us through practical strategies that not only are grounded in the early chapters' reflective practices but also show us how to inspire students to start—or continue—their own journeys of rigorous reflection about their racial identities. I love how, when doing this, Mills never offers the empty generalities that we have become accustomed to in recent times. She instead embraces complexity and shows us how we can encourage our students to do the same. *Open Windows, Open Minds* is truly a must-read, in every sense of the phrase.

—Matthew R. Kay, teacher
Author, Not Light but Fire: How to Lead
Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom, and
Co-Author, Answers to Your Biggest Questions
About Teaching Middle and High School ELA

The key contribution of *Open Windows*, *Open Minds* is Afrika Afeni Mills's ability to carefully, transformatively step readers—and especially White teachers—through our own *knowing better* so that we can *do better* supporting students' abilities to know and do better.

-Paul Gorski

Founder and Lead Equity Specialist, Equity Literacy Institute

Open Windows, Open Minds is a powerful and instructive guide for White educators who are striving to become more effective allies, accomplices, and co-conspirators. Afrika Afeni Mills offers a progression of reflection and action that will empower White educators to dismantle our internalized biases and prejudices and provide better learning opportunities for our students.

—Donalyn Miller, teacher Author, The Book Whisperer

Open Windows, Open Minds isn't simply a book you will read. It's a brilliant book you will reread, mark up, keep near, talk about, and encourage others to read. It's a critical text for anyone committed to living an antiracist life. It's a book you will start reading for just ten minutes and then discover you have sat still with thoughts racing for an hour. It's a how-to book that is also a why-you-must book.

—Kylene Beers, author When Kids Can't Read; Notice and Note; and Forged by Reading Past President of the National Council of Teachers of English

Open Windows, Open Minds

To Noah, Mateo, Jack H., Liam K., Fiona, Mira, Gabe, Grace, Hayden, Kellan, Camryn, Riley, Liam C., Wayne, Moira, Abraham, Lazarus, Augustine, Llewyn, Juliet, Micah, and Tyler.

May the words in this book help this world to become the world you deserve.

Open Windows, Open Minds

Developing Antiracist, Pro-Human Students

Afrika Afeni Mills

Foreword by Cornelius Minor and Kass Minor





FOR INFORMATION:

Corwin
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(800) 233-9936

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President: Mike Soules Vice President and

Editorial Director: Monica Eckman

Executive Editor: Tori Mello Bachman

Content Development Editor: Sharon Wu

Editorial Assistant: Nancy Chung

Project Editor: Amy Schroller

Copy Editor: Megan Markanich

Typesetter: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.

Proofreader: Lawrence W. Baker

Indexer: Integra

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On Children

by Kahlil Gibran (n.d.)

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,

Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them,

But seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.



"The paradox of education is precisely this, that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated."

—James Baldwin ([1963] n.d.), "A Talk to Teachers"



"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

—Bishop Desmond Tutu (1984)



"Nobody's free until everybody's free."

-Fannie Lou Hamer (Ladd 2011)



"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

—Aboriginal Rights Group, Queensland, Australia, including Lilla Watson (n.d.)

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For access to antibias, antiracist (ABAR) resources, visit the companion website for *Open Windows*, *Open Minds* at resources.corwin.com/openwindows.

A Foreword in Two Voices

Cornelius Minor and Kass Minor

CORNELIUS

When I was in 6th grade, I had a White friend, and my father would never let me stay at his house for extended periods of time. Every time that I asked, the answer was, "No."

At first, the "Nos" were simple and direct. When my father could tell that I would not relent, the "Nos" became patient, yet terminal. Stop asking, Cornelius.

So when I kept pressing for weeks, the "Nos" became tense. As if to communicate, "Don't make me have to have a 'conversation' with you right here, young man."

I was 11. The last thing I wanted was a right-here "conversation" with my unyielding father. So I stopped asking.

But this was still peculiar to me, because my parents cultivated the kind of community where we shared everything—time, food, wisdom, hand-me-downs, experiences. Our living room was a meeting place, cafe, guest room, lounge, and healing center. For everyone.

My father curated a lifestyle for our family that fortified relationships by encouraging conversation, prioritizing honesty, and teaching humanity.

So being unable to spend time with Robert and his family was a mystery. Especially because Robert spent so much time with my family. So one day I asked my dad. Outright.

At the time, wisdom and strategy were nascent concepts to me, so I thought it would go really well if I asked him IN FRONT OF ROBERT.

"Hey, Daddy, why can't I ever spend time at Robert's house?"

Stern Liberian father look

Seconds, all of a sudden, felt like millenia.

Stern Liberian father look pans from Robert to me

My father exhaled in the way that Black daddies do when you MUST listen to what they are about to say next. Even Robert seemed to know that he had to pay close attention.

"Son. And ... Robert. I am afraid. This is why you cannot visit Robert's home. Robert's parents are great friends to us, but I am afraid that Robert's parents do not know America well enough to keep you safe in it."

Each word was heavy. I remember hearing their weight then. I can feel the heaviness as I type them now.

"Cornelius, Robert's parents do not carry the same kind of worry for Robert that we are forced to carry for you in this country."

I heard what my father was telling me. I did not know then what he was teaching me. But he continued with words that echo across my consciousness still—as I parent his grandchildren.

"I've never seen Robert's parents seriously consider the history of racism in this country, and I have no way of knowing if they even understand how it impacts you every day, son. I value their friendship, but without that understanding, I cannot trust them to keep you safe in my absence."

These words are tattooed onto my consciousness.

They inform every decision that I make as a parent and as an educator. Who can keep my children, Black children, our children intellectually, emotionally, and bodily safe in my absence?

I wish that I could say, "Every teacher." In this profession, it bothers me that I cannot . . .

KASS

In the first conversation Afrika Afeni Mills and I shared, it didn't take long for us to note the mutual joy and necessity we find within the work of building social justice in schools. While sharing the stories of our lived realities, we learned there are many roles that guide our work as both mothers and daughters, teachers and partners. We understood that for each of us, our work towards justice isn't something we just do, rather, it's who we are. We have been called upon, both spiritually and without negotiation, from the people we love the most to the people who have hurt us the worst, to make the footprint of our presence powerful.

In that first meeting (counter to the color-blind norm in the United States), we did not skip over the significance of my Whiteness and Afrika's Blackness in terms of how we navigate our work in schools as professionals: as one of the White people who makes up nearly 80 percent of the US teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics), I rarely experience a second glance when I am signing in to a school at the front desk, I have never been mistaken for anybody other than a mother or a teacher at a school. The same is not true for Afrika.

We also talked about how our racial identities impact how we are able to live our lives and mother our children. As a mother of two Black-Biracial children, already, I have witnessed my children carrying the labor of their lone racial awareness amongst most of their elementary school classmates. For most BIPOC children going to schools that are predominantly White, this is true. This, as mothers of BIPOC youth, Afrika and I share.

But being in close proximity to BIPOC people, whether they are your partner or friend or child, is not enough.

If you are White, I ask you to consider these questions through your White identity: Have you ever thought much about your race and/or racial identity? Your ancestors? Their role in the making of America? The effect of your visual appearance, the timber of your voice in the space of a classroom? Or still how much you know or don't know about the role of Black, Indigenous, and other Persons of Color (BIPOC) in your community? In history? In your personal life?

I didn't always ask those questions. In elementary school, I skirted the surface on a few of those ideas, but they were mostly banal, surface-level wonderings around physical appearance and social life. For example, I thought about the difference in hair between me and my Korean-American, Black, and Latinx friends, but I never assumed that one type of hair was more accepted by society than the other. I also wondered about the different ways our families convened during our parents' work cookouts, but I never assumed that people congregated in racial groups for a reason. Back then, I didn't unpack any power dynamics I may have noticed because no adult spoke to me about them, nor did I hear them talking about power dynamics regarding racial identity, ever. For me, the '90s were underscored with colorblindness.

As I read *Open Windows, Open Minds*, the depth of Afrika's experience, knowledge-base, and grace within her pedagogy was illuminated, and I believe her work has the power to heal, and perhaps more importantly, prevent the future harm of silence and curricular omission regarding race, identity, and social justice in schools.

For many school communities, social justice is seen as ominous, nebulous, and/or impossible. This book that Afrika has crafted is the antidote for that pushback and those notes of impossibility. Afrika brings the necessary elements for the contents of her book to come to life, providing clarity for how she enacts that love in the

everyday-ness of schools with school leaders, teachers, kids, and their families. Her clarity comes in the form of powerful research, collected anecdotes from teachers and social justice agents in the field, protocols for discourse, lesson plans, as well as curriculum design frameworks.

I am the only White member of my immediate family. As I look upon my time line of "unknowing," it is with great pride and with great thoughtfulness that my own children are far more knowledgeable than I was at their age; they are capable of naming their identity markers in expansive ways, their histories are surfaced honestly, boldly, with both pride and earnest regard. From Liberia to Ireland to the United States, there is no doubt they know where they are from. My Whiteness, elements of their proximity to Whiteness, is named—not with shame, but with responsibility.

With Afrika Afeni Mills's work, White children can also have this profound experience of knowing who they are, where they come from—their honest and complicated histories. There needn't be shame, but there needs to be acknowledgement, and later, responsibility met with action.

CORNELIUS

... when Robert went home that evening, my father let me stay up late, and the two of us talked for hours. He told me, "You and Robert will grow old together, and even though you love him, he will inherit his parents' silence. One day, what Robert does not know about his own Whiteness will hurt you."

This bothered me. It bothered Robert too. As we matured together, we talked about this. Frequently. When we graduated, Robert thanked my dad. He told my father, "You were right. The things that I learned in your living room were things that my parents and teachers never talked about. Even when I asked them. I am so much more prepared for the world than I would have been."

My dad's response was uncharacteristically simple. He told Robert, "There is no better feeling for a parent than knowing that the young people in the community feel prepared to meet the world."

I imagine that there is no higher praise for an educator. Afrika Afeni Mills's work leaves all of us so much more prepared for the world.

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Dishon, my best beloved, soul mate, and biggest cheerleader on earth. Thank you so much for supporting and believing in me. I love you with my whole heart.

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I express my gratitude for the privilege of living on this land, as well as my brokenness for the way that I came to live on this land and what happened to the people who first occupied and stewarded this land. May their memories be for a blessing, and may I honor their stewardship, sacrifice, and loss with the courage to speak truth and to continue learning and contributing to a reimagined world where we destroy walls and build a new table where everyone can be. Be safe, whole, truthful, humble, vulnerable, generous, brave, and filled with joy.

FOR THE READER

I live/work in	(city, state),
which is the original land of the _	
people.	

Go to https://native-land.ca to determine the original caretakers of the land you live/work on.

About the Author



Afrika Afeni Mills (she/her) is a veteran educator and an education consultant. She works with colleagues, teachers, coaches, and administrators to transform instructional practices. Afrika is regularly featured on podcasts, blogs, and webinars. Afrika also delivers keynote addresses and facilitates sessions at conferences and in schools, both virtually and in person across the United States. Afrika believes that all educators can be motivated, engaged, dynamic practitioners and leaders when provided with the support needed to create student-centered, culturally responsive

learning environments that inspire wonder and creativity and nurture diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging from an ABAR, pro-human mindset. You can connect with Afrika online at AfrikaAfeniMills.com.

Prologue

I am a curious person, and I am particularly filled with wonder about things that veer outside of what we've come to consider as "normal." One of the things I enjoy most is reading about, listening to, watching, and learning about stories that center people working together in solidarity toward building awareness and liberation across racial differences—particularly Black and White people in the United States because I am a descendant of people who were enslaved in this country. In full disclosure, maybe it wasn't so much about solidarity and liberation at first. Perhaps my enjoyment came more from the rare opportunity to see people forming and sustaining friendships and partnerships across racial differences depicted in the media I consumed. There was something both curious and special to me about bearing witness to those relationships, especially in a society where those connections were more the exception than the rule.

The work of Emily Style of the National Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) Project (Style 1988) and Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) regarding windows and mirrors provides us with a powerful frame for this book. "Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar, or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books" (Bishop 1990). The problem is that White students tend to have far too few windows and far too many mirrors. What's more, even the mirrors White students have, like funhouse mirrors, often provide them with a distorted view of themselves in relationship with others.

My parents were my first teachers, and it was from them that I first learned about Black history, with the books of W. E. B. Du Bois, Ntozake Shange, Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, and Eldridge Cleaver on the bookshelves my father put up on the walls of our Brooklyn apartment. When I was a sophomore in high school, however, the person who taught my African American history class was a White man

named Mr. McDermott. We read *Before the Mayflower* by Lerone Bennett Jr. (another book that I remembered seeing on a bookshelf in my home) as our text that year in addition to watching the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary series. Mr. McDermott was the first teacher to engage me as a student about Black history, including the fact that Black history long precedes enslavement. I didn't know the term *ally* then, but when I think back, especially as an educator, Mr. McDermott could have chosen to teach other subjects. He chose to teach African American history. And he chose to do it from a liberatory text and perspective. I wonder what compelled him to make this professional choice?

When I was in graduate school studying to become a teacher, I learned that Ezra Jack Keats, the author and illustrator of *The Snowy Day*, was a White man. What made him write this book featuring this little Black boy in 1962? I was also introduced to Ann Turner's book *Nettie's Trip South*, which tells the story of a young White girl's frightened and disgusted response to the horrors of enslavement. What compelled her to write this book?

When I became a teacher, I began to learn more about the abolitionist movement in the United States and to wonder about the White people who chose to offer safety, food, hiding places, diversion, clothing, rides to and for Black people who were escaping enslavement . . . those who lit lanterns and left out quilts to signal safe haven. I learned about those who authored newspapers like *The Liberator*, who spoke publicly about the ills of enslavement and the human violation of anyone attempting to own another person. I wondered about what inspired them to be who they were. William Lloyd Garrison said, in response to questions about his fiery approach to abolitionism, that "I have a need to be all on fire, for I have mountains of ice about me to melt" (Mayer 1998). What made him feel that way? What made him believe that he bore some responsibility to help melt the icy mountains of enslavement, cruelty, and oppression? What was it that compelled John Brown to organize the raid on Harpers Ferry? What made him and others like him persist in spite of backlash and scorn as well as potential and actual harm?

I went on to explore the Civil Rights Movement and noticed the light- and dark-skinned mugshots of the Freedom Riders, including White people like Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, Jim Zwerg, and David Fankhauser as they journeyed toward liberation together with Black people in the face of fear and loss. I don't believe that they were unafraid. I know their families must have been terrified for them and probably wondered why they would engage in this resistance despite the fact that they could have easily looked away. Maybe that was it. Maybe it wasn't really possible for them to look away. How did they develop the will to be courageous in the face of so many who did?

I have enjoyed reading historical fiction that explores the relationships of characters connecting across racial differences. One of my favorite examples is the

fictitious relationship between Hetty (Handful) and Sarah Grimké in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Invention of Wings*. Handful is given to Sarah as a gift on her eleventh birthday, and as they grow, they both embrace abolitionism—Handful as a follower of Denmark Vesey as he is planning a revolt and Sarah as she connects with William Lloyd Garrison and becomes an abolitionist in her own right. These two characters have extremely different backgrounds yet find common ground in their sense of justice and humanity.

While it's important to be aware of the harmful impact of books and movies that exemplify a White savior narrative, portray stereotypes, or show inaccurate, white-washed, and/or White-centered views of the world, I appreciate books and movies about people and characters who connect authentically with one another across racial differences in a way that honors the humanity, dignity, and agency of the people involved in interracial relationships. Examples of how we can work in solidarity with one another in the pursuit of liberation are powerful.

Doesn't the journey toward liberation involve people who have been socialized to believe that they are better, more deserving, more intelligent, more entitled to advantages, privileges, and access to resources beginning to see that there's something not quite right with this narrative? Doesn't transformation begin to happen when those who have been designated as the dominant group see the fallacies in the way our society has been constructed—who look beyond racialization, stereotyping, prejudice, xenophobia, and bias and begin to see those who have been othered for who they truly are? To see that there are people in the world whose lives, histories, thoughts, experiences, cultures, and interests are dynamic, brilliant, creative, beautiful, and worthy of attention—and to realize that this reality has been hidden, distorted, misrepresented, denied, suppressed, and lied about.

If you, reader, are someone who identifies as White, something has been taken from you, from your parents, from your grandparents, and those who came before them. Not only were you most likely not taught the truth about people who are racially different from you as a K–12 student but you most likely didn't learn about the parts of your ancestry, like family names and traditions that were erased at Ellis Island and surrendered in order to be considered White. You may not have had the opportunity to learn that people who look like you were not only colonizers and oppressors but that there were others who, somehow, though surrounded by false messages about people of other races, didn't believe what they were being told and dedicated their lives to the pursuit of liberation through ABAR ways of being.

I'm writing this book to you, reader, as you are presently and also to younger you. The you who wondered and asked questions, the you who enjoyed being curious and investigating. The you at the age when your two front teeth were missing, when you loved to play and make friends without boundaries and walls. The you who was unhindered, curious, and undaunted—your questions about other people

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were not yet hushed and silenced out of politeness, or shame, or something else. The you who wondered why there weren't more People of Color in your neighborhood and schools. You deserved so much more than what was offered to you in schools and by society.

You deserved to learn to appreciate the beauty in difference.

You deserved to have your questions about racial difference answered.

You deserved the opportunity to become friends with people who were different from you.

You deserved to have neighbors who didn't look like you and to understand why there wasn't more racial diversity in your community.

You deserved to grow up unburdened and unencumbered by assumptions, stereotypes, and misinformation.

You deserved to learn how to stand up for those who are marginalized.

You deserved to know the truth about this country's history.

You deserved to grow up reading books written by people who are not like you.

You deserved to see accurate depictions in movies and on television shows of people who are different from you.

You deserved to grow up enjoying the song of the accents of languages and ways of communicating that differ from yours. The White children in our classrooms deserve the same. We have the opportunity to do things differently with and for current and future generations.

I have been an educator for twenty-three years, and during that time, I have enjoyed many amazing professional learning experiences. Some of my favorites are listed in the Acknowledgments of this book. All of these experiences were powerful and provided me with the opportunity to learn about things that were missing from my K–16 learning experiences and from my teacher preparation program. I had to pursue essential learnings like culturally responsive teaching and learning and ABAR instructional practices on my own. It wasn't part of what was required for me to be considered an effective educator, and there's still so much I need to learn. I can't help but wonder about the educator I could have been if the mosaic of learning experiences I've been able to create over time was part of my formal education all along. You may feel the same way.

I have envisioned this book to be an opportunity for me to gift back to you as a reader what I have learned from others over the years about the history of race, racialization, racial identity as well as what it looks like to work in solidarity with one another toward liberation. It is my sincere hope that it enriches your life and

teaching practice the way my teachers, guides, mentors, and visionaries have enriched my understanding by sharing their wisdom with me.

This book is not about shame or guilt but about honesty, vulnerability, and openness to growth. It is about discovering the role we all can play in recreating our learning spaces. It's an invitation to become an active ally, accomplice, and coconspirator. It is also an invitation back to that version of you as a child who was filled with wonder and curiosity and who was unafraid to ask questions, take risks, and make mistakes. And this is a book for White educators who teach in majority-White schools. Your students may not know many People of Color. They may receive confusing messages from media, family, friends, and school curriculum, yet they are part of the most racially diverse generation in history.

You may already have a road map as you engage in this work, but if not, this book is designed to equip you to be the cartographer you've been looking for. Others will benefit from the road map you will create with the support of this book. On this journey, you will go from being *unaware*, to *becoming aware*, to *acting on your awareness*, to *becoming more aware*. And because of this, those within your sphere of influence will have access to the opportunity to do the same.

This journey will not be easy. You will encounter resistance. Some resistance will be internal, because change is hard as it involves loss. Some will come from those around you who have allowed themselves to become comfortable with the status quo. I am a fan of *The Matrix* movie trilogy (okay, in full transparency, I *loved* the first movie. The last two installments, not so much). If you're also a fan, you'll remember that the main character, Neo, was offered an option by Morpheus: to take the blue pill and remain in ignorance of the disturbing reality around them, or take the red pill and learn the uncomfortable truth about that reality. Neo chooses the red pill, yet there's another character, Cypher, who, after also choosing the red pill, comes to regret his choice and decides that he would rather be reintegrated into the system to enjoy what he sees as the benefits of ignorance. You're reading this book, though, because like Neo, there is a splinter in your mind that tells you that something is not quite right with the world around us, that there are truths we need to uncover, things we need to unlearn, challenges to overcome, and a world to reimagine and rebuild.

Here are my main hopes for you, reader:

- To see how you were harmed during your K–16+ educational experiences
- To see that it is imperative to keep students from continuing to be harmed
- To move through the process of being unaware to becoming aware to acting on your awareness all the way through to becoming even more aware and continuing this cycle throughout your life
- To see that you're not alone in your pursuit of ABAR teaching practices. You
 are part of a larger, often unseen community of educators around the country

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who are engaging in this work. You will meet educators like Sarah, Leigh Ann, Sydney, Carly, Shannon, Michael, and Shawna in these pages.

- To examine your own racial identity and how it has been formed
- To equip you with strategies for decentering Whiteness in your literacy curriculum in order to manifest true antiracist teaching practice
- To find concrete examples of ways you can engage in ABAR instructional practices
- To be undaunted in the face of resistance

This book will help you to let go of the things that no longer serve you and to teach your students to do the same. In these pages, you will be wooed to a window you hadn't noticed before. Though the curtains are closed, light streams in at the edges, as light tends to do. In response to the call of the light's invitation, you will take hold of the fabric, pull it apart, and feel the warmth of the sun. You'll open the window, breathe in the fresh air, and smell the aroma of the unfamiliar and beautiful. You'll see things you've never seen before, and you'll invite your students to come and stand alongside you. Together you will gaze and behold, wonder and learn, and because of this, your students will begin to open windows of their own.