

“Who was scared?”: Entering into Reflection Toward Change as Critical Social Educators

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Abstract

This article discusses how an elementary teacher facilitated critical conversations about race and racial injustice with her first-grade students. Our collaborative teacher-researcher team closely examined the whole-class read-aloud events with two picturebooks focused on race and racial injustice. We point to the need for *reflection toward change* among critical social educators to enhance critical literature discussion among young children. In this article, we highlight how we encountered successes and missteps in our efforts to engage young children in critical literature discussion and how that process is deeply ingrained in the work of decentering whiteness. Whether experienced or novice, entering into a stance of *reflection toward change* is a powerful classroom practice for any critical social educator interested in moving toward an antiracist pedagogy.

Keywords: diverse picturebooks, critical literacy, social education, antiracist pedagogy, early childhood education

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Introduction

“The experiences of children of color was not one I had given a lot of thought about. I took them as they came. BUT, by naming it and letting them talk about it, gives it the time and importance it deserves to help the children grow and to open the eyes of children who never have had to think about that. Certainly can't get there just by expecting children to notice it in a book. Right?”

As a seasoned educator, Lottie has long committed to reflecting on her classroom practice toward improvement and innovation. Now, later in her career, she has also turned to reflection to reconsider her stance toward race and racial injustice as part of her first-grade classroom literature instruction. Like Lottie, we believe white educators have “a relationship to whiteness, and, by extension, systems of

power,” and that they have an ethical responsibility to shift their relationship to whiteness and to live and teach in ways that are antiracist (Utt, 2016, Investigate, para. 4). Whether experienced or novice, entering into a stance of *reflection toward change*, as Lottie has in the opening lines of this article, is a powerful classroom practice for any critical social educator interested in moving toward an

antiracist pedagogy. By *reflection toward change*, we speak to the practice of critically reconsidering teaching beliefs and practices that impels a critical revision in practice.

Who is a Critical Social Educator?

As we, a team of teachers and researchers, reflected on the invitation offered by the call for this, the inaugural issue of the *Critical Social Educator*, we pondered, “Who is a critical social educator?” In response, we discussed the teachers we knew who work daily to resist white supremacy through the texts they choose and the histories they teach. We evoked the teachers we knew who were public activists and invited their children to use their language and literacies toward social action. We recalled images of experienced teachers inviting children to interrogate texts. We also kept in mind teachers like Lottie, experienced white teachers who are just beginning their critical social educator journeys. In this article, we hold up Lottie as an example of a critical social educator who is committed to centering race discussions in early childhood classrooms through picturebooks and willing to humbly and critically reflect on her teaching toward change. We do so with the intention of highlighting the journey toward becoming critical social educators as just that, a journey—a dynamic sojourn that has a beginning, successes and missteps, and one that is continually evolving.

Critical Social Education

Reflection toward change must be guided by critical social theory to truly impact change in the classroom. Informed by critical social theory, critical social education asks that we turn away from knowledge transmission and toward knowledge transformation (Freire, 1970; Leonardo, 2004). In such an educational setting, teachers provide contexts where

students not only learn to interrogate institutional and systemic injustices but do so prolifically and with ease. We believe a key component of enacting a critical social education is not only critique but also hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). The critique is intended to serve a purpose; it brings awareness and change to current injustices. Hope provides the foundation to do so and the momentum to move forward.

Critical social education is not a new phenomenon. Research has demonstrated that race and racism are considered taboo topics in classrooms that traditionally serve white interests. When contemplating the purpose of education, scholars, such as Martin Luther King (1947), James Baldwin (1963), and Paulo Freire (1970), argue that education has worked to make society more efficient, thereby making oppressive (e.g., white supremacist) ideologies more permanent—all the while, ignoring the need to cultivate critical, scientific, and logical thinkers. Contemporary scholars continue to implore educators to take up antiracist and abolitionist pedagogies (Kendi, 2019; Love, 2019) and highlight how educators are already addressing this void and repurposing education (e.g., An, 2020; Hawkman, 2020).

Without the work of critical social educators in developing critical thinkers, schools are bound to reinforce the same oppressive ideologies that serve the primary interests of white society. Speaking directly to teachers, Baldwin (1963) stated that children “don't have the vocabulary to express what they see, and we, their elders, know how to intimidate them very easily” (p. 679). Teachers and parents hold positions of authority, and as such, can “intimidate” children toward avoiding certain topics or words. Thus, teachers occupy a powerful role in indoctrinating children toward bias or color-evasiveness¹—treating people

without regard for race, ethnicity, or culture and ignoring damaging effects of racism. By engaging in reflection toward change, a critical social educator can support children's transition from thinking they are controlled by certain institutional forces to having agency to combat such forces (Freire, 1970).

Building Awareness of Race and Racial Injustice Through Children's Picturebooks

One of the ways Lottie's reflection toward change impacted her practice was her deliberate decision to engage her first-grade students in discussion of race and racial injustice through picturebooks. To do so, Lottie turned to picturebooks that offered better representation of communities too often absent in classroom curriculum—picturebooks that offered written and illustrated portrayals of communities that are notably absent in children's literature such as *Black²*, *Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)*; differently abled people (Kleekamp & Zapata, 2018); and LGBTQ+ families (Brown, 2020). Lottie also flooded her room with picturebooks written, illustrated, and published by people who identify with the communities they are portraying [#OwnVoices (Duvyvis, 2015)]. Well-curated literature collections for children that address better diversity of representation affirm marginalized experiences (Sims Bishop, 1990) while problematizing examples of power dynamics, social injustice, and stereotyping (Ching, 2005; Copenhaver-Johnson et al., 2007). Sharing these books in the classroom can reduce bias in children (Gonzalez et al., 2017) while also helping children to, “develop a sociopolitical and critical consciousness of racial justice issues in the world around them” (Husband, 2019, p. 1064).

There is valuable scholarship about how teachers incorporate such picturebooks into

their instruction in ways that support critical conversations among young children (Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 2000; Vasquez, 2014). By reading illustrations through visual thinking strategies (Price-Gardner, 2017), interrogating representations of linguistic differences (Zapata, 2020), or engaging children through critical questioning (Fontanella-Nothom, 2019), early childhood educators and their students can enter into rich discussions of power, race, and identity. We build upon this scholarship to explore how an emerging critical social educator, like Lottie, integrates picturebooks into the early childhood classroom to intentionally explore race and racial injustice with young children.

In the classroom vignettes below, we highlight how Lottie, in partnership with us (a team of classroom researchers) encountered successes and missteps in our shared efforts to engage young children in critical literature discussions. Specifically, we want to feature not only the transformative moments that emerged that centered Black experiences in hopeful ways, but also the moments when we centered whiteness, despite the best of our intentions. Of importance in our essay is that a white teacher still growing into a critical orientation can support young children's initial entries into challenging conversations around race and racial injustice. We collectively enter into *reflection toward change* here to both showcase the transformative moments and missteps in literature discussion and to foreground the value of ONGOING *reflection toward change*.

Positionality

We find that too often, critiques of teachers are made without involving the educator or the children themselves or situate the researcher without imperfections. Ethically, as educators

and researchers who value our relationships with teachers and desire to humanize our partners, we do not offer “critique” of our teaching partners but engage in *reflection toward change* with teachers. We acknowledge the ways we - Mary, Angie, and Sarah - were also collectively complicit in what unfolded in the classroom. We acknowledge that we are each at various stages in our individual journeys as critical social educators and find it important to reflect on how our identities have been shaped and relate to the work at hand. We see this as the first step in *reflection toward change* for us all. Here, we consider the ways in which each of our positionalities play a role in what unfolded in Lottie’s first-grade classroom and acknowledge the limits to our knowledge.

Lottie, who identifies as white, has 21 years of teaching experience, nine years of which were spent at Mariposa Expressive Arts Elementary School in racially, linguistically, and ethnically diverse classroom settings. She held a commitment to critical learning and a disposition toward young children as capable of critical explorations of picturebooks. In our study, Lottie shared that while these conversations around race and racial injustice have not been comfortable for her, she acknowledged that her students “need the truth.” Her own disposition toward a truth that is more inclusive of the invisible histories in the curriculum drives her to have such conversations with her students. Lottie understands her students as “fully capable of sharing feelings and understanding much more than many folks give them credit for” and believes they need the “truth” of a more complete history.

Mary and Sarah are each white, cisgender, able-bodied women raised in conservative, Christian homes. Sarah did not have to consider her own whiteness or middle-class privilege

until she took a teaching position in an urban, lower-socioeconomic public school. As a self-contained special education teacher, Sarah began her critical social educator journey by recognizing and considering how deficit thinking and discourses about race, ability, and economic status permeated all aspects of her classroom, including her students’ experiences and identities, her teaching decisions, and her identity as a special education teacher.

Mary remembers hearing teachers discourage any talk about race but encourage color-evasive language, affirming sameness. Throughout her education, she recalls being implicitly taught that conflict and confrontation were undesirable. It was not until early adulthood when Mary seriously considered ways of thinking and being other than her own, specifically the ways in which she reinforced whiteness. Teaching elementary-grade students, becoming a wife to an immigrant, and a mother to two biracial/biethnic children compelled Mary to consider the whiteness she was perpetuating in her daily life. Though still at the beginning of her journey toward being a critical social educator, she is committed to growing in this area.

As a daughter of immigrant Peruvian parents, Angie grew up bilingual in Texas, and served as a long-time bilingual educator in Texas public schools. She acknowledges how her positionality as a Latina does not make her exempt from constant self-reflection, or from being complicit in reinforcing whiteness. She recognizes the limits of her knowledge, that she is always learning on her journey as a critical social educator.

We have written this paper and shared it with Lottie to confirm that our collective experience in reflection toward change is fairly recounted.

Our Reflection Toward Change

Below, we offer our collective *reflections toward change* of the literature discussions in Lottie's classroom. We lean on Haviland's (2008) definition of white educational discourse to *reflect toward change* and to understand how our discussions about diverse picturebooks can actually at times recenter whiteness. When we avoid words, change the topic, affirm sameness and neutrality, agree and support, and redirect the focus away from systemic injustices, per Haviland, we can reinforce whiteness despite our best intentions. It is important to recognize that a positive intention does not always negate or prevent a negative impact. The humility to acknowledge this is a first step toward becoming a critical social educator.

Together, as a teacher and researcher collective, we committed to initiating collaborative discussions about race and racial injustice with the first graders in Lottie's classroom through picturebooks. We approached our work in the classroom by discussing relevant readings, building curriculum, and sharing books with the students. Before asking her children to discuss race and racial injustice, Lottie assembled a collection of picturebooks about the Civil Rights Movement, stating, "They [the children] need[ed] a historical context of what was going on in the world." Two of the picturebooks Lottie shared were *Rosa* (Giovanni, 2005), which featured Rosa Parks' courageous action of refusing to give up her seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama in 1956, and *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* (Alko, 2015), which featured Richard and Mildred Loving falling in love and working to legalize interracial marriage.

In this section, we highlight Lottie's and her children's conversation around *Rosa* (Giovanni, 2005) and their connections to *The Case for Loving* (Alko, 2015). We focus on the complexities of literature discussion around race and racial injustice and how quickly it can pivot from upholding Black hope to centering whiteness and how quickly we can begin to repair those shifts. We identify moments in the literature discussion where these pivots back and forth between Black hope and whiteness unfolded then reflect upon how those pivots were shaped by our literature invitations and how the children took them up in response. All student names are pseudonyms.

Rosa and the "Neutral Zone"

To help revive the discussion of *Rosa* from the day before, Lottie posed an initial question to her first graders:

Lottie: Who was Rosa? Greg, who was Rosa?

Greg: Hmm... someone that said no on the bus.

Lottie: Someone that said no on the bus. Chad, do you have a connection?

Chad: I have a connection because [Chad walks toward Lottie with the *Rosa* book] so, this book, and that book [*The Case for Loving*], both about skin color.

Lottie: How is skin color in this book [*The Case for Loving*]? ... What was skin color about in this book?

Chad: In this book [*Rosa*], it was about being on the bus.

Lottie: Being on the bus. And what did she do wrong? Sheila, do you remember? Or right, whichever way you wanna see it. Do you remember what Rosa did? Helen, do you remember?

While reviewing the content of the book Rosa (Giovanni, 2005) with students, as one might any other text, we asked, "What did she do wrong?"—inadvertently painting Rosa as the problem. Whiteness is functioning here by directing the students to focus on Rosa as a

problem rather than interrogating the systemic racism shaping the need for Rosa to act. We recognize this conflict in the questions and quickly aim to repair it in the moment by following up and asking, “Or right, whichever way you wanna see it. Do you remember what Rosa did?” Although the second question frames a more direct recall, the expression of “however you want to see it” still sustains a neutral position on the matter. Through reflection toward change, we note how taking time together to plan more critically aware wording for the guiding questions in advance would be essential to sustain a more direct path toward interrogations of race and racial injustice in picturebooks with young children. This asks that we move beyond our tried-and-true line of questioning and build our literature discussion toolkit with questions and prompts that interrogate whiteness and race and racial injustice specifically. We also noted here how our desire to sustain a neutral space in our classrooms for classroom discussion is so ingrained in our spontaneous talk. Even our off-hand remarks can inform the way children interpret events. We note the need to challenge the way our desires for neutrality shape our classrooms and understand the implications of that stance

Helen: She wanted to get on—she went on the bus and there were no more seats in the, in the—where the Black people sit. So, she went where white and Blacks could sit. But this man, that had white skin, wanted to sit there but, she wouldn’t move.

Lottie: Bryan, add to that.

Bryan: I have something—a good way to describe it. She did nothing bad.

Lottie: She did nothing bad. You’re exactly right. What part of the bus was she sitting on? Do you want to add Chelsea?

Chelsea: She was sitting in white and Black part.

Lottie: You remember what they called that part of the bus?

Students: Mixed. Middle section?

Lottie: It could have been mixed.

Student: Neutral?

Lottie: They called it the neutral zone. So, she was supposed to be able to sit there, right?

Here, Lottie invites Bryan to add to what Helen said, a powerful strategy often used in classrooms to encourage more students to contribute. Lottie reclaims Rosa’s position by emphasizing Bryan’s observation, repeating that Rosa did nothing bad. In response to Helen’s comment, Lottie quickly introduces children to the term, “the neutral zone,” to address the seating structure of the bus. In our reflection toward change, we note how in addition to introducing “the neutral zone” here, there can also be a focus on the overt racism shaping the broader seating on the bus, a structure astutely described by Helen as she described the seating design of the bus. Children can also be asked what the term “neutral” means in this context, revealing the systemic racism shaping transportation. Leaning into a deeper discussion of “neutral” and inquiring into for whom this was a neutral space can afford critical openings for children to explore racism and questioning the origins of the division, including systemic injustices perpetrated by white people, specifically lawmakers. Lottie does this and creates an opening to further discuss this issue in the discussion that continues below.

Mariah: How ‘bout these two Black men were like “We need a spot! We need a spot, so scram!”

Lottie: Chelsea, you wanna add to that?

Chelsea: And, um, after that, she went to jail.

Lottie: She did go to jail, didn’t she? Is that a connection between that book (*A Case for Loving*) and this book (*Rosa*)?

Chelsea: Well, yeah, they went to jail.

Lottie: They went to jail, too. So, there’s another connection between—



Mariah: But her— but for her it's like no reason why she had to [go to] jail because it was the *neutral* section! Not, like, against the *law* to sit there, but it's not like they knew it was the law. They [Lovings] knew it was the law couldn't, necessarily, go back after they're married.

Allison: [stands up] It's not against the law, at all! The law, how could she—

Mariah: They kind of knew it was a law, but she didn't really know it was a law that she had to move when she was in the neutral section.

Lottie: That's a good point; I like the way you're thinking. [Allison] what'd you want to add to what Mariah was saying?

Allison: [stands up] It's not against *the law*.

Lottie: What isn't? Say more.

Allison: It's not against the law. [Allison throws her hands up] she was sitting in the *neutral zone*, not the white zone!

Mariah: And I bet the white zone wasn't filled.

Lottie: Well, I think it was, they said it was filled so he came to her to tell her that he wanted her seat. But when we talked about it... Should there have even been a *rule*? Should there have even been a Black zone or a white zone or a neutral zone?

Class: No!

Here, Lottie employs several effective literacy discussion strategies: inviting intertextual connections, asking for students to “say more” to encourage deeper thought, and further probing into a theme, in this case emphasizing Rosa not being in the wrong. She concludes with an essential question, “Should there have even been a rule?” This question affirms the idea of societal critique, that it is possible for collective behaviors mandated by city ordinances to be misguided and therefore questioned. Mariah and Allison had initially redirected the conversation toward this very end, critiquing the tacit behaviors and Rosa’s choices on the bus as “not against law.” Allison was emphatic, pacing frantically around the room waving her hands as she explained Rosa’s behavior as “not against the law.” In this exchange, Lottie affirms her students’ critiques, nurturing habits of critical interrogation of texts.

After having read from Rosa (Giovanni, 2005), A Case for Loving (Alko, 2015), and other relevant narratives, Lottie continued to raise questions and wonderings to elicit students’ responses. In the excerpt below, Lottie opened up a space to explore fear in relation to the racism experienced in the books.

“Who Was Scared?” in the Books

Lottie: Hmm... I wonder how many of these books happened because people were scared. What do you think?

Emily: People were scared in *all* of these books!

Lottie: What were they scared of?... You think people were scared in all of the books?... You think they're scared there? Hey, did being scared help? Didn't help many people being scared, did it? What could we do instead of being scared? What could we do instead of being scared? ...what could we do, if we're scared of something, what instead of, saying it's bad and making it illegal, what could we do instead?

Chelsea: Be brave.

Lottie: How would you be brave? How could you be brave when you're scared of something?

Chelsea: Stand up and say, like ... “I don't wanna move to a new seat.”

Mariah: Or get off the bus.

Lottie: So, okay so, feeling strong, convicted, say, “it's okay for me to sit here, I'm gonna sit here” instead of being scared, okay.

Mariah: 'Cause, saying “no”, like yes, that's a good idea, but just saying “no”, like you should say more than, like, “please can I stay here?”

[sighs] 'Cause, this is the neutral section so Black and white can sit here.

Talking about fear in these texts is an important step toward recognizing injustice and disrupting whiteness. In response to the invitation to consider fear, students centered a Black perspective, calling on stances of bravery and conviction that were needed to enact change and decenter whiteness. Specifically, Lottie asks, “Did being scared help?” and “What could we do instead of being scared?” which moves the discussion toward agency and hope. Mariah



takes up the work of centering Black hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) and bravery and states, “You should say more... Black and white can sit here.” In this way, Mariah is also emphasizing the need for strategy and planning a fuller response to racist encounters. Through our reflection toward change, we also noted the need for caution when centering Black perspectives and experiences. We do not want students to reenact fear or experiences that awaken trauma or perpetuate Black suffering. In these instances, it is essential to center Black experiences in ways that recenter hope and bravery and intellect, as Lottie and her students did.

Lottie: Let me ask this question: Is it Black people...or is it white people who are scared in this book?

Mariah: White. *White*. Black?

Lottie: Who’s scared? White. So, Stella, what are they scared of?

Sheila: Um, the Black people.

Lottie: Yeah. Hmmm.

Anna: That’s why they have to go to the back. ‘Cause they’re scared.

Lottie: Hmm, so I wonder what white people could’ve done, instead of being scared.

Chelsea: Be brave?

Mariah: Well, they could be brave but—

Lottie: What do you think white people could do instead of being scared?

Emily: They can be, like, stop [holds hand out in “stop”] that is e—nough, I am going to try to be brave now, instead of scared.

Mariah: But, in those times, like, white people were kind of like the wrong people, like, Black people they just want freedom! Just *freedom*! That’s not too much to ask, is it?

Emily: Why do people treat Black people the wrong way, but white people are scared of Black people, but they treat Black people the *wrong way*. But that doesn’t make sense ‘cause they treat Black people the wrong way, and they’re scared of Black people. That doesn’t make sense at all.

Here, we initially focused the conversation on the fear white people have of Black people, and

what white people should do instead. Despite our intentions of inviting students to identify white people’s racism and fear as the root of injustice and considering alternate behaviors, students’ response to the question of “Who is scared?” produced a narrative of “fear of Black persons” and ultimately recentered whiteness. Through reflection toward change, we noted that a focus on what white people could have done reinforced white gaze, rather than disrupt it. Asking what white people could have done rather than should have done, may have suggested that white people’s fear was justified. Ultimately, Emily and Mariah shift the conversation toward Black freedom and justice, and noting how white people’s racist behavior, “doesn’t make sense at all.” From our reflection toward change, we are also reminded that to disrupt whiteness, we must remain open to the offerings our young students make in response to injustice. Their sense of fairness and justice is often an invaluable guide for instruction.

Lottie: In these books they were but do you think they still are?

Bryan: It’s all just because of different skin color.

Lottie: All just because of different skin color!

Emily: Yeah, but their skin color doesn’t matter, like at all, like, people can marry each other, just like they did yesterday, on the TV show.

Lottie: Right. You told us about that. What did you think? When I said if they’re still scared, you said kinda.

Mariah: Like *some* people could be. Like, not all people really *have* to treat Black people—even their only skin color, really/well—but you should still try to. Also, back then, white people were being, like, so disrespectful to Black people, and all they wanted was just even a *little* freedom. Like, to go to a restaurant and not to have a Black section and a white section on the busses. And white people were just like, “No, you don’t deserve it.” And, like, all Black people do back then was like be nice to you. And you guys are, like, not—you don’t even let them come into *restaurants* you have to let them come in from the back!



Lottie: It's kinda ridiculous to think about, isn't it? ... So, we'll share in small groups like we did today some 'cause I think lots of you have good ideas.

In closing the discussion, we asked an important question to connect this topic to our current context: "Do you think they still are [scared]?" While we as a research team were excited to see students connect this fear to skin shade variance, we realized that our own initial focus on skin shade served to maintain and reinforce whiteness. Upon reflection toward change, we recognized that suggesting fear came from a difference in skin shade is blaming a phenotypic trait for racism and division, which is inaccurate. By emphasizing a focus on skin shade in our initial collaborative meetings with Lottie, we may have affected the direction of instruction and discussion in a way that reinforce whiteness in the classroom. We also note how Mariah again points out that white people were in the wrong, offering a perfect platform for the next discussion around racism. Reflecting on how discussions end can be an important entry point toward a follow-up discussion, and certainly Emily and Mariah's comments can advance the discussion toward questioning why there were Black, white, and neutral zones.

Reflecting Toward Change: Next Steps

Entering into *reflection toward change* as a way to learn from our literature discussion with first graders highlights for us how quickly our critical conversation can vacillate between upholding Black hope to centering whiteness. We continue to reflect on the ways whiteness can manifest within picturebook discussions around race and racial injustice. *Reflection toward change* is a necessary, and ongoing part of becoming a critical social educator practicing the art of critical literature discussion, teaching toward a greater understanding of whiteness,

and examining how it is reinforced in classrooms.

Through our *reflection toward change*, we became aware of the complexity of the art of critical literature discussion about race with young children. We note that we often have in-the-moment decisions to make as educators during literature discussions: Which threads of questioning do we follow? Whose line of thinking do we lift up? How do we begin to address every possible line of inquiry that emerges among young children during literature discussions around race and racial injustice? How can we ensure that we are never centering whiteness? The reality is, we cannot. Instead, we must own how every line of thinking we lift (and don't lift) from children is always at the expense of another possibility. We must also acknowledge how whiteness is deeply ingrained in our teaching and informs our decision-making and in-turn, what unfolds in the classroom. Through humility, a listening disposition, learning, and a willingness to change, we can enter into *reflection toward change* and hold ourselves accountable to planning for and enacting transformative critical literature discussions with children.

The unsettling movements and missteps revealed in our teaching as we *reflect toward change* are not missed opportunities, but rather new possibilities for deeper inquiry that can truly impact critical learning among young children discussing race and racial injustice. When uncovering new possibilities for teaching and looking to implement change informed by your *reflection toward change*, we recommend revisiting conversations the next day. By going back to students' responses as springboards to dig deeper into the topic, a new pathway toward greater understanding of how whiteness functions in and around us, both in the classroom and beyond, can emerge.

Listening for and lifting the words of students like Mariah and Emily, words that recenter Black hope, Black joy and Black intellect, can only serve to help keep the focus on Black excellence in ways that disrupt whiteness.

Through *reflection toward change*, changes in our teaching are shaped by the reflective questions about our teaching of race, racial injustice, and whiteness. We recommend leaning into Haviland's (2008) framework to help uncover those moments. Doing so can bring awareness to how our classroom teaching is "a constellation of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking in which [w]hite teachers gloss over issues of race, racial injustice, and [w]hite supremacy in ways that reinforce the status quo, even when they have a stated desire to do the opposite" (Haviland, 2008, p. 41) Such attention to whiteness in our literature instruction can inform reflective questions that nudge us beyond the general questions, those that may not bring awareness to how whiteness functions in the classroom nor how we can produce explicit change in the

classroom. For example, attending to the ways we work to sustain a neutral space in the classroom made us aware of how we unfortunately sustained whiteness in our classrooms. This awareness has encouraged us to be more thoughtful and strategic in the way we pose questions around picturebooks about race and racial injustice with young children, including making frequent appointments with ourselves to audio record literature discussions and reflect on the questions we pose, how we word them, and how the children take them up. Through our *reflection toward change*, we are reminded that the work of being a critical social educator is a journey that requires ONGOING *reflection toward change* in order to move forward. Much like any sojourner pausing temporarily during a voyage, we too must pause to reassess, recalibrate, repair, and reroute our course as critical social educators in ways that bring awareness to our complicity in centering whiteness and in ways that directly inform change in our teaching.

Notes

1. To avoid ableist language here, we choose to follow Annamma, Jackson, and Morrison's (2017) example by using "color-evasiveness."
2. While APA (2019) guidelines suggest the use of capitalization for racial and ethnic groups, it is our opinion that capitalizing such terms as Black and white involves taking a political stance. Therefore, our stance is to capitalize Black but not white, to prevent reifying the hegemonic status of whiteness and white supremacy.

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