

Not My Idea- A book About Whiteness

Content/Goal

2A.3b. Analyze how one's behavior may affect others.

3A.2b. Demonstrate knowledge of how social norms affect decision making and behavior.

Students will:

- ★ Examine the role of whiteness in perpetuating racism

Materials

- [Not My Idea: A Book About Whiteness by Anastasia Higgenbotham](#)
- [Anchor Chart: Some Aspects of Whiteness that Perpetuate Racism](#)

Vocabulary

- Racism
- Anti-racist
- Whiteness
- Color blindness
- Xenophobia
- Centering Whiteness/De-centering Whiteness
- Perpetuate

Learning Plan

Make a KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) chart with your students. Keep the chart up so that students can add to the *Learn* column as the week progresses. This is a great way for students to monitor their learning. If eLearning, you could create a KWL using [Padlet](#) (log in using Google Credentials), a shared Google Doc, a shared Google Jamboard or a resource of your choice.

Ask:

- What do you know about the Black Lives Matter movement?
- What do you want to know?
- What is something you don't understand about the Black Lives Matter movement?

Read aloud [Not My Idea: A Book about Whiteness](#). ([a: A Book About Whiteness by Anastasia Higgenbotham](#))

Tell students that even though this week is a week celebrating Black Lives, today we will be learning about Whiteness. Many times, when people have conversations about race,

they focus mainly on people of color. It is important to recognize that White people play a big role in the problems of racism today and throughout world history. If this is one of the first times that you are talking about Whiteness, it might feel uncomfortable and that is okay. I want you to notice how you feel while we read this book today. If you feel awkward or uncomfortable, sit in that discomfort so you can build the muscles that you need to talk about racism honestly. It is very important that we are able to bring Whiteness into our conversations about race--this week and always, **so that we can all actually do something about racism.**

Read the Toni Morrison quote on the first page. Ask students to notice their first reaction to the quote. Do they feel empowered by it? Do they see truth in it? Does it make them feel uncomfortable? Defensive? Does it contradict or reinforce what they have heard? Ask them to jot down a private reflection that will not be shared. We will be coming back to this quote after reading the book.

Begin reading the text, using the following stopping points to guide your conversations.

Page 9: Burying the truth

The author says that grown ups hide scary things from kids because they are scared too. This is called **burying the truth** (page 8). It is something many White people do to ignore racism when they feel uncomfortable.

Here on page 8-9, the adult buries the truth when they turn off the T.V and tell the child “You don’t need to worry about this.” Do you think that is an anti-racist response to the child’s questions (on page 7)? Have you ever experienced somebody burying the truth when you have asked brave questions?

Page 19: Color blindness

One way people bury the truth is by saying things like “I don’t see color” or “We are kind to everybody” (page 10). Pretending not to see color is called **color blindness**. Color blindness helps racism. It is not anti-racist even though it might “sound nice.” When people pretend that everybody is the same, they choose not to see peoples’ culture, and choose not to see problems like racism. Many White people use color blindness to ignore the problem of racism.

(Flip back to page 14) A person who ignores racism using color blindness might look at this illustration and think “that security guard is doing their job.” An anti-racist person

who notices racism might ask “Why is the security guard only watching the Black child when the White child is doing the same thing with more expensive bowls? That’s not fair.” An anti-racist person notices how race may be playing a role in the situation.

Turn and talk: “I don’t see color” is an example of a colorblind message. What other colorblind messages have you heard? (Examples: treat everybody equally, love conquers all, BLM movement is divisive, ect...)

Page 29: Xenophobia

The adult in this illustration is locking their car doors and clutching their wallet when they see the Black and Brown people across the street. When people have a fear of people who are different from them, it is called **Xenophobia**. Xenophobia can make people act in really weird and unhelpful ways. When somebody locks their doors or clutches their wallet/purse, it tells the story that they feel unsafe. Many people use safety as an excuse for racism. This is xenophobic because they are afraid of other people for no good reason. The people across the street are just walking.

Page 37: Ignoring History and Centering White History

The author is teaching us that we have the power to change racism. It was something that was here before we were even born, and we can learn about it and be anti-racist. One way to start becoming anti-racist, is to know the history of racism so we can understand why we still have racism today and what it looks like today. Many people tell themselves that racism happened in the past and so they don’t have to worry about it. Many people choose not to learn about Black history at all. Some people are choosy-- they only learn about history that agrees with their point of view. This all helps racism. It is not anti-racist.

Has anybody heard about Colin Kaepernick (page 37) kneeling at NFL games? What have you heard? (students share).

Some people think that Colin Kaepernick was wrong when he kneeled during the singing of the National Anthem (page 37). They said that he was disrespecting the history of people who lost their lives for freedom in the U.S. Many White people were uncomfortable with Mr. Kaepernick because he was asking people to think harder about that freedom. He wanted people to see that many people still do not have the freedom that the flag represents. Many Black people have also died for freedom in U.S history and Black people are still treated unfairly.

Also, what many people don't know is that before Mr. Kaepernick kneeled, U.S Representative John Lewis kneeled in a protest in 1962 when Black children were not allowed to swim in public swimming pools (page 37). By kneeling, Mr. Kaepernick was honoring a part of history that many people chose not to learn about. Some people look at the U.S flag as a symbol of freedom. People who are still not free don't see it this way. Ignoring history and or choosing to center white history helps racism. It is not anti-racist.

End of book reflections

Display the [Aspects of Whiteness that Perpetuate Racism chart](#) or create your own before discussing the following questions.

Why do you think the child in this book was so mad in the car after choosing to learn about the history of racism in the U.S?

What does the author mean "You can be white without signing on to whiteness?"

Follow up: What does the author mean by "Whiteness?" (Examples: burying the truth, color blindness, xenophobia, ignoring history, and other aspects students notice and raise).

Closing

Reread the Toni Morrison quote to students and give them time to reflect. How do they feel about the quote after reading the text? Did their feelings change at all from the beginning of the text? Do they have more to say now?

Reflection Question(s)/Activist Extension

- Let's look back at our KWL chart. Have we answered any of our "wonders" yet? What have we learned?