

Going beyond the Efferent: Teachers' Critical Literacy Development Using Picture Books

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Abstract: This article offers teacher educators understanding of the manner in which they could prepare their students to develop understanding of the theory of critical literacy and to apply specific literacy practices in their classrooms. Only after teachers develop understanding on a personal level of the concept of critical literacy could they be properly prepared to transfer this knowledge through guided learning to their pupils. The application of the “I Do”, “We Do”, “You Do” technique presented provides a framework within which pre-service and practicing teachers become actively engaged in the study of critical literacy.

Key words: critical literacy, teacher education, gradual release of responsibility

1. Introduction

“He drew a circle that shut me out- Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I had the wit to win: We drew
a circle that took him in!”

Edwin Markham (American Poet, 1852–1945)

It is the purpose of this article to provide a framework within which understanding of critical literacy, a theory currently lacking its own instructional methodology, but one possessing positive educational implications, might become developed by both pre-service and practicing teachers. The theory of critical literacy was formulated to enhance the reader's awareness of the presence of oppressive conditions often transfixed by common and culturally acceptable language in material encountered by them, to stimulate recognition of an author's attempt to foster acceptance of the status quo, and to encourage the development of learning environments in which each pupil becomes aware of his/her responsibility to work as they age to create a more equitable, just, and humane society (Gutek, 2011). Critical literacy requires reflective thought and encourages transactions between the reader and the text. In addition to typical textual material, picture books which challenge the status quo and which provide perspectives of existing conditions could be effectively employed while developing critical literacy skills. However, as noted by Miller and Hatch (2008), only after teachers understand the manner in which they develop their own critical literacy capabilities will they become able to transfer this knowledge to their pupils.

The establishment of a critical literacy framework within the classroom is noteworthy both academically and socially. Critical literacy teachers encourage the development of skills that ultimately enable their pupils to

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function as social agents. They highlight the importance of identifying the presence of sources of power and stress the need for accountability. These same educators typically assist pupils to identify and question unjust and oppressive social relationships while reading and encourage them to develop understanding of the importance of justice, human dignity, and the right of the individual to work to better his/her life (Gutek, 2011). Texts supporting the development of critical literacy skill also provide the teacher with ample opportunity to enhance each pupils understanding of more typical comprehension strategies.

Developing critical literacy in students at any age can be challenging (Apol, Saluma, Reynolds & Rop, 2003; Berman, 2006). That being said, teacher educators are able to facilitate critical consciousness and support critical literacy development during pre-service teacher education coursework and through in-service professional development training (Meller & Hatch, 2008). In the following pages a 3-part sample lesson is offered to demonstrate concretely the manner in which critical literacy training might be presented effectively through the use of picture books.

2. What is Critical Literacy?

Critical literacy is an approach designed to empower people to resist and to reconstruct oppressive conditions and in doing so to create a more equitable, just, and humane society (Gutek, 2011). Critical literacy is a form of liberation pedagogy (Freire, 1998), the goal of which is to raise human consciousness. Raising consciousness is an essential feature of critical literacy because it leads to a personal commitment to work for social change and reform (Gutek, 2011).

Critical literacy theory acknowledges that texts are culturally constructed and, therefore, contain more than a neutral set of facts and ideas. Observing texts through a critical literacy lens allows the reader to understand that authors often produce works in order to express their beliefs regarding power, gender, race, and other issues. Teaching pupils of various ages to read and write through a critical literacy lens encourages them to develop aesthetic abilities which foster social consciousness and awareness about the conditions of their lives. At the same time, pupils immersed in a critical literacy framework also develop efferent abilities and read to gain the essential meaning of a text as explicitly articulated by the author (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Critical literacy focuses on issues of power and promotes reflection, transformation, and action (Cardiello, 2004). It encourages readers to focus on the complex nature of social problems, to move beyond a passive acceptance of information as universal fact, and to take an active role while reading and while thinking about complex topics. This active role becomes clearly apparent through their generation of questions. For example the reader might ask: Who wrote this text? What does the author want me to believe? What information was included or excluded during the writing of this text? When readers approach a text while employing this framework they become able to identify and understand the concept of the personal lens more completely. At the same time, readers become cognizant of their own core beliefs and in particular how they compare to other beliefs in the world, how their own belief system has been developed, that belief systems are personal, that other individuals might develop and employ completely different systems of belief which serve them well, and that many authors' works are ultimately based on their beliefs or the perspective from which they want their characters to speak (Hall & Piazza, 2008).

3. Critical Literacy in the Classroom

As indicated above, the theory of critical literacy is not tied to its own distinct instructional methodology and is constantly redefined in order for it to become actualized in a variety of settings. McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) describe critical literacy as an aspect of thought which enables the reader to challenge texts and life as we know it (p. 29). This approach to thinking underscores the importance of developing among students an understanding of the connection between language and social relationships, their need to engage actively in the reading process. It also prepares readers to question the validity of the use of power as presented in various texts.

Readers approach texts and reading through the lenses of their personal lives. To truly understand the ideas authors intend to convey we need to be aware of who we are as readers in addition to the motives of writers. By enhancing their awareness of these issues learners become equipped to view text with a critical eye as they concomitantly analyze the appropriateness of their own views and existing concepts. This transaction between the reader and text and its influence on comprehension forms the basis of critical literacy theory.

Texts communicate both implicit and explicit messages that promote specific values and ideologies. In specific texts there are those who are empowered and those who are devalued. The message of the text maintains or challenges the status quo. Teaching students to identify these elements in various texts facilitates self-analysis of their own values and core beliefs. Berman (2006) noted that using the classroom as a space to consider and test our changes in beliefs, gender roles, and power structures, can provide students with an opportunity to gain control over the manner in which they shape their views and beliefs in a safe environment. Jank & Ivancic (1992) and Bean & Moni (2003) have suggested that by employing critical literacy practices students become empowered to identify the author's intentions which inform text creation, and when appropriate, to actively resist and challenge ideas presented in assigned readings. Table 1 identifies classroom practices and goals necessary for the development of critical literacy skill within the classroom setting.

Table 1 Critical Literacy Classroom Practices and Goals

Classroom Practices	Classroom Goals
Identify voices in text	Identify beliefs and biases.
Identify dominant cultural discourse	Expand ones personal lens.
Identify possible meanings and readings	Develop awareness that text represents particular views while silencing others.
Connect literacy to social justice	Examine what the text intended to do. Examine social relationships.
Read supplementary texts	Expand ones personal lens.
Read from multiple perspectives	Develop awareness that text represents particular views while silencing others.
Read from a broad range of texts representative of many cultures and institutions	Expand ones personal lens. Develop awareness that text represents particular views while silencing others. Examine what the text intended to do.
Produce a counter text	Develop awareness that a text might represent particular views while silencing others.
Take social action	Make positive change in the world.

Developing critical literacy in students can be a challenge (Apol, Saluma, Reynolds & Rop, 2003). Students may resist reading and using texts that require them to examine their own belief systems or the culture within which they have been raised. These students may be uncomfortable delving into how their culture has impacted on

their particular belief systems. In addition, the status quo is not something most students realize they can question, it is typically simply accepted. Concomitantly, these issues hinder critical literacy development among pre service and practicing teachers. Additional challenges inherent in developing critical literacy in this population reside in teachers' ethnic and socio economic backgrounds. Teachers bring their cultures and values to the classroom and as Lazar (2004) found, most teachers continue to be white, middle class and female. These professionals due to their existing experiential backgrounds and their specific cultural experiences may be unfamiliar with "mirror books" needed to fill classroom libraries. A final barrier to the development of critical consciousness can be the teacher's reluctance to challenge the status quo.

While these inherent obstacles exist, teacher educators attempt to develop critical literacy skills and concepts during pre-service teacher education coursework and through in-service professional development training (Meller & Hatch, 2008). Practices teacher educators employ to facilitate critical literacy development include but are not limited to: (1) promoting understanding of personal biases and beliefs; (2) examining the effects of prejudice on self-identity; (3) identifying the manner in which prejudice can lead to false mental images; (4) going beyond existing comfort levels to provide literature that encourages participants to think outside their own personal "box"; (5) making issues of power a central focus; (6) using multicultural, multi perspective literature; and (7) encouraging students to engage in activities and to design projects dedicated to promoting the public good and public wellbeing.

4. Developing Critical Literacy: A 3-Part Lesson

Critical literacy encourages individuals to become aware of and actively address issues such as racism, poverty, persecution, homelessness, prejudice, inequity, and injustice (Meller & Hatch, 2008). Advocates of critical literacy training believe that all texts are biased to some degree and that bias is a normal, unavoidable aspect of expression. It is the readers' job to understand the presence of bias and to decide how to balance it with their existing knowledge (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 26). The following activity supports pre-service and practicing teachers' exploration of picture books from a critical perspective and is taught to facilitate the discovery of social, moral, and political issues embedded in the text provided (Vasquez, 2001). As already noted, the inclusion of critical literacy pedagogy in teacher education coursework is necessary because only when teachers experience the process of critical literacy development on an individual basis can they become equipped to transfer their knowledge effectively (Meller & Hatch, 2008).

The activity presented below follows the "I Do", "We Do", "You Do" framework and is rooted in the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) and in the work of Duffy (2004). Students were provided initially with necessary scaffolding and modeling as they developed understanding of critical literacy and its importance. A review of the manner in which guided questions should be developed and employed to inform the learner to seek specific information while listening or reading was also undertaken. A picture book was then presented and read aloud to the students. The direct explanation method (Duffy, 2004) was utilized to expose students to the manner of thought they were to develop and employ, and the type of questions they were to construct while listening. The entire group then engaged in discussion as core concepts and answers to guiding questions were presented. Information resulting from this discussion was then presented in graphic form as a web or map. Retelling and further discussions of key concepts was strongly encouraged. The students were then invited to work together in small groups while discussing the type of thinking they were exposed to. As students

became familiar with the framework and approach to reading they encountered they were directed to engage in independent practice, to select an appropriate text from this specific genre, and to develop questions (i.e., establish a questioning stance) which would facilitate understanding of the manner in which their pupils were to think. These activities provided opportunity for students to become familiar with books representing multiple topics intended to facilitate their critical literacy development (See Appendix A). The texts included in this bibliography were selected because they: (1) challenge the status quo, (2) examine multiple viewpoints, (3) focus on socio-political issues, and 4) set forth action steps for social justice, within a picture book format. As McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) noted, while these types of books provide a source of critical literacy experience, it is not the reading of these texts that generates critical consciousness. Critical consciousness develops through discussions engaged in by students, which enable them to analyze in depth the validity of encountered ideas and concepts (p. 54). That being said, this introductory activity presents both the literature and the questioning framework necessary for the initiation of preliminary critical consciousness development.

“I Do”: The story of *Atalanta*, embedded in the *Free to Be You and Me* anthology (Thomas, 2008) was selected for the read aloud because its protagonist, a young princess, challenges the status quo and rejects marriage for the opportunity to travel and explore the world. Before reading aloud, guiding questions were introduced (See Table 2). After completing the read aloud the group as a whole discussed previously formulated questions. Following this discussion several types of graphics, including one created for this text were presented to the class to make more concrete the thought process they had engaged in.

Table 2 Guiding Questions

<p>Guiding Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is valued or ignored in the text? 2) What does this text try and communicate to you? 3) Does the meaning of the text change if you look at the story from a different characters' perspective? 4). Does the message of the text maintain or challenge the status quo? 5) Would you use this text? 6) How can you use this text in your classroom?
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“We Do”: After participating in their whole group activity students were invited to work in small groups. They were directed to select and read a text listed in Appendix A. As a group they addressed the six questions listed above in terms of their relationship to the text selected. Next, the group was required to prepare a graphic representation of the text, again in relation to the questions presented above. Finally each group was asked to share with other members of the class information regarding their selected text, the manner in which they framed guiding questions, and their graphic representation of essential information.

For example, the group could select the *Big Box* (Morrison, 1999) and investigate how language and literacy are related to power systems and dominance. In the *Big Box*, readers' are introduced to the disenfranchisement and exclusion of children with special needs. By engaging in practices discussed above, students could be provided an opportunity to reflect on existing exclusionary educational practices along with issues associated with the creation of least restrictive learning environments. The ability to identify the disenfranchised and silenced voices of children in our society would, in and of itself, serve as a starting point in the development of readers' critical consciousness.

“You Do”: While employing Meller & Hatch's criteria (2008) for text selection, participating teachers were asked to locate independently texts supporting critical literacy. Appropriate texts were those which explored individual differences, enhanced understanding of history and life by giving voice to those traditionally silenced

or marginalized, demonstrated the manner in which the individual might begin to take action on important social issues, explored dominant systems of meaning that operate in society to position people and groups of people to be viewed as “others”, and those texts which do not offer a “happily ever after” ending to complex social problems (p. 335). After locating an appropriate text, students were instructed to read critically and to respond to each of the six guiding questions listed above. Information gleaned by each student was then presented graphically and shared with all members of their class.

5. Conclusion

This article offers teacher educators understanding of the manner in which they could prepare their students to develop understanding of the theory of critical literacy and to apply specific literacy practices in their classrooms. Only after teachers develop understanding on a personal level of the concept of critical literacy could they be properly prepared to transfer this knowledge through guided learning to their pupils. The application of the “I Do”, “We Do”, “You Do” technique presented above provides a framework within which pre-service and practicing teachers become actively engaged in the study of critical literacy. Examples of graphic representations completed by these teachers during their participation in “You Do” activities are included in Appendix B. These documents illustrate teachers’ development of critical consciousness and their personal transactions with the text.

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Appendix

A: Critical Literacy Picture Books Thematically Grouped

Alternate Perspective

- Browne A. (1998). *Voices in the Park*, New York, NY: DK Publishing.
- Wyeth S. D. (1998). *Something Beautiful*, New York, NY: Dragon Fly Books

Authenticity

- Andreae G. (2001). *Giraffes Can't Dance*, New York, NY: Orchard Books.
- Binch C. & Hoffman M. (1991). *Amazing Grace*, New York, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers.
- Corey S. (2003). *Players in Pigtails*, New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Drachman E. (2004). *Ellison the Elephant*, Los Angeles, CA: Kidwick books.
- Fierstein H. (2002). *The Sissy Duckling*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.
- Haan L. D. & Nijland S. (2000). *King & King*, New York: Tricycle Press.
- Hart C. (Producer) (1983). *Free to be... You and Me* [Audio].
- Herron C. (1997). *Nappy Hair*, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Hopkinson D. (2003). *Girl Wonder*, New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks.
- Kilodavis C. (2009). *My Princess Boy*, New York, NY: Aladdin.
- Leaf M. (1936). *The Story of Ferdinand*, New York, NY: Viking.
- Lester H. (1988). *Tacky the Penguin*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Martin R. (1998). *The Rough-Face Girl*, New York, NY: Puffin Books.
- Munsch R. (1996). *Stephanie's Ponytail*, Buffalo, NY: Annick Press.
- Munsch R. (1980). *The Paper Bag Princess*, Buffalo, NY: Annick Press.
- Park F. & Park G. (2000). *The Royal Bee*, Honesdale, PA: Bodys Mills Press.
- Pinkwater D. (1977). *The Big Orange Spot*, New York, NY: Scholastic Inc.
- Recorvits H. (2003). *My Name is Yoon*, Douglas & McIntyre Ltd.: Canada.
- Thomas M. & Friends (2008). *Free to be... You and Me*, Philadelphia, PA: Running Press Kids.
- Zolotow C. (1972). *William's Doll*, Harper Collins Publishers.

Environment

- Dr. Suess (1971). *The Lorax*, New York, NY: Random House.

Family

- Baylor B. (1994). *The Table Where Rich People Sit*, New York, NY: Aladdin Books.
- Bunting E. (1994). *A Day's Work*, New York, NY: Clarion Books.
- Bunting E. (1991). *Fly Away Home*, New York, NY: Clarion Books.
- Harris R. (2008). *It's Not the Stork!* Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Lindenbaum P. (2007). *Mini Mia and Her Darling Uncle*, New York, NY: R&S Books.
- Miller K. (1994). *Did My First Mother Love Me?* Buena Park, CA: Morning Glory Press.
- Morrison T. & Morrison S. (1999). *The Big Box*, New York, NY: Jump At The Sun/Hyperion Books For Children.
- Parnell P. & Richardson J. (2005). *And Tango Makes Three*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.
- Polacco P. (2009). *In Our's Mothers' House*, New York, NY: Philomel Books.
- Quinlan P. (1994). *Tiger Flowers*, New York, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers.

FRIENDSHIP

- Choi Y. (2001). *The Name Jar*, New York, NY: Dell Dragon Fly Books.
- Fox M. (1989). *Feathers and Fools*, New York, NY: Voyager Books.
- Raschka C. (1993). *Yo! Yes?* New York, NY: Scholastic Books.

HISTORICAL FICTION

- Bunting E. (1995). *Cheyenne Again*, New York, NY: Clarion Books.
- Campbell N. L. (2005). *Shi-shi-etko*, Berkeley, CA: Group West.

- Hesse K. (2004). *The Cats in Krasinski Square*, New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Park F. & Park G. (2000). *The Royal Bee*, Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.
- Rappaport D. (2001). *Martin's Big Words*, New York, NY: Scholastic Books.
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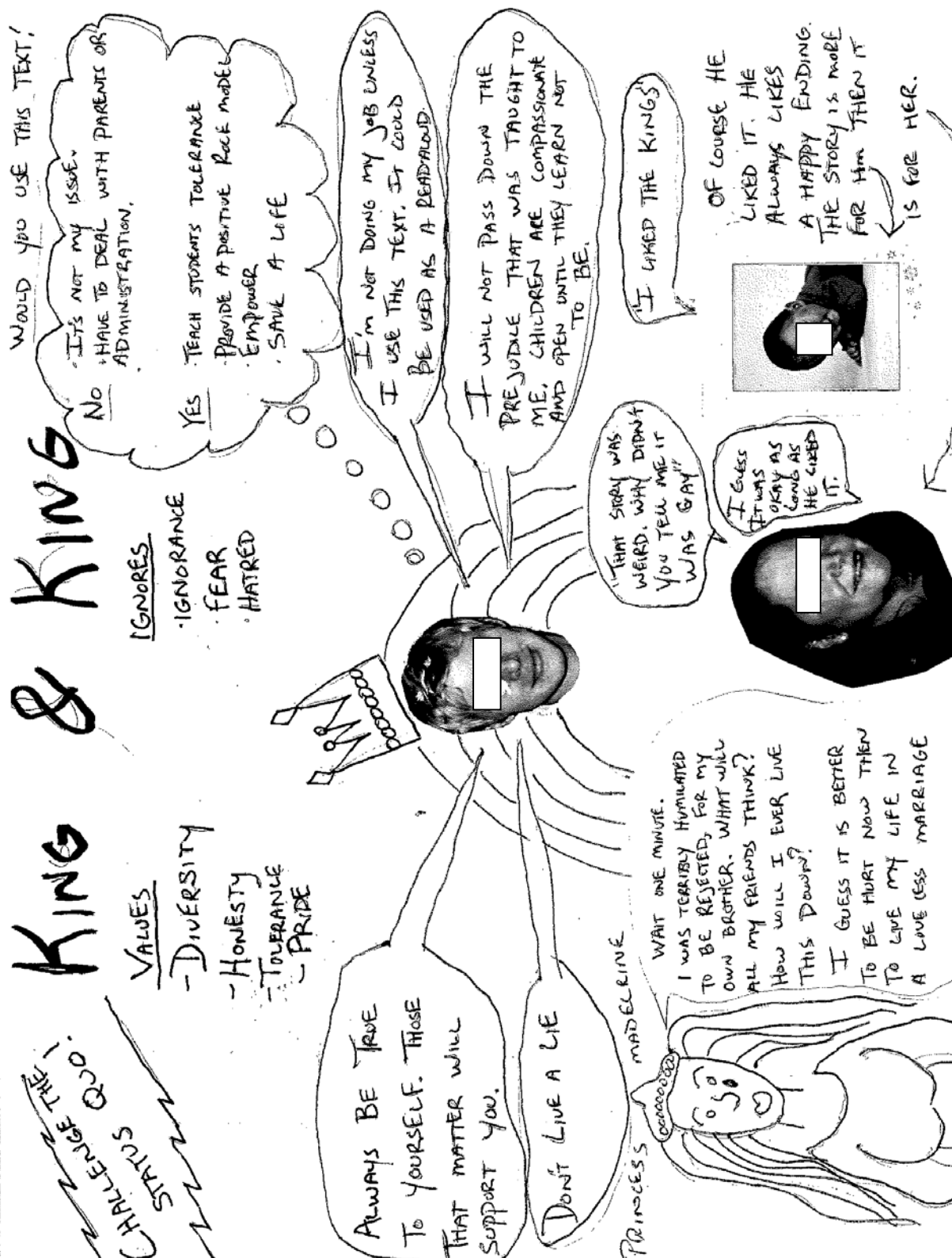
ILLNESS

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- Verniero J. C. (1995). *You Can Call Me Willy*, New York, NY: Magination Press.

PREJUDICE

- Bunting E. (1994). *Smoky Night*, Orlando, FLA: Harcourt Brace & Company.
- Faulkner M. (2008). *A Taste of Colored Water*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.
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- Vigna J. (1992). *Black Like Kyra, White Like Me*, Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman & Company.
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B: Graphic Representation 1



B: Graphic Representation 2

AVENGE THE STATUS QOO

VALUES
HEROISM
COURAGE
CONCERN FOR OTHERS
PATRIOTISM

IGNORES
FEAR
HATRED

WHAT TEXT SAYS TO ME
Leadership
TRUE LEADERS LEAD BY EXAMPLE
• NEVER ASK SOMEONE TO DO SOMETHING YOU WOULD NOT DO YOURSELF
• KING CHRISTIAN X RODE WITHOUT BODY GUARDS
WHEN FACED WITH A TOUGH CHOICE THE HARDER OPTION IS INVARIABLY THE RIGHT THING TO DO

REST THEY CAME FOR THE COMMUNISTS.
1 I DIDN'T SPEAK OUT BECAUSE I WASN'T COMMUNIST.
2 IN THEY CAME FOR THE TRADE UNIONISTS,
3 I DIDN'T SPEAK OUT BECAUSE I WASN'T A TRADE UNIONIST
4 THEY CAME FOR THE JEWS
5 I DIDN'T SPEAK OUT BECAUSE I WASN'T A JEW
6 IN THEY CAME FOR ME
7 THERE WAS NO ONE LEFT TO SPEAK FOR ME
MARTIN NIEMOLLER -

THE POLARIZATION OF POLITICS AND CLASS PLAYS INTO PEOPLES FEARS AND DRIVES THEM FURTHER APART.

The Yellow Star

THE LEGEND OF KING CHRISTIAN X OF DENMARK
"IF YOU WISHED TO HIDE A STAR," YOU WOULD HIDE IT AMONG ITS SISTERS"
KING CHRISTIAN X

WHAT MADE DENMARK DIFFERENT THEN OTHER COUNTRIES INVADED BY THE NAZIS?
• DANISH MONARCHY WAS ALLOWED TO STAY INTACT
• GERMANS NEEDED FOOD, TRANSPORTATION ROUTES

How would the story be different if it took place in another country? Would Nazis allow their flag to be taken down without repercussion?

How TEXT COULD BE USED
History VS. HISTORIOGRAPHY
TIME LINE OF WWII AND GERMAN OCCUPATION OF DENMARK
HAVE STUDENTS INVESTIGATE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (1) CHILD SLAVERY, SUPPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS RIGHTS SUPPRESSION IN CHINA. STUDENTS CAN REPORT BACK AND WRITE A PERSUASIVE ESSAY ABOUT HOW THOSE SITUATIONS MIGHT BE DIFFERENT IF THOSE COUNTRIES HAD A LEADER LIKE KING CHRISTIAN X TO UNITE THE PEOPLE.
• HAVE STUDENTS FIND OUT FACTS OF DENMARK'S ROLE IN WWII.

IN CLASS
HAVE STUDENTS THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT ISSUE of CLASSISM & POVERTY. How do they PERCEIVE RICH PEOPLE

