

“What we need to understand is that there are no ‘others’ here. Ensure that no one is othered; everyone in the play and in the classroom has to be kin.”

Tracy Laverty

Some teachers and students are comfortable having conversations about race in the classroom. Many, however, are not (yet), for a variety of reasons, including the potential risks of personal &/or professional vulnerability, trauma, and conflicts among individuals and groups.

**This play and learning guide can help teachers and their students, who are all diverse in diverse ways, to cross this bridge together.**

As a work of verbatim theatre, Reasonable Doubt is uniquely designed to allow students and teachers to collectively observe others engage(d) in conversations about race. The script and performance take people’s intense, often hidden thoughts and feelings about race and embodies them elsewhere, in the words on the page and the actors on stage.

Re-locating this important, emotionally-laden, often unexplored content outside of ourselves creates space for us to:

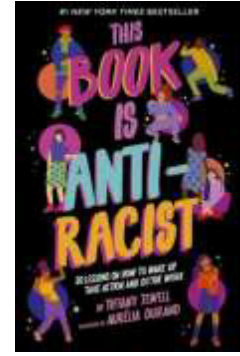
- a. reflect inwardly on how the play’s voices and ideas echo and challenge our own; &
- b. talk together about how the play’s ‘characters’ talk about race.

Each student and teacher is thus their own gatekeeper: they can talk about race without necessarily having to talk about what they personally think, feel, and have experienced.

Anti-racist educator, Khodi Dill, affirms this approach: “One of the mistakes we can make is to retraumatize folks – to ask, ‘How has this affected you? Have you ever experienced racism? Have you been stopped by the police?’ . . . We need to keep our conversations in the classroom about structural inequities, about systemic racism, about social constructions of power and how that plays out in social scenarios. We don’t need to talk about individual accounts. We don’t need to talk about personal stories. All of those stories put together are the problem.” (Dill, Getting the Goods Podcast, March, 2020)

As students of Reasonable Doubt talk about other people’s statements and dialogues about race, they learn concepts essential to an understanding of racism and antiracism. These concepts give them the ability to “read” their own and others’ often unconsciously-held beliefs and the actions which issue from them. As their social justice literacy develops, they become increasingly capable as ethical beings -- able to consciously affirm or alter the beliefs and actions they have inherited and habituated.

To develop a shared understanding of key social justice concepts before and/or during their study of the play, consultant Tracy Laverty recommends **This Book is Anti-Racist**. The reflections & dialogues students engage in as they journey through the book give them opportunities to internalize key concepts and to begin developing their own racial autobiographies. This will prepare them well to engage in dialogue about Reasonable Doubt as they journey through the play together. Below are some of the concepts featured in the book:



Personal identity map \* social identity categories \* privileged & marginalized identities \* intersectionality \* racial identity \* ethnic identity \* noticing power in systems \* microaggressions \* my family history \* our collective history on this land \* stories of resistance \* strategies to interrupt racism \* self-care & healing \* calling out & calling in \* practicing allyship \* building relationships \* (re)defining self

Laverty explains, “If you build the social justice conceptual knowledge and understanding first, then, when you experience the play, you see that ‘Every time a voice comes on the stage, it’s a relative.’”

This conceptual knowledge makes it possible for students to hold their own reactions, beliefs, and commitments up for reflection and scrutiny. If and when they feel offended, threatened, or otherwise triggered by an idea, they can treat these emotions as signs that a threshold or entry point “for gaining deeper self-knowledge” is at hand (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 4) and ask questions such as, **“What do I think about this? What are my assumptions? How did I come to think this way? Whose needs and interests does this way of thinking serve? threaten?”**

Developing shared norms and expectations for the learning ahead with students can provide them with a sense of purpose and safety. In *Courageous Conversations about Race* (2005), authors Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton offer 4 Agreements for Courageous Conversations:

1. Stay Engaged
2. Expect to Experience Discomfort
3. Speak your Truth
4. Expect and Accept a Lack of Closure

The Foundation for Critical Thinking provides a complementary set of agreements that can help students to self-regulate their own cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual responses as they engage with the play.

According to the Foundation, before we develop critical social justice literacy, we tend to rely on these psychological standards of truth:

“It’s true because I/we believe it.”  
“It’s true because I/we want to believe it.”  
“It’s true because I/we have always believed it.”  
“It’s true because it’s in my/our selfish interest to believe it.”

Encouraging the practices listed below can support learners to move from egocentrism and sociocentrism to fair-mindedness and cultural humility:

**As I learn, I'll strive to:**

- o recognize and admit the limits of my current knowledge;
- o understand others' thinking well enough that I can reason accurately and fairly both within and about their points of view;
- o see truth in ideas I once considered dangerous or absurd and distortion or falsity in ideas I've long believed to be true;
- o stay engaged in learning even when I'm struggling with confusion, opposition, and unsettled questions, knowing that this may be necessary to achieve deeper, mutual understandings;
- o be willing to change my mind in response to new and compelling information, ideas, and points of view;
- o avoid privileging my own point of view and vested interests over the points of view and interests of others.

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The strategies provided in the final section of the Teacher Guide are designed to hone these skills (which are at the heart of the Broad Areas of Learning and Cross-Curricular Competencies in Saskatchewan curricula.)

