



RECOGNIZE, REFLECT, REFOCUS

Addressing Anti-Black Racism in the Drama and Dance Classroom

June 2022

*“What ‘s happening in our spaces
the moment our Black students,
our racialized students, enter the space?
What type of spaces are we creating?”
(Ayesetta Conteh, 2021)*

Assembled by the CODE Equity Committee, 2022:

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With thanks to partners Joseph Gwalingo and Coco Murray who vetted the material found within.



We need to recognize the history
that we stand on when we do this work.
(9:43) (Dr. George Dei)

AFRICAN ANCESTRAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In relation to our work in the creation of this document and as an arts association, CODE would like to acknowledge that our occupation on this land is complicit in the stealing of African labour and resources. We recognize that people of African descent (Black, African and Caribbean peoples) were forcibly displaced from their native lands and from their languages, customs, and cultures. It is imperative that our national narratives tell the truth about Canada's Black presence. People of African descent have been involuntarily uprooted, enslaved, and scattered, then reinserted on stolen land. We move forward in our commitment to disrupt harmful narratives, dismantle systematic oppression and anti-Black racism and decolonize all spaces in the Arts, no matter how great or small. As both allies and educators, we realize the need to unravel our own power and privilege and provide spaces for voices that have been historically silenced.



Don't debate facts. Racism exists.
It's not something that's up for debate.
(14:29) (Michelle Rodney Bartalos)

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This document is created in response to CODE Conversation: Recognize Reflect Refocus, a panel discussion that took place in May 2021, moderated by Dr. Seika Boye, and featuring panelists Michelle Rodney Bartalos, Wallis Caldoza, Ayesatta Conteh, Dr. George Dei, and Debbie Nicholls-Skerritt. Key comments from the panel discussion frame the content of this resource. The intent of this document is to continue the conversation and reflection, to question systems of power and privilege, examine overlapping systems of oppression, unpack biases, inspire educators to look at their privilege, and invite teachers to engage in this work along with students. This can be uncomfortable, messy work, but it is essential. Our intention is for this document to serve as a catalyst for moving from equity to action oriented social justice in the Drama and Dance classroom and tell stories of joy and hope that dismantle the colonial narrative.

The guiding questions that have framed this document are:

How can Drama and Dance be used as the tools to unpack systems of power, privilege, and oppression in our classrooms and schools?

How can the elements of Drama and Dance be used to scaffold and engage in the exploration of oppression, voice, bias in all divisions at an appropriate level?

How can we use Drama and Dance to lead with hope, and celebrate the strengths, voices and positive narratives of the Black Diaspora?

The first part of this document provides a discussion of guiding frameworks and key concepts along with resources for further exploration. The second part of this work is an offering of different ways in which you might engage the tools and practices of Drama and Dance in education to address anti-Black racism.

There is no one way to “do” or one answer to addressing Anti-Black Racism in the Drama and Dance classroom. In this document you will not find lesson or unit plans or a definitive list of prescriptive resources. Instead, you will find a series of invitations to engage in this work. This is a journey. This work does not end here but begins with you, the educator, and where you are in your learning and practice.



Systemic problems
require some
systemic solutions.

(13:39)

(Michelle Rodney
Bartalos)

FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS: CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) describes teaching that integrates a student's background knowledge and community experiences into the curriculum, as well as the teaching and learning experiences that take place in the classroom (Ladson-Billings 1994). Cultural Relevant Pedagogy or CRP aims to honour cultural expressions and knowleges in an effort to fill gaps to counteract the oppression of Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC); as well as Lesbian, Gay, Transexual, Bisexual, Queer, Two Spirit and Non-Binary (LGTBQ2+) persons. However, CRP is one small part of the larger umbrella of Critical Race Theory (CRT) which requires a broader commitment of all stakeholders to address systemic racism. This places responsibility squarely on the shoulders of both the oppressed and the privileged, to unpack, address and,

...challenge the system of images, words, attitudes,
unconscious feelings, scripts, and social teachings...
which...convey to one another that certain people are
less intelligent, reliable, hardworking, virtuous...than
others (Delgado and Stefancic 2012).

By examining how these social constructs are directly related to oppression, stakeholders then understand how systematic oppression operates as the culpable source of lost opportunities for discriminated groups.



You can't cry fire when you are the arsonist.

(1:09) (Dr. George Dei)



It is the way whiteness determines the rules and the standards of the conversation... legitimation, validation, whose stories, whose experiences count, how these experiences should be told...(31:07) (Dr. George Dei)

AIMS OF THIS DOCUMENT

What does this mean for Drama and Dance Education? In short, CRT addresses systematic oppression at its core, and calls upon us to act to bring about change. This means examining how whiteness has been privileged in all areas of Drama and Dance; often to the detriment of all global Drama and Dance forms and the oppression of its Artists. Arts educators are called upon to decentre whiteness in all aspects of the Arts including hiring practices, educational qualifications, opportunities, arts curriculum, and artistic expression (to learn more, please see the articles listed below). This document focuses on CRP as a beginning step towards the larger work of CRT. We honour that each educator approaches this work from different spaces. It is our hope that this document will become a stepping stone towards greater inclusion and engagement in the Arts for all students.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY IN DRAMA AND DANCE

In a monograph entitled *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Towards Equity and Inclusivity in Ontario Schools* (2015), the Ontario Ministry of Education along with the Ontario Human Rights Commission expressed key thinking surrounding concepts of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and what it might look like in Ontario schools. The document cites three areas through which we can engage in CRP in education; Institutional, Personal, and Instructional. This framework inspires the following further inquiry into each of these areas:

Institutional: What values do our school, board, and ministry policies and practices reflect? How do formal and informal processes, syllabus, and curriculum in Drama and Dance education reproduce patterns of marginalization or ‘othering’?

Instructional: Do course content, assessment, and/or resources reflect diversity and allow for all students to experience success and see themselves reflected? Where are there patterns that need to be interrupted and provide opportunities for counter-storytelling? Who is in the class? How can classroom practices work to be inclusive of all learners? What differentiation can be offered to validate all abilities and ensure the needs of all students are met?

Personal: What is our positionality? Are we aware of how artistic practices can be oppressive and centre whiteness? Has effort and thought been invested in building relationships with students and ascertaining how they learn and express their understanding best?

The work of CRP requires awareness and critical examination of the thinking and positionality we bring to the classroom, but also demands that we have the same accountability through critical discourse and action in the classroom and systemically through administration, policy, and practices at school, Board, and Ministry levels.

CRP REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR DRAMA AND DANCE TEACHERS

Addressing Anti-Black Racism in education is an ongoing active process that confronts, disrupts, and builds capacity in a multi-directional way, from the work we do in our classrooms to the policies that impact education systemically. For more information from leading Canadian and International researchers and to learn more about anti-Black racism within the context of Ontario schools see the reference and resource list provided below. The chart below highlights themes with accompanying reflections questions and offers some examples of what anti-racist practice and pedagogy might look like.

Theme	Reflection Question	Look Fors/Understandings
Centring Yourself	<p>Do I represent the community I teach in?</p> <p>Do I represent a similar or different gender/ gender expressions from my students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher understands that their knowledge may not represent their school community - Teacher understands that they do not have the historic authority to <i>speak for</i> students experiences or histories of systemic oppression - Teacher reaches out to members from the community to avoid cultural appropriation of traditional Art forms -Teacher centres student voice in discussions involving LGBTQ2+ realities

Theme	Reflection Question	Look Fors/Understandings
<p>Decolonizing Your Practice: Interrupting 'Normative' Arts Education</p>	<p>Whose culture is being presented and why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher actively works to decentralise whiteness in programming by moving away from European ways of movement and expressions as 'the standard' - Student cultures and histories are validated, and are the driving force behind curriculum decisions and planning
<p>Building on Student Strengths</p>	<p>Which voices are present and absent in the material?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Missing voice and histories are researched and addressed - Classroom learning interrupts narratives that are harmful to Black, Indigenous People of Colour and LGTBQ2+ students
<p>Changing Ways of Movement</p>	<p>Which types of dance and styles of movement are being honoured?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching honours the movement traditions and expressions of all of students - Historically absent traditions are also addressed, even if they are not part of classroom composition - Oppressive or traditional movement patterns or expressions that hinder and exclude LGTBQ2+ students are modified or removed

Theme	Reflection Question	Look Fors/Understandings
<p>Inviting Community Voice</p>	<p>In what ways are community voices included in my teaching?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural references are found within school community - Parents and outside Arts agencies are welcome voices in classroom
<p>The Role of Elders and Knowledge Keepers</p>	<p>Have Indigenous Elders and/or Knowledge Keepers been consulted?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educators build one-on-one relationships over time with local Elders/Knowledge Keeper - Consultation occurs with these partners seeking guidance when engaging with Indigenous content - Non-Indigenous Educators are mindful to avoid instruction about Indigenous cultural practices/teachings and focus instead on issues, history, and relevant contemporary news, not on cultural practices, unless lead by a guest Elder or Knowledge Keeper - Harmful narratives and content are actively addressed and challenged with the intention of replacing them with positive counter-narratives <p><i>*For more reading about Indigenous subject matter in the Drama Dance Classroom see the document <u>In a Good Way</u>, on the CODE website</i></p>

Theme	Reflection Question	Look Fors/Understandings
Student Voice	Are student voices and histories represented in my teaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student choice and voice are central to student success - Students are comfortable to challenge material presented and take ownership of their learning
Inclusion of ESL, ELL, ELD, and students with disabilities	Do resources provide entry points for students with specific education needs or English language learners? Are learning strategies and resources accessible for students with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All students can access materials and are provided support - Community supports are accessed - Alternate means of movement are considered and explored - Differentiated assessment and instruction are incorporated in planning and artistic choices

References and Further Reading

Kerr-Berry. (2016). Peeling Back the Skin of Racism: Real History and Race in Dance Education. *Journal of Dance Education*, 16(4), 119–121.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2016.1238708>

Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (2001) *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

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- Munroe, Tanitiã. (2021). How to curb anti-Black racism in Canadian schools. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/how-to-curb-anti-black-racism-in-canadian-schools-150489>
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- Richards, H.V., Brown, A., & Forde, T.B.(2006). *Addressing diversity in schools: Culturally responsive pedagogy*. Buffalo State College/NCCREST.
- Robin Prichard.(2019). From Color-Blind to Color-Conscious. *Journal of Dance Education*, 19(4),168-177, DOI: 10.1080/15290824.2018.1532570.
*(*Note: Scholars have made a call to move away from the use of the term “colour-blindness” towards addressing “colour-evasiveness”. This both acknowledges the ableist undertones of this term and invites us to actively engage with race as opposed to just being aware. Further reading on this topic can be found [here](#) and [here](#).)*
- Srivastava, V. (2021, February 17). How to spark change within our unequal education system. Don't Call me Resilient Podcast. Season 1, Episode 3. <https://dont-call-me-resilient.simplecast.com/episodes/ep-3-how-to-spark-change-within-our-unequal-education-system?share=true>
- York Region District School Board. (2021, March 5). 5 Ways to be Culturally Relevant and Responsive in the Arts. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW3waxojbFM>



When talking about gaps and privilege we also need to talk about the consequences of doing this work - you are going to get upset but that's part of the work .
(11:36) (Dr. George Dei)

1. Learning/Unlearning From and Through Counter-Storytelling

How can we learn from Black performance artists in confronting anti-Black racism within our classrooms and broader communities? Perhaps we can engage with the stories that they weave through their creative work and practice.

Turning to stories as a method for teaching and returning to our acts of storytelling as a space to rethink how we teach, we have much to learn from practices of counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling has been defined as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Mobilized through the work of Black critical and creative scholars and artists, it has been suggested as “the single most important strategy in ongoing struggles against colonialism, racism, and White supremacy among other oppressions” (Baszile, 2015, p. 240).



You have to enter into the work; I don't think it is optional.
(19:56) (Michelle Rodney Bartalos)

As we reflect on our own learning and unlearning, we invite you to engage with the stories that the Ontario-based artists below weave through their creations, and perhaps even explore how their practices of counter-storytelling reveal the power of Drama and Dance to re-imagine the stories that we tell of our past, our present, and our future.

Entry points for engagement

We offer the following questions as provocations for your thinking and perhaps to even to guide your explorations of contemporary Black performance art with your own students:

- What stories are these artists sharing through their creations?
- What dominant stories of race are these artists working to disrupt?
- How are these artists using Drama and Dance to tell different stories?
- How might we understand these artists' practices as acts of counter-storytelling?
- How can we be inspired by the creative work of these artists to question the stories we tell and how we tell them through Drama and dance?

Esie Mensah—A Revolution of Love

<https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/history-art-culture/museums/a-revolution-of-love/>

Through this dance film, Esie Mensah presents a counter-story to “reframe revolution in the name of love.” Situating her film at Toronto’s Fort York National Historic Site, she further disrupts dominant stories of Canadian history by animating a site that is often associated with the history of the founding of Toronto, a history that often erases the presence of Black individuals and communities. She tells a counter-story of Black women’s’ presence in colonial spaces, highlighting the activist roles that many Black women have taken and continue to take in confronting Canadian settler colonial legacies by reimagining how we move forward through care, healing, and love.

Obsidian Theatre—21 Black Futures

<https://www.cbc.ca/artsprojects/21blackfutures>

Through this anthology of plays, Obsidian Theatre company commissioned twenty-one Black playwrights, twenty-one Black directors, and twenty-one Black actors to create pieces in response to the question, “What is the future of Blackness?” While each monodrama presents a counter-story of Black futurity in the face of ongoing violence against Black life, the collection of pieces come together to disturb monolithic conceptions of Blackness, Black identity, and Black experience. Some of the plays do this by performing counter-stories that emphasize the intersections and entangled experiences of race, Indigeneity, disability, sexuality, and gender. Presenting twenty-one different and unique perspectives, 21 Black Futures further tells a counter-story of the future of Black theatre. As artistic director Mumbi Tindyebwa Otu suggests, “The future of Black theatre is not one thing. It is not just an increase in ‘Black representation’, it is profoundly diverse and multifaceted, it is multi-generational, and it commands attention.”

References:

Baszile, D. T. (2015). Rhetorical revolution: Critical race counterstorytelling and the abolition of white democracy. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(3), 239-249.

Solorazano, D., & Yosso, T. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44.

Sins Invalid—Disability Justice from A to Z: A Coloring Book for Our Communities

<https://www.sinsinvalid.org/coloring-book>

Sins Invalid is a performance collective of disabled and queer artists of colour based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through their activism, they explore the possibilities of artistic creation through a disability justice framework. This framework of disability justice presents a counter-story that forces us to confront the often-erased entanglements of racism and ableism.* Using performance art, they centre perspectives at the intersections of racialized, disabled, and queer experience to reimagine how we come together in critical, creative, and caring community. As a creative and accessible way to share their framework of disability justice, they commissioned twenty-six disabled, trans, queer, and BIPOC artists to illustrate a colouring book introducing and exploring different words that describe different aspects of intersectional disability justice.

**To learn more about the entangled nature of ableism and racism, to hear discussions on disability and race in education, and to understand the ways in which disability justice and racial justice cannot be achieved without the other, listen to this episode of Ibram X. Kendi's podcast, "Be Antiracist," featuring American disability rights activist Rebecca Cokley:*

<https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/be-antiracist-with-ibram-x-kendi/ableism-racism-roots-of-the-same-tree>



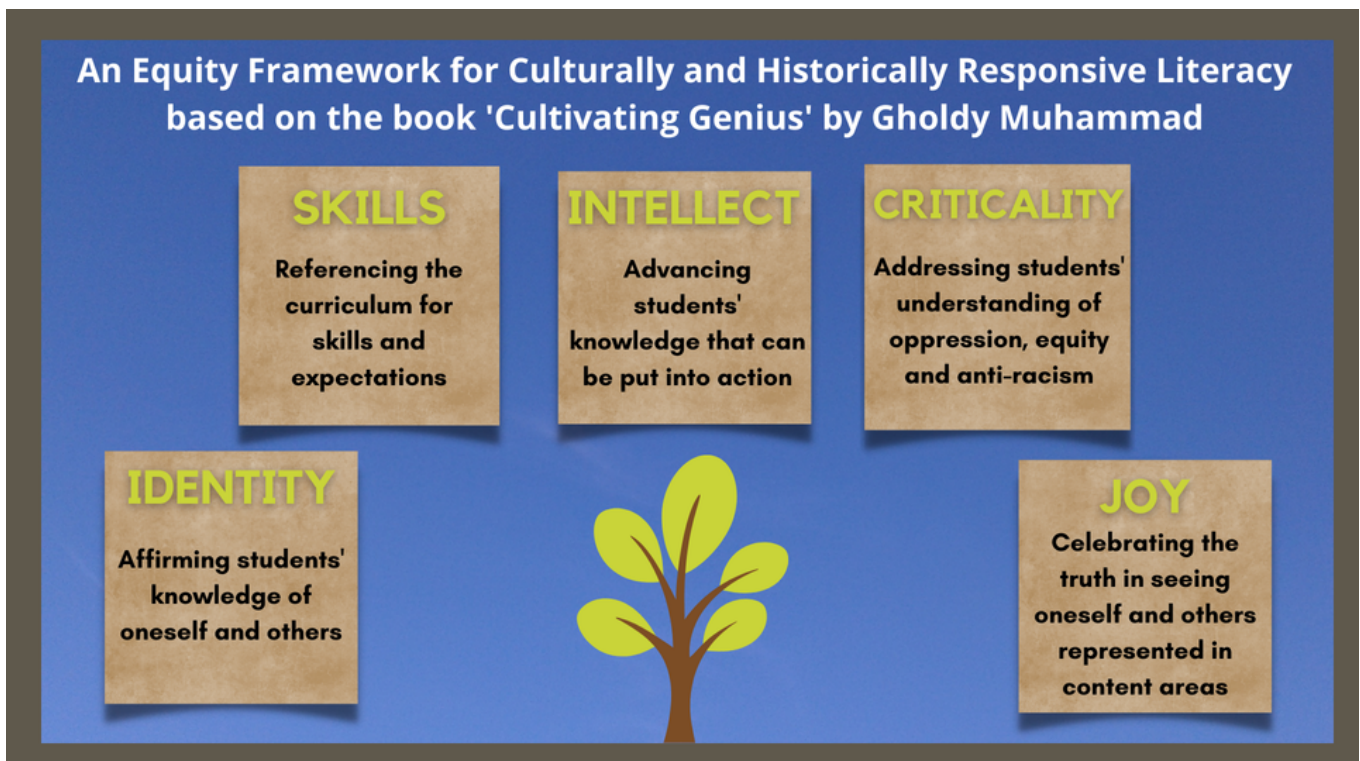
We need to be able to identify the community members, the activists the artists, the healers because that is the community that needs to be rallied up so that we could take up space and help navigate the traumatic terrain and hopefully have a more empowered experience moving forward.

(47:00) (Debbie Nicholls-Skerritt)

2. Identity Centred Texts to Inspire Drama and Dance

In Equity work we start from where we are. Identity is a powerful entry point for students to claim/reclaim space for marginalized voices, decentre dominant Euro-centric and colonial narratives and perspectives in our classrooms, explore difference, and make room for joy, celebration, and pride.

In the book *Cultivating Genius*, Professor Gholdy Muhammad uses an equity framework for teaching and learning that brings the histories and stories of marginalized communities to the forefront. The framework includes: identity, skills development, intellect, and criticality as a foundation for learning so that literary provocations are inclusive and diverse. This framework can also be referred to as the HILL Model.

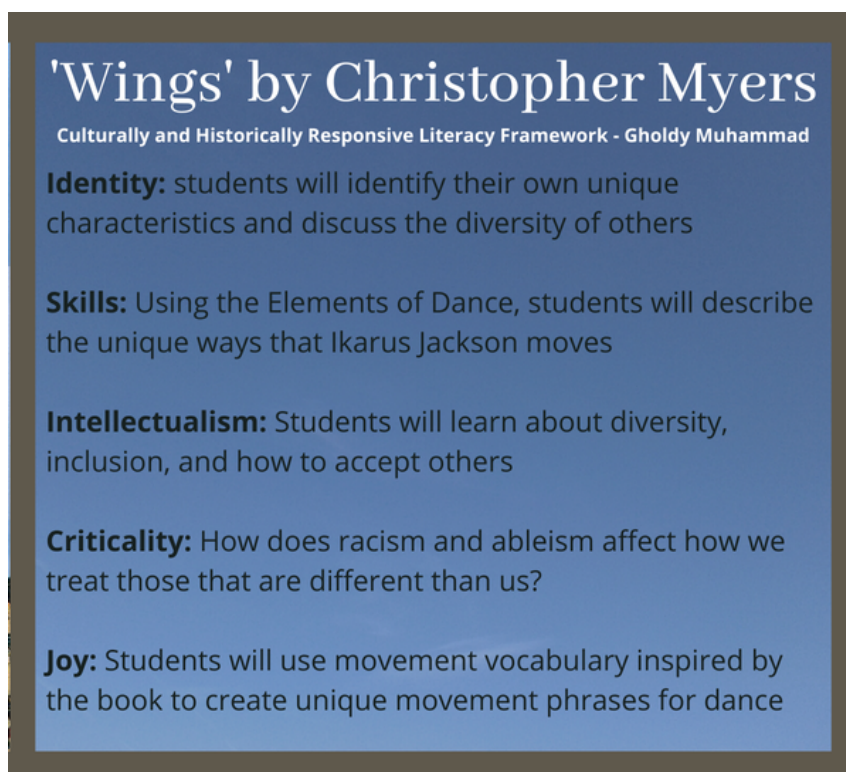


Gholdy Muhammad's framework appears here with the author's permission.

Culturally and Historically Responsive Texts in Drama and Dance

The stories of marginalized students help all students understand issues of equity, oppression, and anti-racism. Integrating the HILL framework in the Drama and Dance classroom can mean centering culturally and historically responsive texts as the provocation for Drama or Dance work and engaging students in thinking about *their* responses to and connection with the text in a way that affirms the multiplicity of students' identities. This framework also requires educators to think deliberately about the texts that are used in the classroom: Does the text affirm diverse identities? Does the text offer the opportunity to think critically about power constructs? Is there occasion for students to create meaningful work through Drama and Dance using the text as a provocation?

The graphic below shows how this equity framework can be applied using the book *Wings* by Christopher Myers as an example. The approach offered in the graphic below identifies points of connection for students to identify aspects of their own identities and access pre-existing knowledge. It integrates the curriculum by working with the elements of dance within the context of the story and by applying keywords to movement while also promoting meaningful discussion surrounding ableism, racism, and inclusion, as well as values.



'Wings' by Christopher Myers
Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy Framework - Gholdy Muhammad

Identity: students will identify their own unique characteristics and discuss the diversity of others

Skills: Using the Elements of Dance, students will describe the unique ways that Ikarus Jackson moves

Intellectualism: Students will learn about diversity, inclusion, and how to accept others

Criticality: How does racism and ableism affect how we treat those that are different than us?

Joy: Students will use movement vocabulary inspired by the book to create unique movement phrases for dance

Gholdy Muhammad's framework appears here with the author's permission.



As an ally, use the position of power and privilege to speak up to give other people, more racialized people, the voice, the platform to say what they need to say.

(18:19) (Michelle Rodney Bartalos)

The texts we use in class can encourage students to think about themselves and their identities in positive ways that inspire contemplation about their own unique qualities, gifts, and knowledge while also learning about those of others. An additional title that can be explored in a similar way is *I am Enough* by Grace Byers, illustrated by Keturah A. Bobo (2018, Harper Collins).

Entry points for engagement:

1. How might the chosen text prompt an activity that has students think about the nature of identity? What types of things make up who we are, what we care about, and value?
2. How does movement reveal parts of our unique identities? How might students use movement to explore the ways that they move at different times and in different places?
3. An example of exploring identity and students' existing knowledge and lived experience through writing and then performatively through spoken word might include devising a poem such as the one outlined below. With this type of reflective writing activity, students bring themselves and their identities into the content of the Drama work. In small groups, individual writing pieces can be merged together in different ways (alternating different lines from students' work) and groups can make choices in volume, tone, pitch, and pace to determine how they might use their voices to speak their words aloud.

A further performative layer can be added to embody the students' combined poems by having students determine how they might use movement and their bodies to express the words they have put together. In this way, we see identity, lived experience, and histories honoured and expressed in an embodied way through a collaborative creation that uses the elements of both Drama and Dance.

Writing and performing an "I am from" poem

From Christensen, L. (2017). *Reading, Writing and Rising Up: Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word, 2nd Ed.* Rethinking Schools Ltd.

I am from...(places: rooms, buildings, cities, neighbourhoods, provinces, etc.).

I am from...(people: family, friends, relatives, ancestors).

I am from...(foods you have grown up with).

I am from...(games, toys, TV shows, sports that you liked to do as a child).

I am from...(family sayings, familiar phrases, things your elders say to you).

I am from...(objects found in your neighbourhood or house growing up).

I am from...(traditions and celebrations)

''

When we are talking about perspective and role, we always want to come back to the lived experiences of our students and our spaces. How do we make them visible? (Ayesatta Conteh)



The colonized lens is so thick and like a convoluted root, so it's not that simple. So it is about making sure that students are empowered to challenge, but also having educators and administrators and boards that are willing to have these conversations on the grassroots, on the level of the students.
(25:42) (Debbie Nicholls-Skerritt)

3. Using the elements of Drama and Dance to engage with history and representation

A foundational aspect of the creative process in the Ontario Arts curriculum is the initial challenge, inspiration, or provocation that activates creative inquiry and elicits response. Objects, painting, photography, and other visual arts can be a powerful entrypoint for examining our relationship to history, identifying colonial structures, and evoking responses that inspire critical discussion. The artists and art works cited below disrupt, challenge, and make space for re-storying difficult relationships.

Entry points for engagement:

1. In what ways do students see the elements of Drama (Tension, Relationship, Time/Place, Role/Character, Focus/Emphasis) or Dance (Body, Energy, Relationship, Shape, Time) at play in the artist's work? What parallels exist between creating visual art and creating Drama and/or Dance?
2. How and in what ways do students see history present in the art work? What more might they need to find out about this work and the story it's depicting? How do they connect with this history? What is their personal response to the story the art work tells?
3. How might students communicate their responses through movement? Spoken word? How might individual responses be interwoven to create a collaborative drama or dance work?

Selected works to discover...

Chantal Gibson - Historical In(ter)ventions

In her collection, *Altered Books*, Vancouver artist Chantal Gibson creates *Historical In(ter)ventions* that invite us to think about history, specifically history as it is written in books. How do we read and write text? What is absent or erased?

<https://chantalgibson.com/altered-books>

Titus Kaphar - Crumpled

Titus Kaphar is an artist who uses classic portraiture to call attention to the absence and silencing of Black histories using various techniques to confront dominant colonial tropes. Kaphar's work illustrates the presence, stories, and history of Black people through time, inviting us to think critically about how history is represented (or painted) and what is missing from that representation and why.

<https://www.kapharstudio.com/new-alte%cc%b2rs-reworking-devotion/>;

<https://gagosian.com/artists/titus-kaphar/>

Curtis Talwst Santiago - Infinity Series

Toronto-based multimedia artist Curtis Talwst Santiago creates unique works that celebrate and provoke. Known for making miniature dioramas among other creations, Santiago's art speaks to the notion of "genetic imagination" with pieces that are an expression of roots and wants, origins and joy (Santiago (2020), *Can't I Alter*, The Drawing Center, New York).

<https://www.curtissantiago.art/video>; <https://www.curtissantiago.art/>

Sandra Brewster - Token Reflections

Sandra Brewster's work evokes thinking about displacement, movement, the nature of objects, and identity. Working with photography, paint, and layered mediums, Brewster's art invites exploration into how the use of form contributes to meaning in the stories and themes of her work.

<https://sandrabrewster.com/category/work/>



How can we come together
when we do this work? (Dr. George Dei)

Where do we go from here?

This document is the continuation of ongoing conversation and commitment to provide Drama and Dance educators with entry points for engaging with the critical work of anti-racism. Whether this work is new to you or it represents an opportunity for further exploration, our goal is that this resource supports deliberate rethinking of what we do in classrooms and schools, offering meaningful material infused with inspiration and hope. Drama and Dance are powerful tools through which to unpack power, privilege, and oppression, create agents for change, and make space for the voices and experiences of Black students. This work can be challenging and uncertain, however, it is also urgently needed and crucial for our students, ourselves, our craft, and our systems of education.