

Tanisha Taitt: Post on Facebook May 30th 4:42 p.m.

I saw an article today about how every college/university program should contain a course on Black history & white privilege, and it should be a mandatory requirement for graduation. I read a blog post espousing that kids should definitely be learning about racism in high school! Definitely! It's so important that they have an understanding before they go to college or out into the world!

I know these articles are well-meaning but... dear Jesus...

Through my decade-long work relationship with Children's Peace Theatre, I explored the concepts of race & racism, economic & societal power, injustice and privilege WITH 7-YEAR-OLDS.

SEVEN.

It was glorious, revelatory work. The amount that kids already hear, see and question is SO much more than we give them credit for. The production we created in my third year as theatre director, Raising Revolution, is one of the most profound pieces of social commentary that I have witnessed. I will never, EVER forget "White Life", an original song about living with skin colour privilege, written by members of the cast and performed by a quartet of white boys delightfully croonin' and groovin' in the style of the Four Seasons. (Bravo Seanna Kennedy, bravo!) Hilarity beyond measure, and razor-sharp. Brilliant. It made a few of their parents gasp. Good.

Children understand few things better than the concept of fairness. They know in their guts when something that has been done to someone - or not done FOR someone - feels unjust. There is a belief that children cannot handle discussions about race. Completely false. That is an excuse that ill-at-ease parents and teachers use to dodge their own discomfort and to avoid looking at the truth of themselves.

Please understand this basic thing. The longer you wait to start teaching white children about racism, the more already engrained racism you will have to undo. Because racism is foundational, and society is teaching your child how to normalize and ignore it every single day.

It is said that children are not born racist; they learn it. This is true. But the myth is that they always learn it from overtly malicious parents or from hanging with the wrong crowd. Sure, that happens. But they learn it just as much from the silence and INaction of the adults in their lives. They learn that it's something not worth talking about or challenging out loud and therefore, probably, NOT THAT BIG A DEAL.

When your 3-year-old turns the pages of her picture book, or your 8-year-old plays his video game, or they notice the photos of friends on your phone -- and everyone or 95% of the people are white -- you are teaching them something. When an unarmed Black person is killed by police, and you have the news on in the background that focuses more on the fact that the dead Black man was selling loose cigarettes than it does on the fact that he was killed by a racist cop -- and you don't correct it -- you are teaching them something. When your parent or uncle or aunt sits at your dinner table with your child and makes a bigoted comment, and you let it stand, you are teaching them something.

Those 'somethings', like dust, build up silently and almost invisibly on the surface of a child's brain. That surface must be actively and repeatedly cleaned, before dirty becomes its default. Otherwise there arrives a day when, out of the blue, you hear something come out of the mouth of your teen and think "Where did that come from? That's not how I raised you!"

But... was it though?