**Auditing Your Read Aloud – A Whole School Conversation**

[January 29, 2020](https://pernillesripp.com/2020/01/29/auditing-your-read-aloud-a-whole-school-conversation/)[Pernille Ripp](https://pernillesripp.com/author/pernilleripp/)

In 2010, I created a project called [The Global Read Aloud](https://theglobalreadaloud.com/), for the past 11 years I have been the driving force behind this global literacy initiative. For 11 years, I have asked educators to recommend books for us to read aloud on a global scale. To suggest books they feel would make for an incredible connection around the world. That will inspire students to learn more about others. That will inspire students to learn more about themselves. That will generate connections that maybe were not possible before.

You could say that for the past 11 years, I have seemingly had a front row seat to the most recommended read aloud books in America. And I am here to tell you something; they are almost all by White authors featuring White kids.

Probably not a shock to many, but still something to sit with for all.

I used to not notice. That’s what happens when White privileges blinds you to seemingly obvious things. I would gladly go with the suggestions not thinking about skin color or ethnic heritage as the read alouds were selected. Not thinking past the book and into the life off the author, after all, a read aloud is separate from the person who creates it, right? And these books were great. These books would generate conversations. These books had merit. These books had endured and would guarantee a beautiful read aloud experience for all of us. And they did.

And yet, a few years in, someone kindly asked; when will the “Global” part of the name come true? When will you pick a book that isn’t set in America, that isn’t written by a White author? I felt so dumb when the comment came my way. How could I have not noticed? How could I have forgotten to think deeper about what the project recommended?

Now looking back at the years of recommendations, patterns emerge quickly. Despite asking for #OwnVoices authors and stories set outside of the White dominant culture, these books continue to be the most often recommended. The same authors keep popping up. The same titles even. Even when they have been chosen in previous years, I am told that they would make for a great read aloud again because surely nothing can beat the experience we already had. Even if the books have been deemed problematic, they are still recommended.

This is not a trend limited to the Global Read Aloud. I see it play out on social media all of the time. Someone asks for a recommendation for a read aloud and in that list are the same White books. The same books that we, White educators, have loved for years and years and continue to read aloud because to us they mean something more. The same authors but with new titles. The same situations. The similar story of yet another White child overcoming obstacles. And of course, we need these stories too, however, we do not need them as much as we are using them right now. With a teaching profession in America that is dominated by 80% White people, it shouldn’t be a surprise, and yet, it should be something that we, as a profession, recognize and see the harm in.

[Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop](https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf), of course, reminded and continues to remind us of the power of seeing yourself in books. [We Need Diverse Books](https://diversebooks.org/our-programs/ourstory/) started from yet another moment of exclusion in a White dominated conference field. The [CCBC](https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp) continues to remind us how White children’s books are. [Lee and Low](https://blog.leeandlow.com/2020/01/28/2019diversitybaselinesurvey/)reminds of how White the publishing industry is. But that doesn’t mean our read alouds need to be. In fact, quite the opposite. This is the once again urgent reminder to all of us, White educators, and those who choose the books that we hold up and venerate enough to make a part of our curriculum, of our experience, that we need to audit our read alouds.

That we need to look past the books we have loved for a long time and see what else is out there.

That we need to start recommending #OwnVoices books. Books written by people who are marginalized within our society.

That we need to expand our loyalties. Our lists should contain numerous names of BIPOC authors who are writing incredible stories.

That we need to start reading more widely ourselves in order to discover the new authors who are creating stories that we so desperately need in the hands of our children.

That we need to stay current.

That we need to audit across grade-levels so that we can see what the read alouds are from one year to the next and disrupt the pattern of White dominance that inevitably occurs within most schools because an audit is not done.

That we look around and ask ourselves; what is the story told of kids of color? What is the story told of White kids? And how often is the story told? How does my read aloud cement or disrupt the dominant culture and how we view others?

Whose story is highlighted? Whose story becomes a part of the community we weave together? Whose stories hold power for all of us?

We need to think of the patterns we continue to perpetuate when we fail to see how much power a read aloud holds. Especially if we teach in White majority schools or in schools with White majority teaching staff. Our kids deserve stories about kids whose lives may not mirror their own, but who are still living incredible lives.

Because that’s what a great read aloud does; it creates connections, it leads to revelations, it it binds us together in deeper sense because we have lived through the story of another.

So we need to keep asking; whose stories are we living through? And how does that impact the students we teach? Because it is, and it does, and it is up to us to do something about it.

PS: I would be remiss to not thank those who have pushed my thinking on this. I am so grateful for the work done by the [#DiversityJedi](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23diversityjedi&src=typed_query)[#DisruptTexts](https://disrupttexts.org/) [Chad Everett](http://www.imaginelit.com/), [Sara Ahmed](https://twitter.com/SaraKAhmed?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor), [#WeNeedDiverseBook](https://diversebooks.org/)s, [Dr. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas](https://www.ebonyelizabeththomas.com/), and countless others

<https://pernillesripp.com/2020/01/29/auditing-your-read-aloud-a-whole-school-conversation/>