

The Power of Picturebooks to Enact Culturally Informed Reading Practices:

A Case Study from the 3Rs (Reading, Racial Equity, and Relationships) and Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School

Agenda

- ❖ **Introductions**
- ❖ **Context & Background**
- ❖ **Case Study**
- ❖ **Expanding the Narrative**



**Let's Introduce
Ourselves!**
The 3Rs | Urban Academy



The 3Rs

Reading, Racial Equity, and Relationships

OFFICE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT REIMAGINES THE THREE R's IN EDUCATION

On their own, reading, writing, and arithmetic—the traditional foundations of American education—often aren't making the grade in under-resourced public schools whose students are primarily Black and Brown children.

In response, the early elementary education cohort of The Pittsburgh Study was formed to focus attention on a complementary set of three R's: reading, relationships, and racial equity. Since 2019, the Office of Child Development (OCD) has been part of The Pittsburgh Study to help more children thrive in reading at the kindergarten to third grade level. The work is directed by OCD Director **Shannon Wanless** and project codirector **Shallegra Moye**, along with **Jennifer Briggs**, **Abby Chen**, **Amanda Cross**, **Sharon Geibel**, **Rhonda Hall**, **Caitlin Spear**, and **Meghan Orman**.

One aim of the initiative is to infuse Allegheny County with high-quality, racially affirming picture books. Picture books can serve both as windows through which adults and children see into the lives of others and as mirrors revealing truths about themselves. However, racially affirming picture books are often missing from schools, libraries, and literacy programs. For example, a study by University of Wisconsin-Madison researchers found that less than 25% of some 3,100 picture books in their study depicted ethnically diverse characters.

So far, the researchers have developed partnerships with many different people. They work with more than a dozen community-oriented literacy organizations, 35 education leaders, and more than 200 classroom teachers across six schools. Additionally, they have organized more than 100 community-of-practice sessions with adults across the county. The sessions provide moments for adults to have their beliefs challenged and

skills developed in a relationship-based format. Furthermore, the staff members meet each month with the team of community leaders, parents, teachers, and advocates who hold them accountable for their part in bringing forward bold and meaningful change.

The goals are simple: Disrupt racism, see children read, and see children thrive.

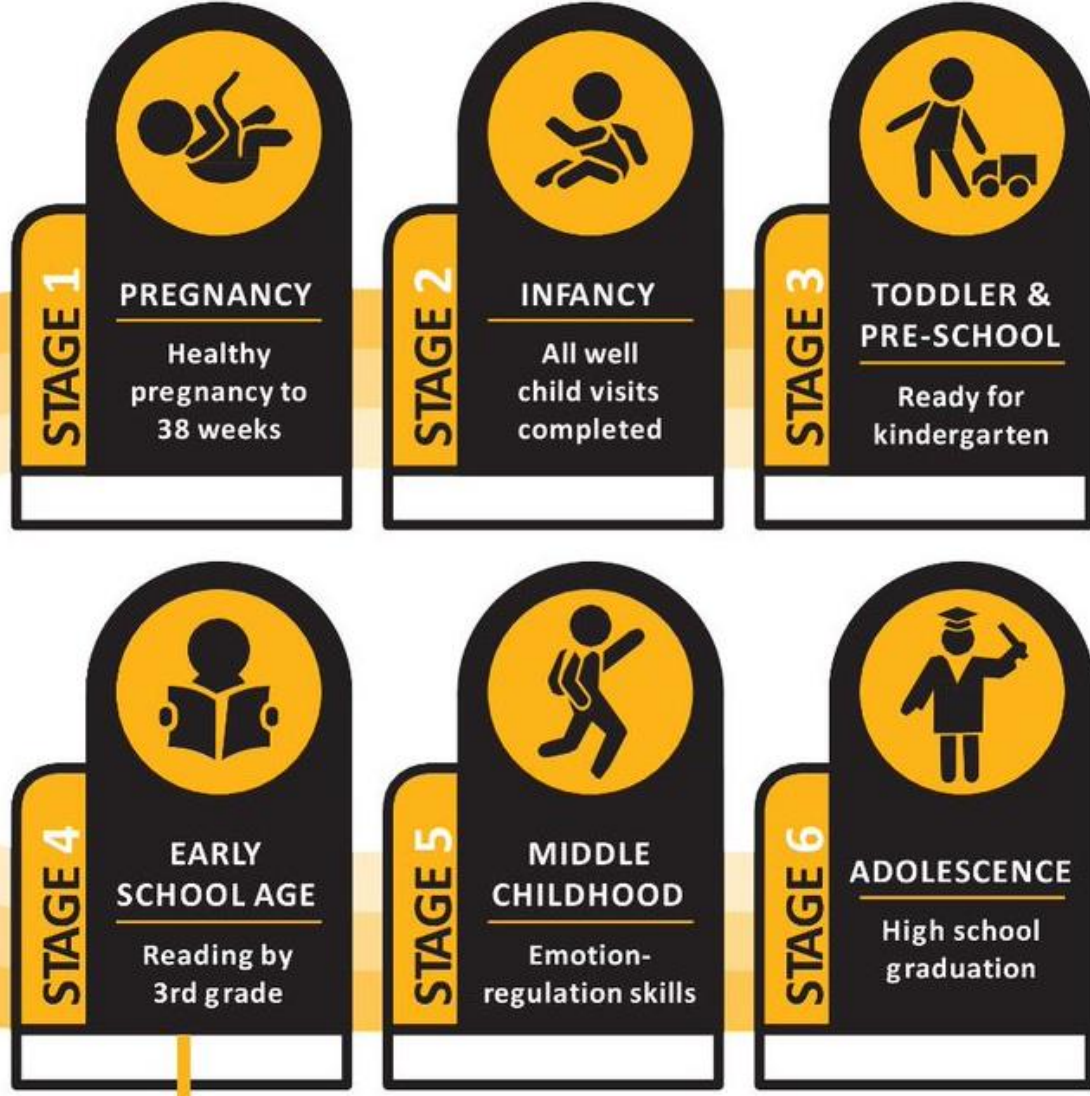
Says Moye, "The biggest gift we have to offer is the ability to acknowledge our own positionality and how it's showing up and influencing how we perceive the world. This is how we can then work through, connect, move past, and create the conditions for racial equity."

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

The Pittsburgh Study

CROSS-CUTTING COMMITTEES

HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH
POLICY AND PLACE
DATA ACCESS



3Rs Team

Co-Leads

Shannon Wanless & Shallegra Moye

Project Coordinator

Sharon Geibel, Sharon.Geibel@pitt.edu



3Rs with the Community



3Rs with Classroom Teachers



3Rs with Leaders



3Rs with Families

Embracing Literacy

Adults are always engaging children in literacy experiences

Prioritizing High Quality, Racially Affirming Books

Our community is full of books and materials that affirm Black culture and adults use them effectively.

Being 3Rs Means

Loving Black Children

Adults see strength in Black children & families and love them like their own.

Working Together

Adults and organizations work together so everyone has the support and resources they need and can align their efforts

3Rs with Classroom Teachers

Our Mission:

Supporting teachers' development of **racial literacy*** by shifting the lens to:

- Promote equitable **Reading** practices
- Build and support strong **Relationships**
- Foster the conditions for **Racial Equity**

Our Approach:

- Yearlong PD focused on the 3Rs
- Opportunity to join PLCs to take a deeper dive
- High Quality, Racially Affirming Picture Books as the tool to support **racial literacy*** development





What is Racial Literacy?

The capacity to decipher the durable racial grammar that structures racialized hierarchies and frames the narrative of our republic.

- *Guinier, 2004*

A skill and practice in which individuals are able to probe the **existence of racism** and examine the **effects of race and institutionalized systems** on their experiences and representation in US society.

- *Sealey-Ruiz, 2011*

Practicing Racial Literacy Means...

- **Understanding the role** racism plays in society
- The ability **to identify racism** when it happens
- [Developing/having] the knowledge, skills, and awareness needed to **talk thoughtfully** about race and racism; this includes having a rich vocabulary [and deep understanding of] terms such as race, racism, prejudice, ally, upstander, and so on.
- Having **strategies to counter or cope** with racism



Picture Books as the Tool to Support Racial Literacy Development

High-Quality, Racially Affirming Books

- Tools for adult self-reflection and learning.
- Strengthening literacy experiences with children so they see more representation and more examples of social justice & equity.

Adult Communities of Practice

- Adults come together often to engage in ongoing learning to become more 3Rs-ish.

Picture Books for Children's Learning

- Books as mirrors, windows, & prisms

Case Study

The 3Rs in Action at Urban Academy

Tiffany Sanchez (instructional coach) &
Marla Woody (reading specialist)





Urban Academy

Urban Academy of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School

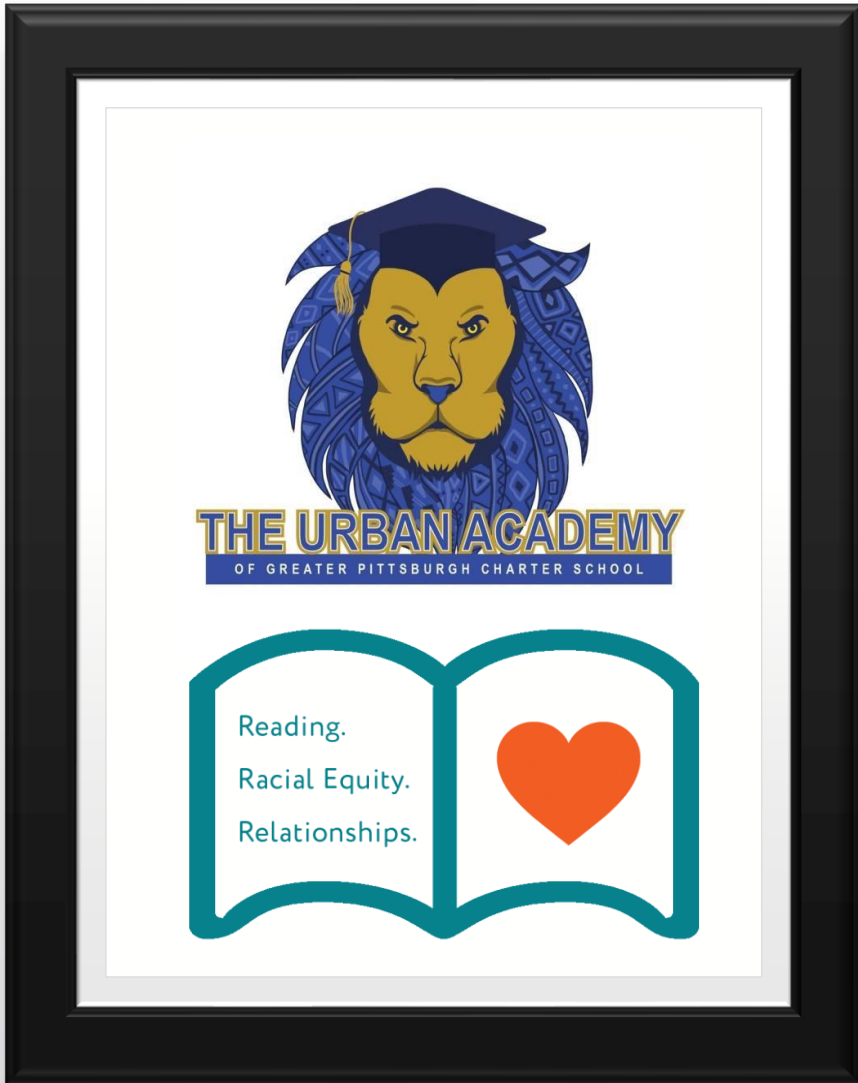




The 3Rs & Urban Academy: A Thriving Partnership

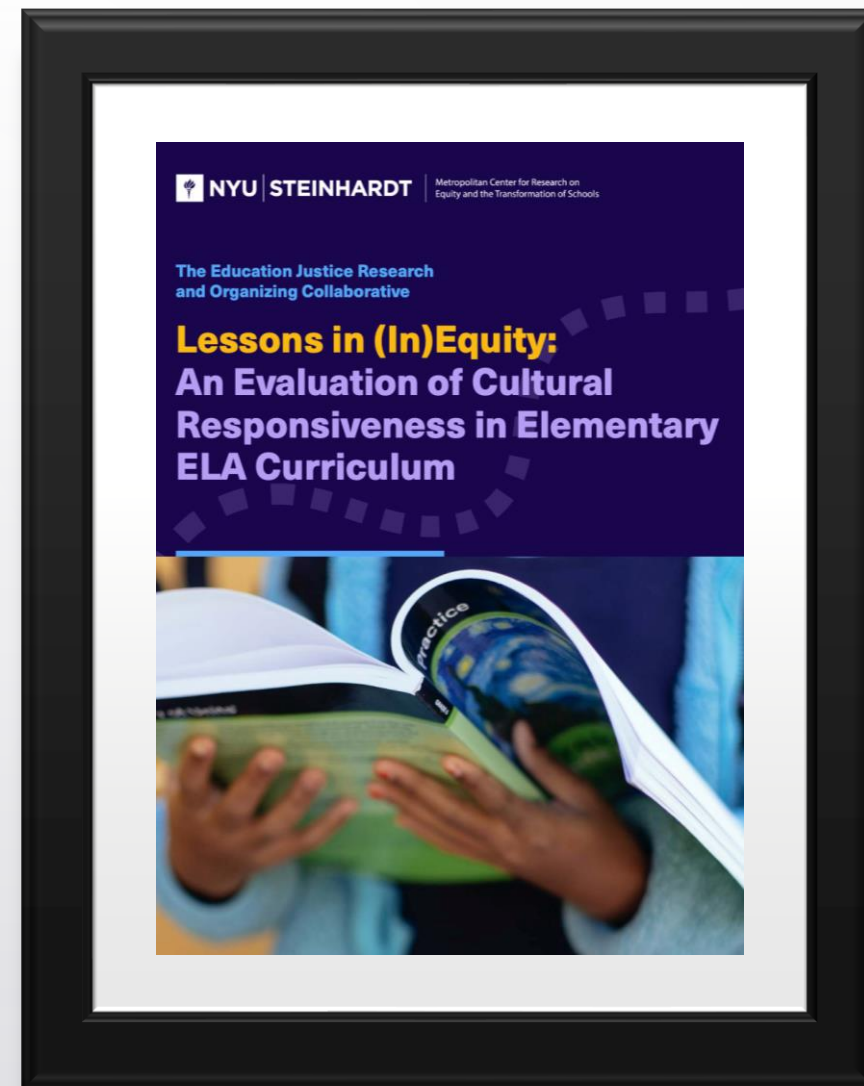
- **School Wide: 3 years** of Professional Development (PD) and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
 - Over 30 hours of PD with an average of 50 teachers
 - Over 28 hours of PLC with between 6-13 teachers
- **Sanchez & Woody**
 - Instructional coach + reading specialist - involved in all the above aspects of the 3Rs
 - Co-presenters at the State of Black Learning
 - Co-authors on a manuscript* (*under review*)

**context for today's presentation*



Context

- **Cultural responsiveness of widely-used elementary ELA curriculum (NYU Metro Center; Khan et al., 2022)**
 - Includes McGraw Hill *Wonders* (2023)
- **All three curricular programs deemed *Culturally Destructive***
 - Superficial visual representations of diversity
 - Dominated by one-sided storytelling
 - Demeaning and dehumanizing language
 - Gives little to no guidance for engaging students' background or prior knowledge



The background features a dark blue field with white gear icons of various sizes scattered across it. On the right side, a large, glowing yellow lightbulb is depicted with radiating lines around it, symbolizing an idea or insight. The overall theme is educational and creative.

Teachers Response

- ❖ **Curriculum scan to identify culturally destructive *Wonders* stories**
- ❖ **Highlight the potentially harmful aspects in stories so teachers can see problematic patterns**
- ❖ **Select alternate HQRA picture books to aligned with the essential question included in the weekly unit that include:**
 - ❖ Positive Representations of Diversity
 - ❖ Positive Language
 - ❖ Guidance for Engaging Students' Background or Prior Knowledge
 - ❖ Diverse Storytelling

Sample Unit & Story

Grade 3 - Unit 3, Week 1

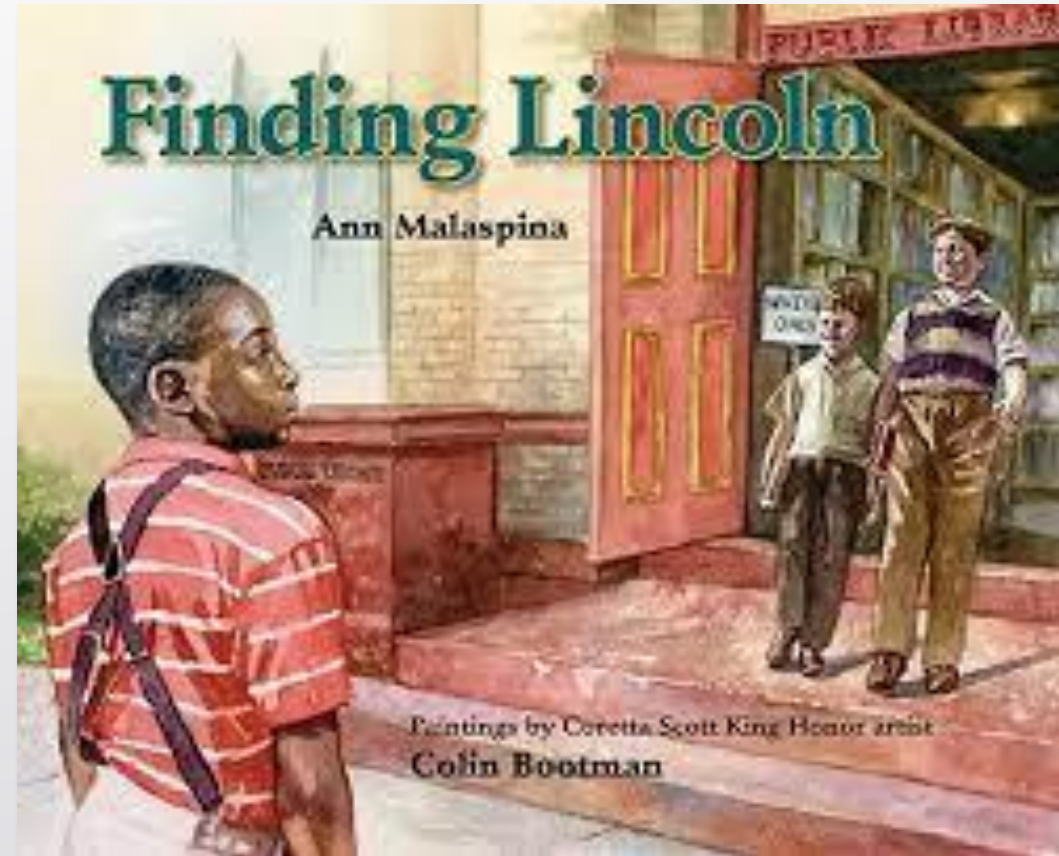
Essential Question:

How can one person change
the way you think?

Finding Lincoln

(Malaspina & Bootman, 2009)

It's 1951, and Louis needs to write
an essay, but he is not allowed
inside the library. He meets a
librarian who gives him access.





What did we notice?

- This is one of 30 stories in Units 1-6, that features a story that centers a black character.
- Lack of diversity in the author.
- The story centers White ideas throughout the text. For example, "The Southern farmers said they needed slaves to plant the tobacco and pick the cotton."
- A story of oppression and struggle. The story takes place in 1951.
- White people are infused in stories that are seemingly about Black characters. In this story the librarian and Abe Lincoln are portrayed as more important than the main character.

Whose history do we teach? ...and how?

Finding Lincoln Read Aloud

he climbed the wide steps and pushed open the door. Everywhere he looked, books were shelved high. Louis didn't have time to count, but a million seemed about right.

7 The library was also full of people. Every one of them turned to stare at Louis.

In the quiet room, Louis's heart was beating as loud as a tin drum. He began walking to the front desk. He was so **nervous** that he bumped into a man's chair.

STOP AND CHECK

Visualize How does Louis feel in the public library? Use the descriptions to visualize the events in the story.

"Watch where you're going, boy," said the man.

"Excuse me," mumbled Louis. On the polished floor, his sneakers squeaked like an old rusty hinge.

Two librarians sat at the desk, looking at him. "Can't you read?" said one, pointing at the "Whites Only" sign next to the door.

Louis's face burned like it did when he ran fast on a hot day in August.

The second librarian put down the book she was holding. "You'd better go home," she said, leading Louis back to the door. As she gently pushed him outside, she whispered, "Come back tomorrow after five."

8

Louis didn't see how tomorrow would be any different. Still, Mrs. Yates was waiting for that essay. He had to go back.

The next afternoon, Louis told Mama he needed to run an errand. Before she could ask a question, he was off.

He ran all the way to the library and up the front steps. It was after five o'clock. The door wouldn't budge when he pushed it. Just as Louis turned to go, he heard a voice.

"Shh, come in quickly." The door cracked open, and the librarian from yesterday peeked out.

Inside, the library was dark and quiet. "Now, what book did you want?" she asked.

"I need a book about President

"Follow me."

Louis followed her down one stack of books, then another. She stopped, moving her finger along a high shelf. "Here it is."

She pulled down a book. Her hand was shaking, like Louis's insides. She could get in big trouble for helping him. She might have to pay a fine or even lose her job.

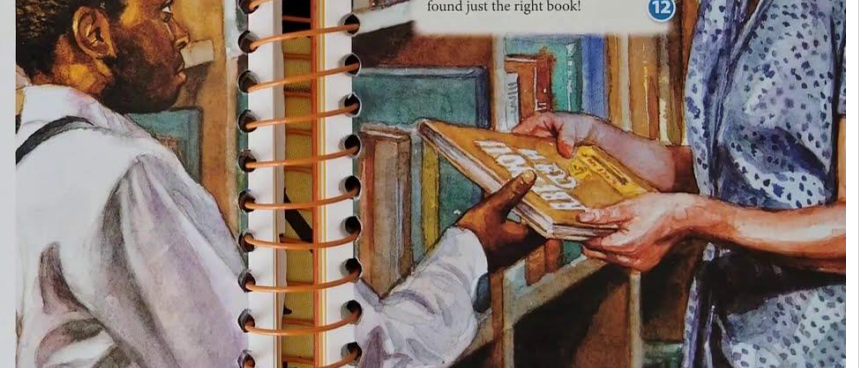

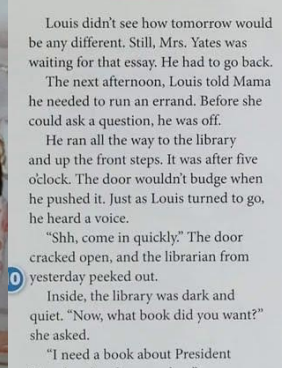



Louis read the cover, *Abe Lincoln Grows Up*, by Carl Sandburg. She had found just the right book!

9

11

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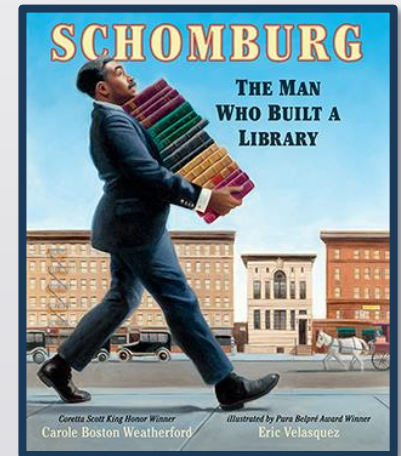
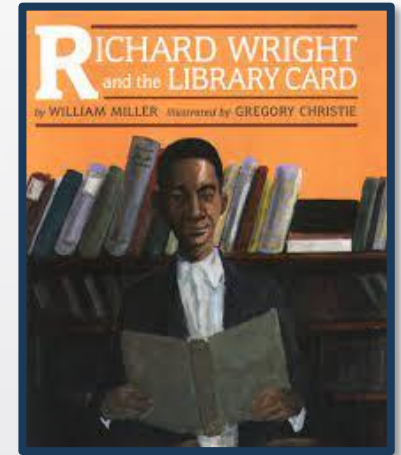
Alternate Text



What it offers:

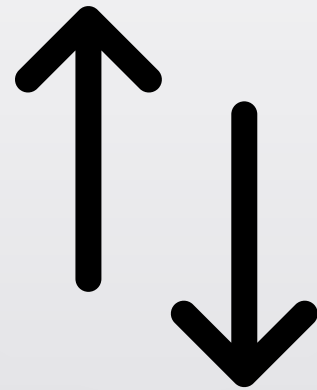
- **Representations of Diversity:** Positive visual representation of Afro-Latina immigrant
- **Positive Language:** Pura Belpré is portrayed as intelligent and determined
- **Guidance for Engaging Students' Background or Prior Knowledge:** Bilingual text; connects culture/story; includes authors note on Pura Belpré
- **Storytelling:** True story of famous Afro-Latina educator; Diverse author/illustrator

Additional Options



What is needed for this work?

Racial Literacy!



Support!



Do teachers have the racial literacy to:

- *Understand the role of racism?*
- *The ability to identify racism when it happens?*
- *Talk thoughtfully about race and racism?*
 - *To counter or cope with racism?*

Do teachers have the support to develop racial literacy?

(Milner, 2020 & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021)

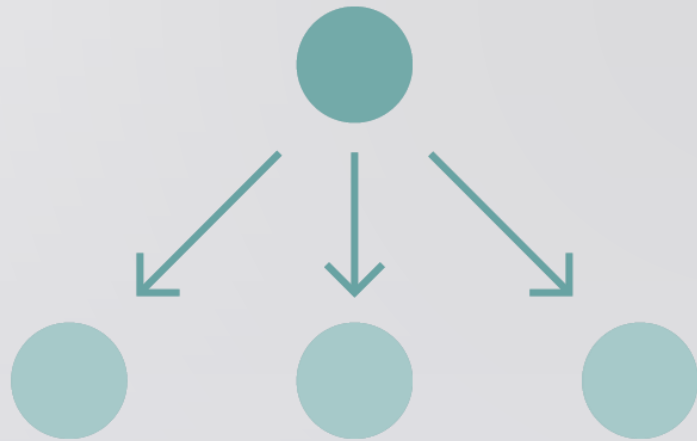
How does the 3Rs support teachers' *racial literacy* development?

- *High Quality, Racially Affirming Picture books as a tool for adult and child learning*
- *Communities of Practice*

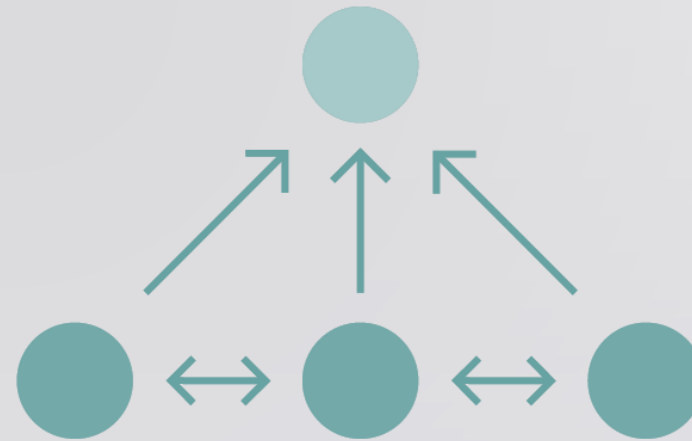


The role of school leadership in supporting and sustaining collaborative interventions

Top Down



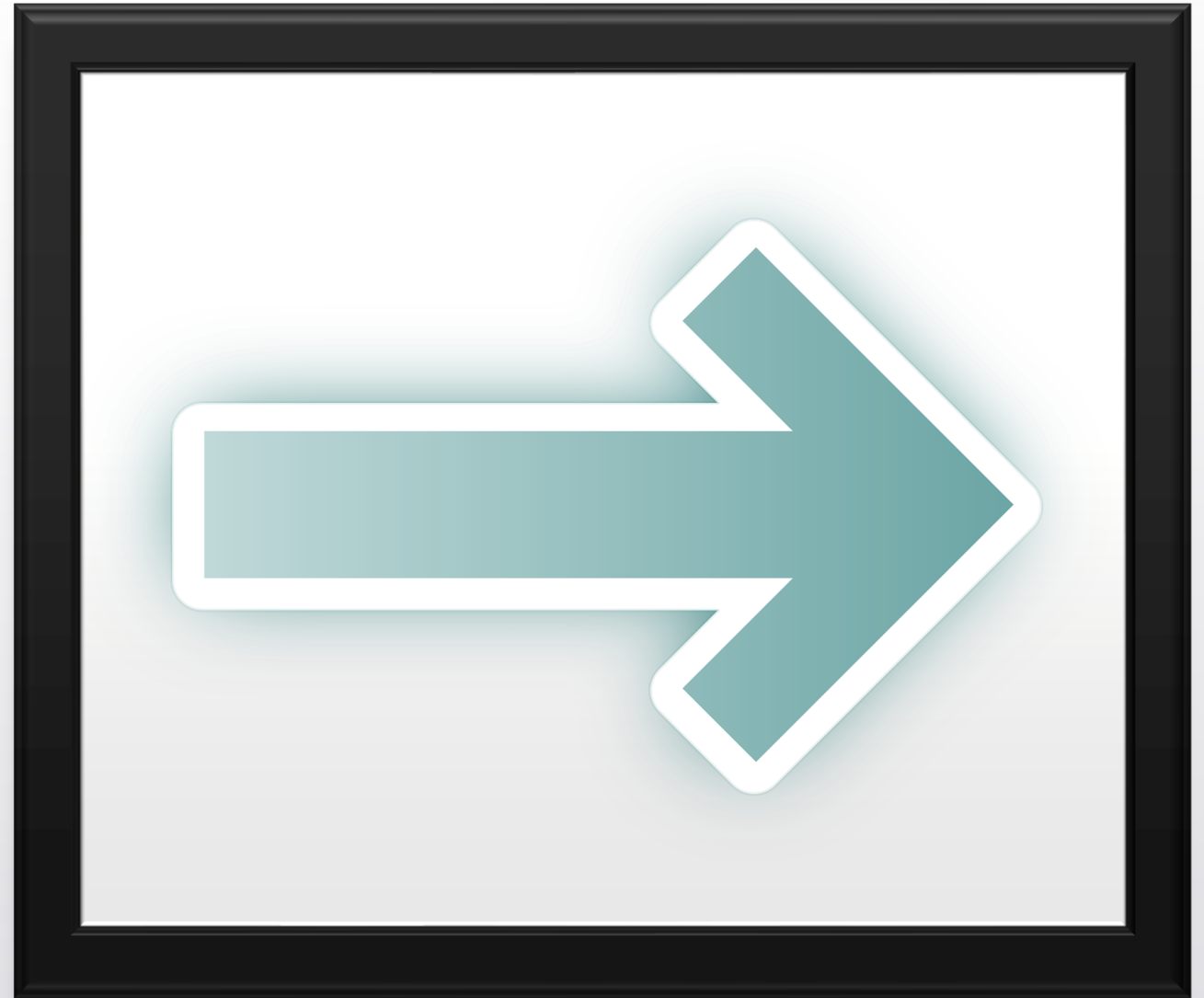
Bottom Up





Expanding the Narrative in Practice and Beyond

- Picture books to expand teachers' racial literacy and learning
- Curricular moves to expand student literacy and knowledge
- Leadership involvement to expand collaborative partnerships
- Reciprocal partnerships that serve to expand each of these goals





THANK YOU!