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
The Pittsburgh Study

CROSS-CUTTING COMMITTEES

STAGE 1
PREGNANCY
Healthy pregnancy to 38 weeks

STAGE 2
INFANCY
All well child visits completed

STAGE 3
TODDLER & PRE-SCHOOL
Ready for kindergarten

STAGE 4
EARLY SCHOOL AGE
Reading by 3rd grade

STAGE 5
MIDDLE CHILDHOOD
Emotion-regulation skills

STAGE 6
ADOLESCENCE
High school graduation

3Rs Team
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3Rs with the Community
3Rs with Classroom Teachers
3Rs with Leaders
3Rs with Families
Being 3Rs Means

Embracing Literacy
Adults are always engaging children in literacy experiences

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

Prioritizing High Quality, Racially Affirming Books
Our community is full of books and materials that affirm Black culture and adults use them effectively.

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
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
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?
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 Belpre
• **Storytelling**: True story of famous Afro-Latina educator; Diverse author/illustrator
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
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

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THANK YOU!