BY TRICIA EBARVIA

DISRUPTING TEXTS AS RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

In the spring of 2018, **Kim Parker, Lorena German, Julia Torres,** and I launched #DisruptTexts. As literacy educators—and women of color—we launched #DisruptTexts as a call to action to dismantle curricula that continues to center White and male perspectives at the expense and erasure of people of color. Since then, hundreds of teachers have gathered online and in person to engage in long overdue dialogue about rebuilding the literary canon.

So what does #DisruptTexts look like in practice?

REPLACE TEXTS

Replace some current texts to make space for the literary and intellectual history of people of color. Ask: are any of these texts absolutely essential, especially those that reinforce the same voices? If so, why? Consider the essential questions explored in the curriculum: Whose voices, what points-of-view are not reflected in our study? Why?

Then find those voices; find those texts.

Finding these texts will require some difficult conversations with colleagues. As Kim Parker notes, this means we must address racism, which will be hard given how so many of us (particularly White educators) are socialized to avoid the subject. Because our educational system is biased, generations of teachers have inherited these biases, convincing us that some, but not all, texts are worthy of study. Consider: Who created this system? Who perpetuates it? The canon is often more fixed than flexible. Its purpose is to exclude. Ask yourself: exclude whom?

There will be an urge to defend ourselves, to position ourselves as the well-intentioned and hard-working teachers we believe ourselves to be. This can be true—but it can also be true that we are doing real harm to all our students in sending messages about the voices we value and those we have not, even if unintentionally. But intention does not excuse impact.

APPLY A CRITICAL LENS

In addition to replacing texts, we can also disrupt our practices by applying a critical lens to all the texts we teach.

Consider the traditional "narratives" and themes we teach about certain texts. Gatsby represents "the" American Dream. Atticus is heroic. *Lord of the Flies* is about the evil in all mankind. We can resist these singular interpretations and the narratives they perpetuate. Teach multiple, divergent, even contradicting interpretations. Ask: How are characters portrayed and positioned? Whose point of view is centered? Whose are marginalized? Which perspectives are missing?

We can use literature as a forward-facing entryway into the urgent problems of now. Racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not a product of its time; racism is a problem now. Don't assume that students will know this. We need to offer students consistent opportunities to find relevant connections, to reflect on who they are as they read. What are the identities that shape them? It's these identities that we bring to every single reading experience; it's these identities that are the vehicles for bias and prejudice. Unpack those.

#DisruptTexts might seem threatening to some. When we remove—or even criticize—a (beloved) text, we see this criticism as an attack, this removal as a loss. But the truth is, what we're doing is making space. We're making space for something else, something better. When we disrupt texts, we can be honest about ALL of our literary history, which must include more voices. This isn't rewriting history; it's correcting it.

#DisruptTexts is about restoration—restoring dignity, honesty, and justice to our teaching. By reckoning with the gaps in our curriculum—and in ourselves—we can address the inequities perpetuated by the very real choices we make as educators and rebuild a canon that is rooted in collective liberation.

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—Tricia Ebarvia