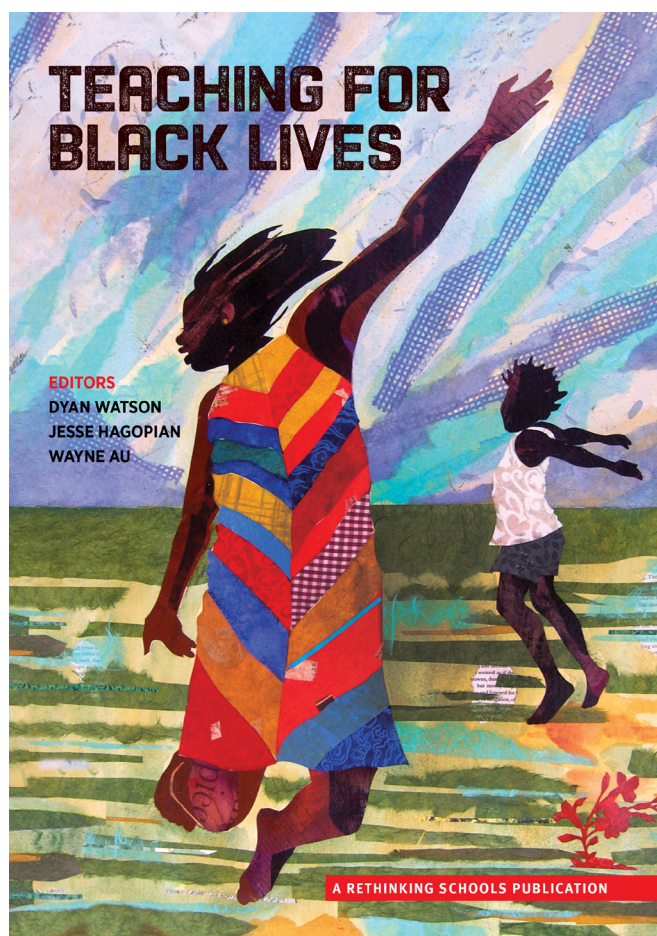




# TEACHING FOR BLACK LIVES

## EDITORS

DYAN WATSON  
JESSE HAGOPIAN  
WAYNE AU



# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## CREATED BY

CIERRA KALER-JONES  
AND JESSE HAGOPIAN

## A NOTE ON PEDAGOGY

*Teaching for Black Lives* directly pushes back on the dominant and harmful narratives that dehumanize Black people by providing educators with critical perspectives on the role of schools in perpetuating anti-Blackness, but also offers examples of what it looks like to celebrate, affirm, and humanize Black people in curriculum, teaching, and policy. The book presents a certain method for pedagogy — a problem-posing pedagogy — that treats students as intellectuals and centers their experiences in classrooms and communities. While reading the text, reflect on what you observe about what this book shares not only for its content, but also for the pedagogical strategies that are rooted in humility, critical inquiry, and intentional love. The need to teach for Black lives is imperative. As educators, we have a duty and responsibility to stand with and beside our students to learn together, to organize, to resist, and dream the world we deserve into being.

## INTRODUCTION

**1**

The book begins with the quote “Black students’ minds and bodies are under attack.” What does that mean? What examples are in the book and what examples have you seen in the country or in your own school of Black students under attack?

**2**

In what ways is the book *Teaching for Black Lives* an outgrowth of the Movement for Black Lives?

**3**

How does the erasure of Black history and the failure to center Black brilliance in the curriculum contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline?

**4**

What does it mean to teach for Black lives? What is the pedagogy to teach for Black lives? What are the threads between curriculum and pedagogy that we need to build out for overall curriculum that teaches for Black lives?

**5**

What are some suggestions the authors make about teachers’ responsibility to join the struggle for racial justice?

**6**

Looking over the table of contents and the outline for each section of the book described in the introduction, what lessons in the book do you think might be most useful to provide the historical context for teaching the current uprising for Black lives?

## **SECTION ONE**

### **MAKING BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL**

**7**

In Wayne Au and Jesse Hagopian’s “How One Elementary School Sparked a Citywide Movement to Make Black Students’ Lives Matter (pp. 67-68),” they discuss what it means to show up for students inside and outside of the classroom through organizing. How can you use the lessons learned from this piece to mobilize and organize for Black lives?

**8**

In the editorial “Black Students’ Lives Matter (pp. 17-21),” the Rethinking Schools editors suggest three immediate steps for bringing the BLM movement into our teaching. What are those recommendations? Have you engaged in those actions? What was your experience? What are other ways for educators to support the Movement for Black Lives?

**9**

In the essay “Student Athletes Kneel to Level the Playing Field (pp. 33-38),” Jesse Hagopian discusses the role middle and high school athletes have had in the struggle for Black lives. What has the impact of student athletes been on the Movement for Black Lives? What are you doing at your school to engage students and student athletes in a discussion about the history of athletes and the Black freedom struggle, and how student athletes might want to use their platforms today?

**10**

How can we use poetry to help students express their thoughts and emotions about police murders of Black people?

**11**

Why is it important to make spaces specifically for Black girls to talk about their experiences in

school and society? In what ways do Black girls often get overlooked in discussions about race?

**12**

Why does M. K. Asante say that Black and Brown students always have to take two sets of notes (pp. 67-68)? Can you see a way to use M. K. Asante’s poem with your students?

**13**

Adam Sanchez writes about how to engage students in discussions about the removal of statues and monuments to slaveholders, Confederates, and white supremacists (pp. 71-73). How should we decide as a society who to publicly honor? How can you engage your students in answering this question?

**14**

What are some of the most important policy demands for education issued by the Movement for Black Lives? Why do you think these are important?

## **SECTION TWO**

### **ENSLAVEMENT, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND BLACK LIBERATION**

**15**

In regard to the Trump administration attacks on Howard Zinn, the Zinn Education Project, teaching people’s history, critical race theory, and teaching the 1619 Project, how might you use the chapter in the book on Enslavement, Civil Rights, and Black Liberation to teach the true history of white supremacy and anti-Blackness, but also teach the rich history of resistance to oppression?

**16**

In Adam Sanchez’s piece on “When Black Lives Mattered: Why Teach Reconstruction (pp. 96-98),” he says, “Though often overlooked in

classrooms across the country, Reconstruction was a period where the impossible suddenly became possible.” What are some of the moments in Black history that are overlooked in the school curriculum and what do they teach us about the possible? How do we debunk the myths that perpetuate white supremacy by leaving crucial parts of history out of the textbook?

## 17

What is often distorted or left out of standard textbook narratives of the Black Panther Party? What was COINTELPRO? How did it disrupt the Black freedom struggle? How will students’ understanding of both the Black Panther Party and COINTELPRO transform their understanding of Black history?

## 18

For educators who teach math or science, how can you teach social justice in your classrooms? Why is it important for teachers who don’t teach language arts or history to also teach for social justice? [See lessons in the book: “Medical Apartheid (pp. 108-113),” “Beyond Just a Cells Unit (pp. 115-121),” and “Lead Poisoning (pp. 198-203).” Also see the lesson “Plotting Inequalities, Building Resistance (pp. 198-203)” in section three of the book.]

## SECTION THREE GENTRIFICATION, DISPLACEMENT, AND ANTI-BLACKNESS

## 19

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, what lessons from the book can you use to have conversations with students about previous racialized U.S. government responses to natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina, the Port-au-Prince earthquake, and the ongoing lead poisoning crisis?

## 20

How can you use lessons in the book on gentrification, displacement, and anti-Blackness as a framework to examine your local community through both a historical and contemporary lens?

## 21

What teaching activities in this section of the book are most often left out of the standard textbooks?

## 22

What was the most interesting aspect of the Black freedom struggle you learned in this section of the book that you didn’t already know?

## SECTION FOUR DISCIPLINE, THE SCHOOL- TO-PRISON PIPELINE, AND MASS INCARCERATION

## 23

What are some of the origins of restorative justice practices?

## 24

What are some things that restorative justice is not?

## 25

What are some of the primary components of a robust approach to restorative justice?

## 26

Have you engaged in restorative practices in your own classroom? If so, what did that look like, and what ideas from this section of the book might help you expand your restorative practice?

## 27

How does “Haniyah’s Story (pp. 256-263)” deepen your understanding of what it means to teach Black students whose parents have been incarcerated? How might you teach your students using this story?

## SECTION FIVE

# TEACHING BLACKNESS, LOVING BLACKNESS, AND EXPLORING IDENTITY

### 28

How will you center the multiple identities that Black students might hold by teaching about the contributions of Black women, Black LGBTQ+ folks, Black Muslim folks, and Afro-Latinx people in your curriculum? How will you teach about the intersections of multiple identities?

### 29

What does Dominique Hazzard mean when they say we need to “queer Black history (pp. 325-329)”? Why is it important for educators to queer Black history? How might you begin to do it in your curriculum?

### 30

For early childhood educators, how might you use chapters like Kara Hinderlie Stroman’s “Black Is Beautiful (pp. 360-367)” to engage in critical conversations about race in developmentally appropriate ways?

### 31

In “Brown Kids Can’t Be in Our Club (pp. 348-355),” Rita Tenorio reflects on the limitations of multiculturalism and why she needed to take a more direct approach to talking to young children about skin color, race, and racism. What lessons does her journey hold for your own pedagogy? Which of her lessons on skin color, race, and identity might you try in your own classroom?

### 32

How might you use Alison Kysia’s Black Muslim meet-and-greet in the chapter “Rethinking Islamophobia (pp. 330-339)” to address and make connections between Islamophobia, anti-Black, and anti-immigrant racism?

### 33

How can you use art in your lessons to create humanizing classroom spaces for students?

### 34

In Dyan Watson’s piece “Black Boys in White Spaces (pp. 306-309),” she says, “Black boys deserve to be boys — to be young, carefree, and nurtured. To be seen as human — capable of being hurt, bullied, and afraid. They deserve a school system that will educate them with intentional love.” What does it mean to teach with intentional love?

### 35

What are the hopes and fears that Dyan Watson expresses about her son starting school in “Message from a Black Mom to Her Son (pp. 325-329)?” What does her experience in school and her wishes for her son reveal about the responsibilities of educators to Black children?

## IDEAS FOR USING THE BOOK IN YOUR STUDY GROUP

In addition to discussing the questions as part of a study group, we recommend that study groups also use the lessons in the book for activities themselves. Here are some examples to spark inspiration:

- Collectively develop an idea for a mixer about a struggle in Black history — or today — modeled on the Black Panther mixer.
- Practice a virtual mixer in the book using this guide to try different online pedagogical strategies.
- Take turns leading lessons for the group that you might try in your classroom.
- Write a “Raised by . . .” poem based on examples in Linda Christensen’s “Raised by Women,” or Renée Watson’s “Bearing Witness Through Poetry.”
- Use and adapt the lesson “The Color Line” to predict laws and policies about a historical topic of interest to learn more about its history. For example, “The Hair Line” adaptation of the lesson examined policies and practices that perpetuate discrimination based on hair.
- Create a lesson in your book club using a children’s book that celebrates the beauty of Blackness based on the “Black Is Beautiful” lesson. Social Justice Books has curated book lists and a guide for selecting anti-bias children’s books. Learn more at [socialjusticebooks.org](http://socialjusticebooks.org).
- Begin or end each study group session with community-building circle-keeping practices, based on the information shared in the book.

## WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

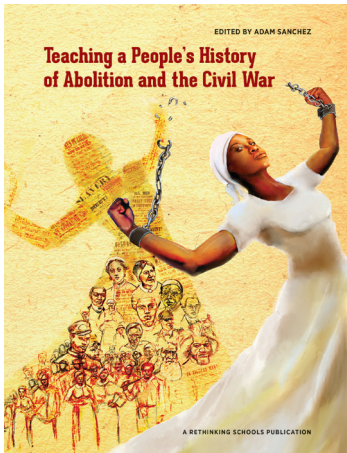
- Participate in Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action and advocate for your school and school district to support it. Learn more about [blacklivesmatteratschool.com](http://blacklivesmatteratschool.com).
- Participate in Black Lives Matter at School Year of Purpose and advocate for your school and school district to support it.
- Answer the Black Lives Matter at School Year of Purpose Reflection Questions with colleagues in your school.
- Commit to organizing an action or hosting an event in support of the Year of Purpose. For ideas, see D.C. Area Educators for Social Justice teacher stories. Learn more at [dcareaeducators4socialjustice.org](http://dcareaeducators4socialjustice.org).
- Participate in Teach the Black Freedom Struggle online classes. Learn more at [zinnedproject.org](http://zinnedproject.org).
- Download free people’s history lessons from Zinn Education Project to teach in your classroom. Learn more at [zinnedproject.org](http://zinnedproject.org).
- Share your teacher stories with Zinn Education Project and Rethinking Schools.



# Continue Teaching for Black Lives with additional Rethinking Schools publications

Learn more at [rethinkingschools.org](http://rethinkingschools.org)

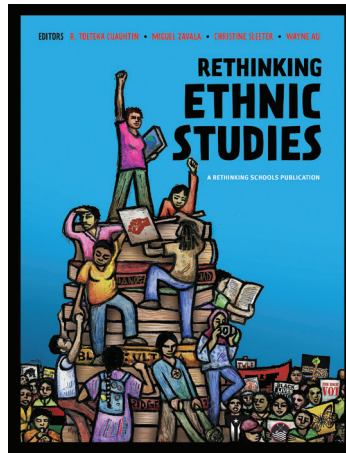
For information about special bulk order discount rates, email [marketing@rethinkingschools.org](mailto:marketing@rethinkingschools.org).



**Teaching a People's History of Abolition and the Civil War**  
*Edited by Adam Sanchez*

Paperback • 181 pages  
 ISBN: 978-0-942961-05-8

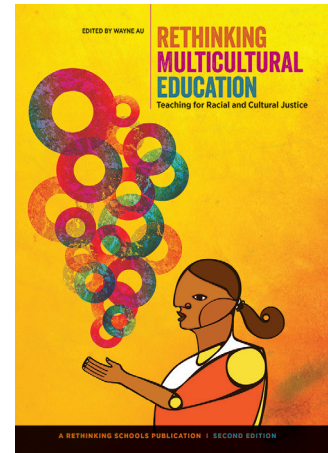
**Only \$19.95**



**Rethinking Ethnic Studies**  
*Edited by R. Tolteka Cuahtin, Miguel Zavala, Christine Sleeter, and Wayne Au*

Paperback • 368 pages  
 ISBN: 978-0-942961-02-7

**Only \$24.95**



**Rethinking Multicultural Education**  
 Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice  
*Edited by Wayne Au*

**SECOND EDITION**

Paperback • 418 pages  
 ISBN: 978-0-942961-53-9

**Only \$24.95**



**Rethinking Schools magazine:**  
 Voice of social justice educators for 35 Years

Subscriptions include access to the online archives and PDF version of magazine!  
 One year for \$24.95

**Save 20% books and magazine subscriptions when you use the coupon code T4BLSTART.**