

# Reading <sup>with</sup> Relevance

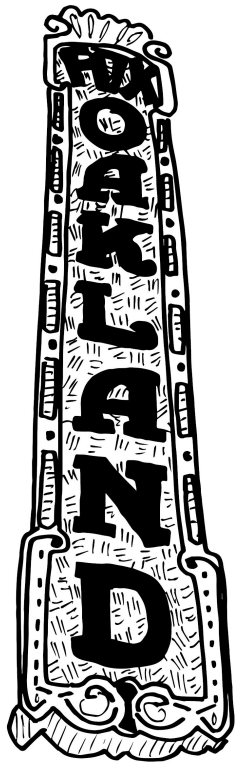
*Engage the Heart to Engage the Mind*



*D. Lacy Asbill, Co-Author, Reading with Relevance*

Open Up Resources Equity Session \* August 13th, 2020

# Our Story



We are a **collective of progressive educators** on a mission: sharing and scaling the program we've built for (and with!) our students over the last decade, to inspire relevant reading experiences, heartfelt conversations, and **instructional breakthroughs** in classrooms across the nation.

We wrote *Reading with Relevance* because we couldn't find the tool we needed to effectively teach our students. Most of the young people in our classrooms not only came to us two to four years below their grade level, but also with very real social and emotional struggles that sometimes felt more important than school. We came to believe that **meeting students' social and emotional needs** was the **key to unlocking their academic potential**.

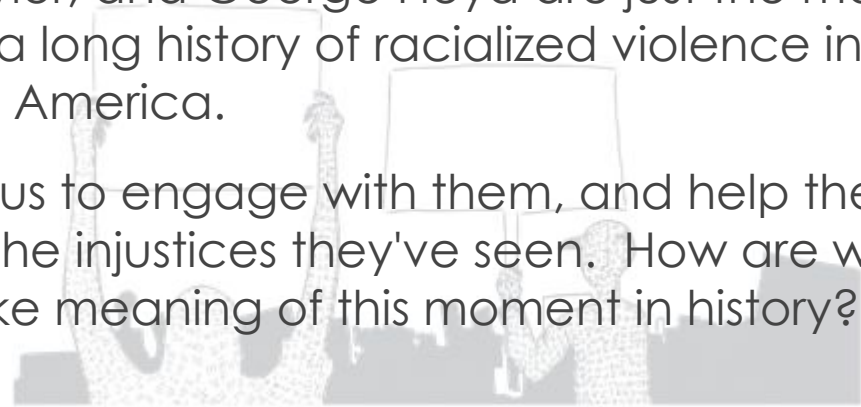
*Reading with Relevance* leverages student interest in highly engaging social and emotional learning activities to develop crucial academic skills: reading fluency, comprehension, and critical thinking. **We turn barriers to learning into the very tools that accelerate literacy.**

# **We Need Social Emotional Learning Now, More Than Ever.**

**Now is the time to engage our students around the racial injustice endemic to our nation.**

The last several months have been devastating. The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd are just the most recent and visible losses in a long history of racialized violence in America.

Our children are counting on us to engage with them, and help them process their feelings about the injustices they've seen. How are we helping young people make meaning of this moment in history?





# Supporting Students to Exhale

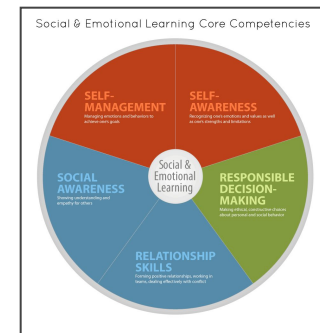




# SEL Skills Are Critical

In the midst of crisis, these skills are game-changers:

- **Self-Awareness:** recognizing one's emotions and values, strengths and challenges
- **Self-Management:** managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals
- **Social Awareness:** showing understanding and empathy for others
- **Relationship Skills:** forming positive relationships, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict
- **Responsible Decision Making:** skills making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior



# SEL for Equity

**“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”**

**~Desmond Tutu**

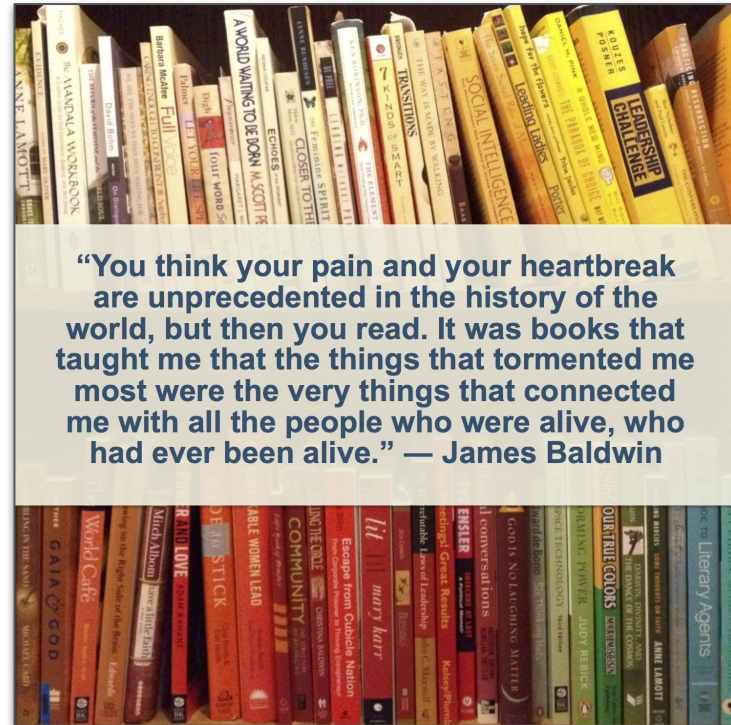
We are not doing the work of Social and Emotional Learning if we are not tackling racism head-on at this moment.



# The Power of Diverse Books

Literature is a great way to start these critical conversations.

**Books are a powerful tool for inspiring essential, empathetic dialogue about racism and police brutality in America**, supporting young people to cultivate the social and emotional skills needed to understand, question, and respond to the racial injustice they see in their communities.

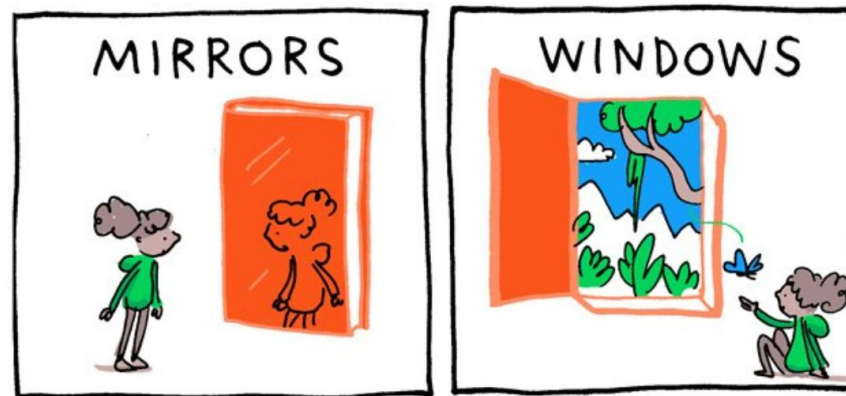


# Books as Mirrors and Windows

**Mirror books** allow readers to see characters and communities that reflect their own lives. Seeing their own culture and experiences reflecting in literature helps students develop a positive sense of identity and self-esteem, and also improves their reading comprehension and language skills.

**Window books** allow readers to better understand the lives of people with experiences different than their own. A variety of books representing diverse cultures helps students to develop attitudes of openness and empathy around difference.

*A single book can serve as a mirror for one child, and a window for another!*





# We Need Diverse Books

## DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS 2018

Percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2018 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison:  
[ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp](http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp)

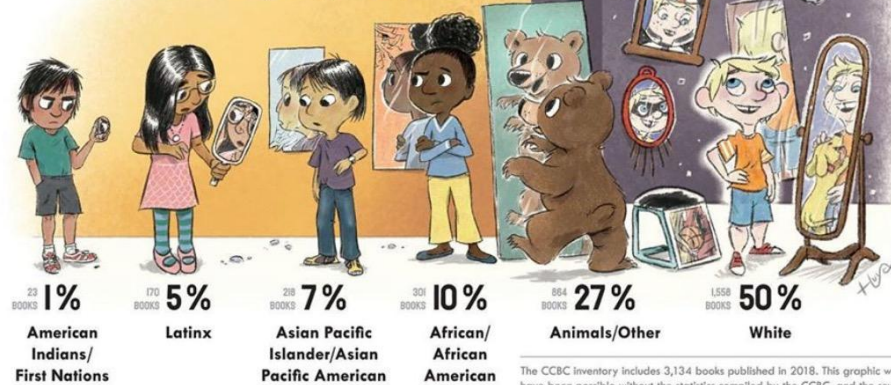


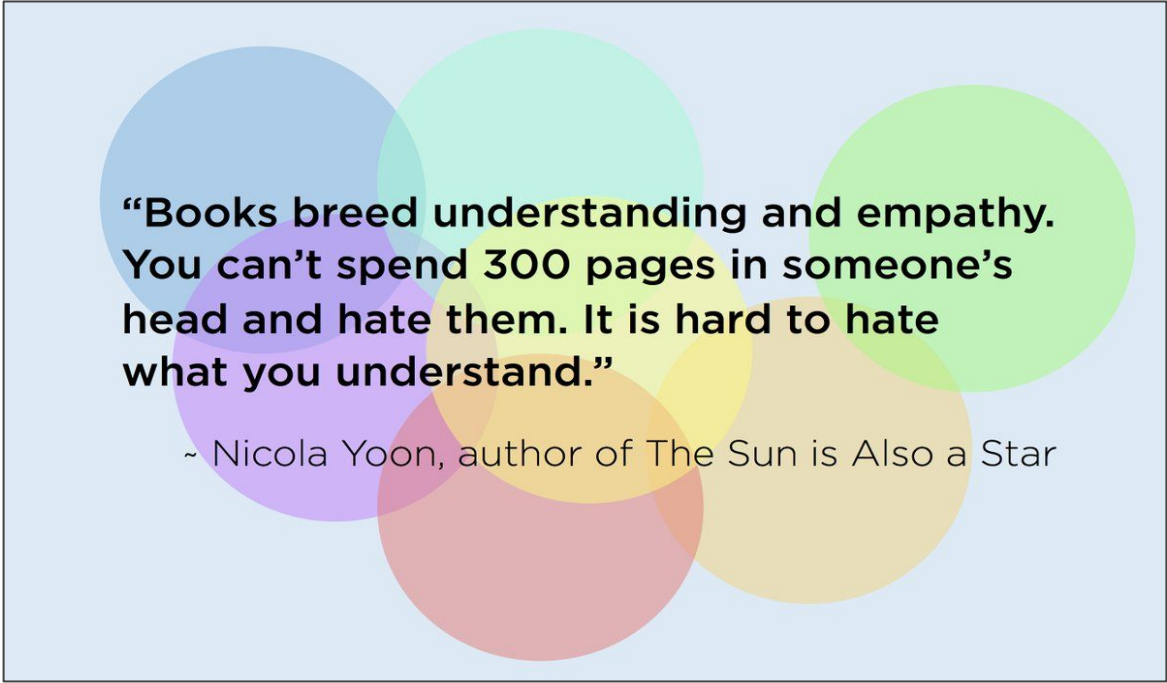
Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen  
Released under a Creative Commons BY-SA license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

The CCBC inventory includes 3,134 books published in 2018. This graphic would not have been possible without the statistics compiled by the CCBC, and the review and feedback we received from Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Horning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner. Many thanks.

Unfortunately our students struggle to find the mirrors and windows they deserve to see in diverse literature -- this is important for *all* young people.

# Diverse Books: A Force for Empathy

Building classrooms that are rich with diverse reading experiences provides students with opportunities to cultivate empathy across difference. *Empathy is a critical skill that will be required to achieve social justice.*



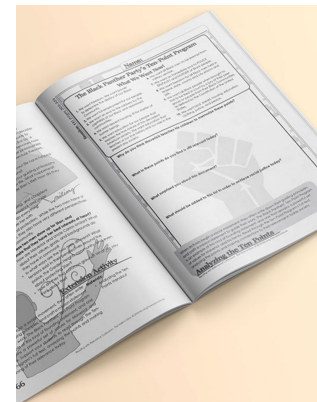
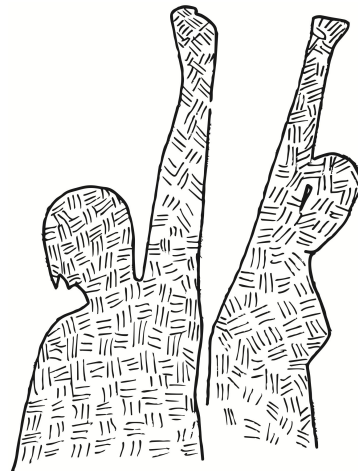
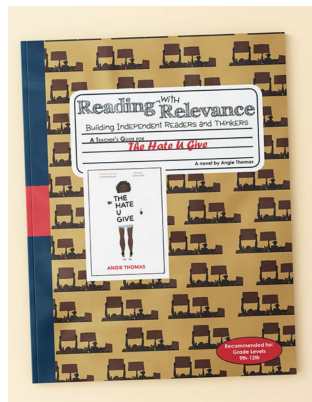
**“Books breed understanding and empathy. You can’t spend 300 pages in someone’s head and hate them. It is hard to hate what you understand.”**

~ Nicola Yoon, author of *The Sun is Also a Star*



# Reading with Relevance Turns Great Books Into GREAT INSTRUCTION

***Reading with Relevance*** is a literacy program that guides students and teachers through the process of reading relevant, culturally diverse, socially and emotionally rich literature. **By integrating intentional social/emotional development into every lesson**, we are creating a generation of learners ready to understand, question, and remake the world around them.



# Making Reading Relevant

How can you use books to empower and connect young people around social justice issues?



*Today, we'll share our best practices for inspiring students to read deeply, think critically, talk openly, and write reflectively about topics that matter!*

## **Reading with Relevance seamlessly integrates:**

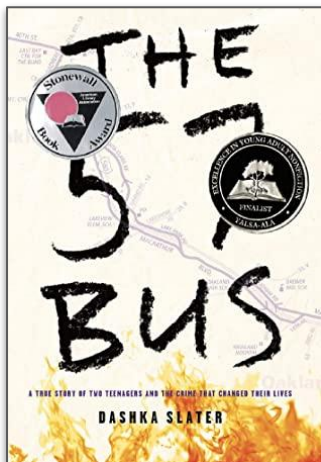
- Diverse books that tackle racism, social justice, and identity head-on
- Social and emotional skill-building
- Instructional activities aligned with CCSS



# Begin with Intention



*Before reading, introduce a social/emotional theme that threads through every aspect of your instruction.*



Today's theme is **privilege**: the special rights, advantages, and opportunities available to people, based on their membership in a group or social class. From the beginning of the book, the author has taken care to show readers that Sasha and Richard are growing up in two very different Oaklands, separated by race and class. The different worlds of experience Sasha and Richard encounter produce really different lives, paths, and opportunities for the two teenagers. Support students to think critically about how various privileges show up as an important factor throughout the book. How do privileges impact the opportunities available to Sasha and Richard? What about the safety they experience? While we are responsible for making decisions about our actions, how are the options available to choose between impacted by inequality? **How does thinking about Richard and Sasha's story help illuminate the role of privilege in shaping their own lives, communities, opportunities, and experiences?**

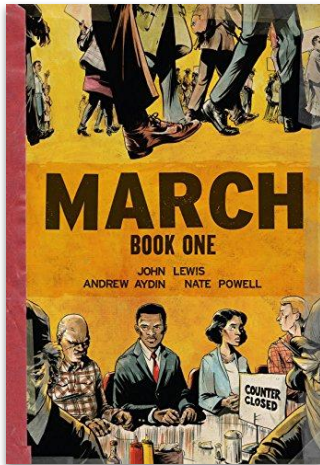
## Featured SEL Skill: Social Awareness

*Showing understanding and empathy for others.*

# Center Student Voice



*Create intentional discussion questions to invite meaningful conversations about the themes and content in your reading, and step back to let them lead the discussion.*



- **John describes the injustice in his community he sees every day on his way to school. What injustices do you see in your community?**
- Why is getting an education so important for John?
- Dr. King talked about a “social gospel.” What do you think this means? What is the social gospel of today?
- What was the general reaction to Brown v. Board of Education?
- There are no words on page 68. Why do you think that is? What is the tone of the page?
- What factors does John have to consider when deciding whether to go to Troy State University?
- John talks about the evils of racism, poverty, and war. How are they related?
- How does John’s activist training impact his ability to fight racism?

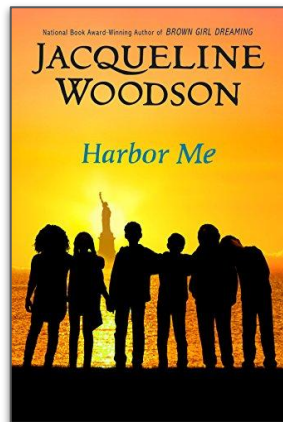
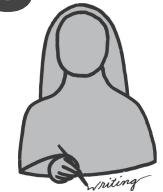
## **Featured SEL Skill: Self-Management**

*Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals.*



# Make Meaning Through Writing

*Use thoughtful prompts to help students connect the reading to their own lives, communities, and identities.*



Amari's dad has "the talk" with him about how he has to act and things he can't do because of the threat of police violence, and he tells the story of an unarmed Black boy who was shot and killed in a park by police. Amari isn't the only member of the ARTT students who live with fear of the police: Holly's Black cousin was handcuffed for riding a bike, and Tiago's cousin was pushed by a cop for hanging out in the "wrong place." Amari's dad says that "we're suspects from the day we're born" (pg. 73).

**What is your reaction to reading about the talk Amari had with his dad?**

- » How did the conversation make Amari feel? How did it make you feel?
- » Can you relate to the loss of innocence that Amari experiences after his conversation? Why or why not?
- » How does your racial identity impact the talks you've had with adults about interacting with the police?

## **Featured SEL Skill: Self-Awareness**

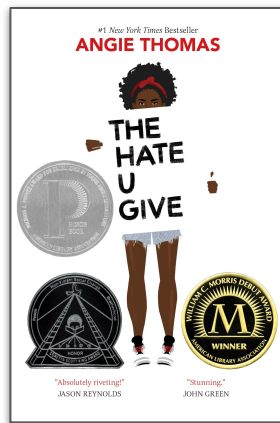
*Recognizing one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and limitations.*



# Make it Personal



*Engage authentically by providing students opportunities to explore how the book's social and emotional themes show up in their lives.*



## Allyship

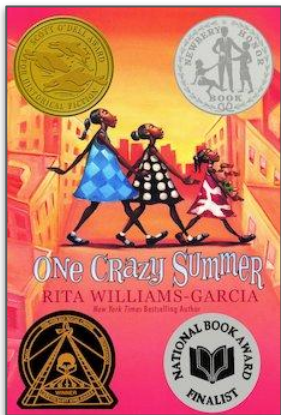
Chris tries to be a good ally for Starr — despite his missteps, standing up for Starr is important to him. An ally is someone who isn't directly affected by a system of oppression, but stands with those who are. In today's reading, Chris stands by Starr's side, both literally and figuratively, in support of racial justice. Reflect on and list the characteristics you would want to have in an ally as well as the characteristics that allow you to serve as an ally to others.

## Featured SEL Skill: Relationship Skills

*Forming positive relationships, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict.*

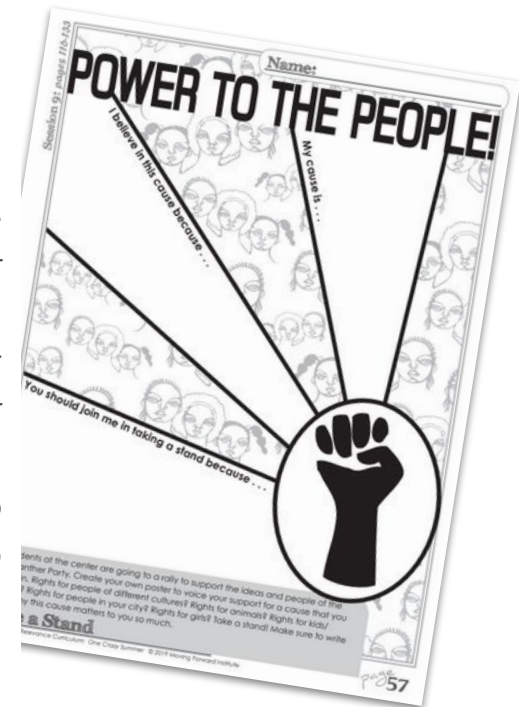
# Help Students Shine

*Ensure that every student finds a way to connect with the story by providing diverse, creative ways of demonstrating their understanding.*



## Take a Stand

The students at the center are going to a rally to support the ideas and people of the Black Panther Party. Create your own poster to voice your support for a cause that you believe in. Rights for people of different cultures? Rights for animals? Rights for kids/students? Rights for people in your city? Rights for girls? Take a stand! Make sure to write about why this cause matters to you so much.



## Featured SEL Skill: Responsible Decision-Making

*Making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior.*

# Reading with Relevance Titles

We've intentionally selected **36 titles** that span grade levels 2-12, reflecting diverse voices, experiences, perspectives, and themes through high-interest literature.

- **Keena Ford and the Second-Grade Mix-Up:** Grades 2-3
- **Keena Ford and the Secret Journal Mix-Up:** Grades 2-3
- **Keena Ford and the Field Trip Mix-Up:** Grades 2-3
- **Donavan's Word Jar:** Grades 2-3
- **The Great Cake Mystery:** Grades 2-3
- **Charlotte's Web:** Grades 3-4
- **Wishtree:** Grades 3-5
- **Riding Freedom:** Grades 4-5
- **Any Small Goodness:** Grades 4-5
- **Inside Out & Back Again:** Grades 4-5
- **Bud, Not Buddy:** Grades 4-6
- **Home of the Brave:** Grades 4-6
- **Esperanza Rising:** Grades 4-6
- **Mighty Miss Malone:** Grades 4-6
- **Wonder:** Grades 4-6
- **Camo Girl:** Grades 4-6
- **Number the Stars:** Grades 4-6
- **Crossover:** Grades 4-6
- **Feathers:** Grades 4-6
- **One Crazy Summer:** Grades 5-7
- **Walk Two Moons:** Grades 5-7
- **Holes:** Grades 6-8
- **Ghost:** Grades 6-8
- **I Am Malala:** Grades 7-9
- **Hunger Games:** Grades 7-9
- **The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian:** Grades 8-10
- **The House on Mango Street:** Grades 8-10
- **We Beat the Street:** Grades 8-10
- **Warriors Don't Cry:** Grades 8-10
- **Street Life: Poverty, Gangs, and a Ph.D:** Grades 8-10
- **Aristotle & Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe:** Grades 9-12
- **March, Books 1-3:** Grades 9-12
- **The Hate U Give:** Grades 9-12
- **The Sun is Also a Star:** Grades 9-12
- **The 57 Bus:** Grades 9-12
- **With the Fire on High:** Grades 9-12

[Review Our Titles by SEL Theme/Topic](#)



# Ways to Integrate RWR

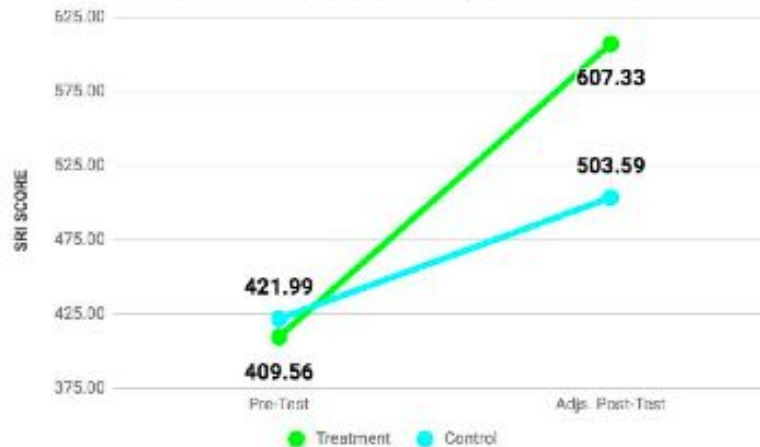
*Reading with Relevance* was intentionally designed to be flexibly adapted to a variety of implementation options:



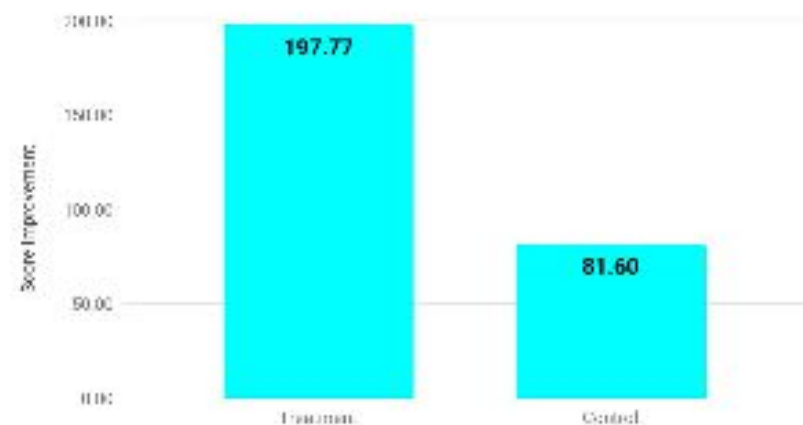
- **Supplementing core ELA instruction, including remote and blended learning applications**
  - Cross disciplinary applications
  - Summer school programs
- **Before and after-school programs**
- **Tutoring and intervention services**
- **Book clubs and community-wide reads**
  - **Advisory groups and SEL classes**

# This Approach Really Works!

2017-18 SRI Growth: Treatment v. Control



SRI Score Improvements: Treatment v. Control



## AND STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF RELEVANT READING.

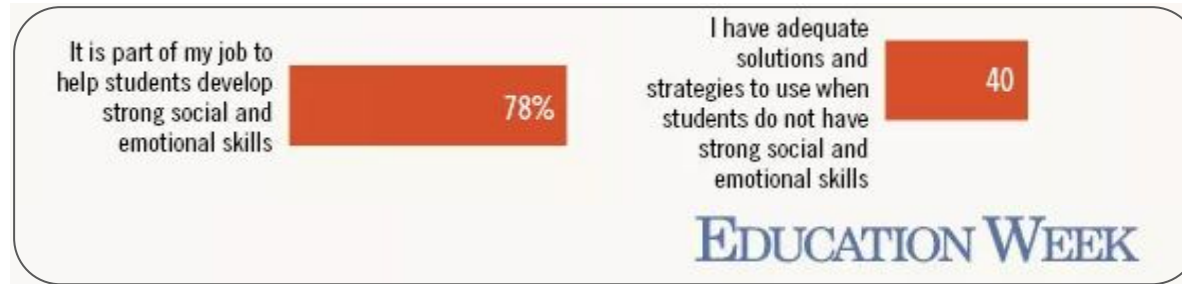
"Before using *Reading with Relevance* I thought school was boring and had nothing to do with my life. But when we started the books I could finally relate to, it caught my attention and I started paying more attention in class, completing my assignments, and getting better grades because I was participating more. **This program and the books we've read are better than any other books I have read before in school because my classmates and I can relate to them.**"

**~ Jaharri Wheatly, 14 years old**

*Former Student at the Byron Boys Ranch in Contra Costa County*

# What Teachers Are Saying

**Teachers need support** to translate SEL from pedagogy to practice. That's why we bake **professional learning about SEL** right into everyday literacy instruction.



"I take my *Reading with Relevance* teacher's guide with me to every teacher professional development meeting and conference I attend, and share the word with every teacher I know. This is a **teacher's anti-burnout tool**: it's a lifesaver for new teachers getting their feet wet in the classroom, it's a game-changer for teachers working with challenging student populations, and it's a force for re-invigorating veteran teachers!

~Julia Ann Gillam, John Muir Charter Academy, San Francisco, CA



# What Teachers Are Saying

Educators want to talk about diversity and inclusion with students, **but need resources.**

63%

report that a lack of  
culturally relevant books  
is a common barrier to  
learning

51%

report that diverse,  
inclusive books are a #1  
priority when spending  
their own money

"These kids are so underestimated. **We don't know what they can do until we put content that motivates in front of them.** These are the kinds of books my students want to read, because they provide a reflection of their own identities. And they really want to read with us. Our lowest, struggling students were so proud of themselves as readers--they lit up!"

**~Michelle Sit, Youth Programs Manager, Lions Crossings Afterschool Program,  
Oakland, CA**

# A Best-in-Class SEL Program

*Reading with Relevance* stands out in the SEL field, having achieved the gold-standard in **external validation from CASEL**, the leading authority on the advancement of SEL in education. CASEL certification solidifies the curriculum as a **well-designed, evidence-based social and emotional learning program** ready for broad dissemination to schools. After CASEL's intensive analysis of RWR, they wrote:



**RECOMMENDED**

***“Reading with Relevance unites cultural responsiveness, academic instruction, and SEL. The collection itself is based around culturally relevant and diverse texts, creating ‘windows and mirrors’ where students have ample opportunities to learn about and reflect on their own lives and the lives of others. This promotes deep awareness of and respect for diversity along with opportunities to build self-awareness.”***

# Closing: A Call to Action

To interrupt persistent and generational inequity, we **MUST** unite cultural responsiveness, social/emotional learning, and high-quality instruction -- at scale -- for *all* students.

**Let's work together to make this vision a reality.**

To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

bell hooks

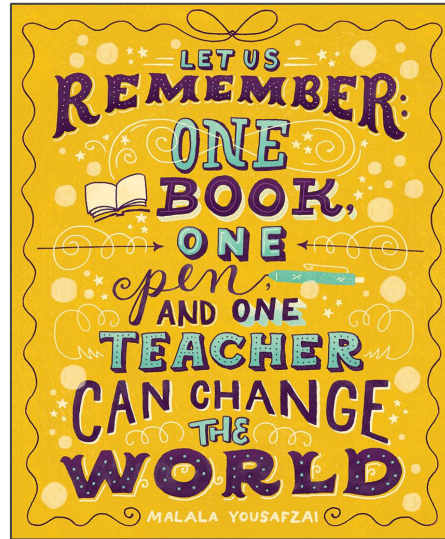




# Q & A



**Thank you so much for all you  
do to support young people!**



*~ Lacy and Team RWR*