

Talking Points for Diverse Young Adult Literature

Teachers have always needed to be ready to advocate for young adult literature, but today the need for YA lit advocacy is greater than ever. Book censorship and “[educational gag orders](#)” disproportionately target literature that features communities of color and LGBTQ subjects. In today’s political context, YA lit that centers people of color and LGBTQ protagonists is especially vulnerable.

Knowing why you teach diverse books is one thing; being ready to respond in the moment to attacks on diverse titles will allow you to speak as an advocate. Talking points – that is, remarks that are planned in advance to engage in an argument and support your position – can help you mentally rehearse what you’ll say when a would-be censor seeks to restrict or remove diverse YA titles.

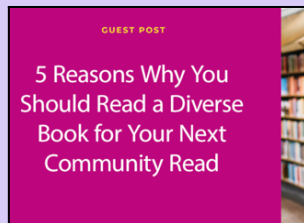
1. On discussions of race and racism in YA lit.

When they say ...	We say ...	Here’s why
“Talking about race makes kids racist.”	“Our society is racially diverse. Reading YA literature that centers people of color allows teens to learn about the complexity of identity and the ways that race matters in daily life.”	• Students of color benefit from seeing themselves represented in literature. • White students benefit from reading about lives that are different from their own. • Reading diverse books helps all of us replace stories rooted in racial stereotypes with stories that illuminate complex humanity.

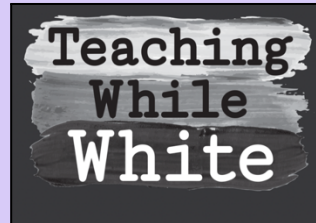
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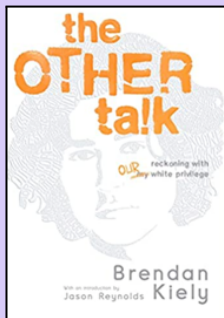


[Slam poem](#)

2. On teaching honest history through YA lit.

When they say ...	We say ...	Here's why
"These books make white kids feel guilty."	"Teens need to see the complexity of the world we live in. They want to make the world a better place. Diverse YA lit prepares them for that work."	• An honest reckoning with the past produces informed citizens who can work toward a more equitable society. • Older students often discover gaps in their education. Diverse YA lit, especially YA nonfiction, serves as a resource for students who want to learn what was left out of their high school history textbooks.

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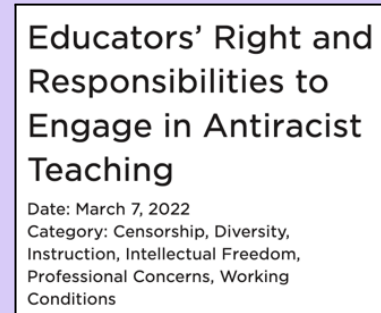
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3. On sexual content in YA lit.

When they say ...	We say ...	Here's why
"These books are pornographic."	"Pornography is entirely different from young adult literature that includes sexual content."	• Pornography is being used as a term to describe books that include LGBTQ people or themes. We reject the misattribution of this term and the weaponization of LGBTQ identities. • Nuanced depictions of teen sex open conversations, foster healthy attitudes, and lead to better relationships.

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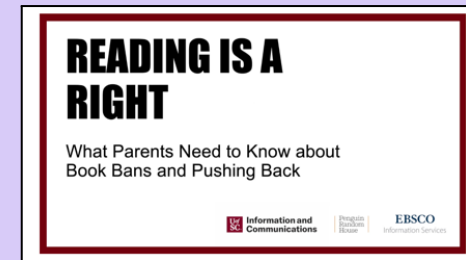
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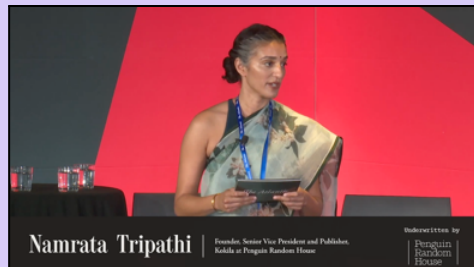
4. On how the curriculum has changed to include YA lit.

When they say ...	We say ...	Here's why
"We didn't read these books when I was in school."	"The publishing world has changed. More people of color are writing books, and publishers are helping those books find readers. Teachers are making the most of the opportunity to bring more diverse voices to today's students."	• We Need Diverse Books is an organization that was formed in recognition of the lack of diverse voices in the publishing world. • All students deserve to encounter the same diverse range of identities in classroom texts that they will encounter in the world outside of school.

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5. On decentering the literary canon by including YA lit.

When they say ...	We say ...	Here's why
"We should just stick to the canon."	"The traditional canon was narrowly focused. Many students did not or could not read canonical titles. We are committed to providing students with a wider range of relevant and accessible titles."	• The canon has changed over time and continues to change. • There is more than one way to think about what is "literary."

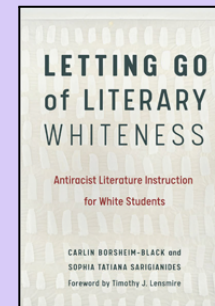
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6. On college readiness and the role of YA lit.

When they say ...	We say ...	Here's why
"These books won't prepare students for college."	"Reading diverse YA lit provides a foundation for the college experience."	● Most universities center diversity, equity, and inclusion in their mission statements, academic programs, and campus life. ● College is a time when students often encounter greater diversity among their peers. When they read diverse YA fiction, students gain insight into the experiences of peers and empathy for people who are different from them.

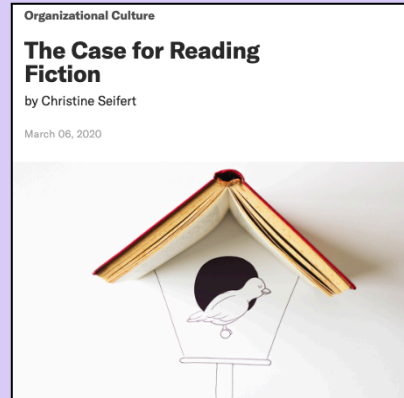
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