

Rethinking the Canon:

The Promise of Liberatory Reading/Teaching/Research

Tuesday, October 26, 2021

7:30-9pm Eastern

Agenda and Edited Chat

David introduces Ada, Namrata and Sarah

Sarah frames the topic

Queries:

Is it that we've made a promise that our research, reading, writing, creativity, leadership will be liberatory?...

Or is it liberating that we've made a promise to use scholarship, reading and pedagogy as our tools?...

Or perhaps pedagogy, research, reading and mentoring promise us liberation?

How do we approach our own work — our research, our creativity, our reading, our teaching — in ways that both scare and inspire us? How and where is trust present as we seek to be alive in this work?

Walter puts attenders in breakout groups

Discuss the query.

Craft a question or comment emerging from either query.

Select someone to post that query/comment in the chat when you return to the full group.

Ada and Namrata Co-Lead a Mini-Class

Link to Ada's recent publication:

[Dissonant Methods](#)

Undoing Discipline in the Humanities Classroom

Edited by Ada S. Jaarsma and Kit Dobson

<https://www.uap.ualberta.ca/titles/967-9781772124897-dissonant-methods>

Class focusses on a close reading of selected sections from

[Such A Fun Age](#)

By Kiley Reid

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/43923951-such-a-fun-age>

Guiding Questions:

What words and phrases jump out to you?

How do you know that this perspective is Emira's (a central character in the novel)?

"That's not what I said."

"Finding a friend in a large crowd"
"random woman, another girl"
"Tapped her collarbone"
"Policeman hold up his hand."
"tapped her collarbone"
"random woman"
"I'm her mom."
"her entire existence had become annulled"
"this doesn't feel right."
"I'm her sitter"
"The new woman bending down to speak with child."
Note: this is such a painful scene, I just feel a lump in my throat
"Hi, sweetie." Addressing the child
"Now wait a minute"
"Guard held out his hand"
"Guard held out his hand"
"I can't let you leave" guard
"I can't let you leave."
"because a child is involved"

Which character or characters had the most authority to speak their mind?

The privileged Karen has status from this, deprived of Emira.

Karen

security guard

the woman and the guard (not Elmira)

even the child is given authority

Karen and the guard

Karen, policeman

Karen had license to say whatever she wanted with no cost.

They know they have more power and assert it.

Other thoughts on power from this close reading

Emira is given authority by mother: she is highly trusted (but also is on call)

they assert it through the child

they use space: held out his hand

white bonding

not surprised, she was marginal by definition.

No... they are not looking at the relationship between Emira and the child.

Closing queries for reflection:

Do our own stories block us from self-interrogation?

Do our Quaker practices help us to inquire more fully about the canon, however, we understand that canon?

Reflections, Questions, and Conversation

Our group was composed of white teachers and learners. How are we able to use our authority responsibly so that we are accountable to students who may be quite different from us?

How can we learn to move from an ethic of obedience to an ethic of creativity?

Despite pressures of the academy—high teaching loads, lots of admin to help run the university, demands to publish—how are we able to listen deeply for the new questions that need to be theorized?

How do we avoid simply re-stating the canon, which is often easy to do because it is already accepted.

That was (roughly) what our group discussed.

Our group resonated with the final words of the query, “as we seek to be alive in this work.” We talked about the importance of inspiration, especially in these times. We noted that the pandemic often has a psychological numbing effect, while simultaneously highlighting the literal life-or-death stakes of physically coming together in learning community. We discussed some of the vagaries of our respective career trajectories. We also shared about the tensions and resonances of integrating Quaker faith and principles into academic research and leadership. Some shared fond memories of Pendle Hill, where I have just begun working. I believe this focus on what it means to “be alive in this work” was a wonderful prologue to the presentation; I see the close reading and critical interrogation of flattening narratives as one manifestation of that “aliveness.”

We talked about vulnerability we each feel in our own situations — then we talked about our efforts to make people (students) aware of the canon in order for them to move beyond and question it. Two problems: some students deeply resist the text while others have their identities completely tied to the text. We questioned how and if liberation actually appears in our work.

In terms of Quaker practices, I think we each struggle with our role in respecting the other person’s space.

Quaker practices and the canon -- we have faith that leadings that arise in a gathered meeting will bring us closer to a truth; whether this may lead to a helpful deviation from canonical beliefs will depend on how open the individuals involved are to dissident voices, including those arising inside themselves.

A theme of our discussion was around attempts to move away from traditional sources and focal points to consider/view/teach through new lenses such as global instead of English/American, BIPOC rather than white, female instead of traditionally male sources, recent rather than older sources and narratives.

A second theme surfaced around the process -- pace matters -- preferred is slow and collaborative rather than hurried and self-paced, and further that trust is needed in this process -- trust that we will arrive at something of value, trust stemming from fear and vulnerability that needs to be exposed to move the process forward.

On this issue about how Quaker practice can help... Quaker practice asks us to have a holy expectation of listening and hearing truths we might not expect or understand ... And it also asks us to have the holy expectation that others listen and hear truths we may not expect or understand. It seems to me that we have to be ready for the unexpected and for something we are not trained to handle. We are asked to be “out of our lane,” which is something that makes academics very uncomfortable.

That is, we “may be asked” to be “out of our lane”

This Quaker experience of courageous listening does seem to run counter to our acculturation as academics.

Re-tooling and Parker Palmer's pedagogy—a collaborative project!

Can our liberation be twinned in project with our students? Yes!!

Brief closing comments.