

# COMBATING “I HATE THIS STUPID BOOK!”

## Black Males and Critical Literacy

Summer Wood ■ Robin Jocius

*Have you ever found yourself looking for texts and instructional practices that would involve ALL of your students? This article provides strategies for engaging young black males in critical literacy.*

“I hate this stupid book,” Sean bemoans repeatedly as he sits in the corner of the classroom library. “These books are dumb anyway. Why do we have to read these stupid books? I HATE reading!” Unfortunately, Sean’s cry of “I hate this stupid book” is one that we have heard from many of our young black male students. Too often, instruction designed to improve literacy achievement for black male readers and writers focuses on skill-based learning, ignoring cultural, social, and personal development. Our goal is to fight back on three fronts, combating students’ assumptions about reading and texts, society’s preconceived notions of black males, and traditional views of literacy success.

In this article, we explore three dimensions (the 3 Cs) of critical literacy for young black males: culturally relevant texts, collaboration, and critical conversations. We also offer suggestions and resources for teachers to create critical literacy experiences in which black male elementary students can have the opportunity to become socially conscious text users who see themselves and their cultural histories reflected in texts (See Table 1 for a list of web resources for teachers).

### Black Males and Literacy

Sean (all names in this article are pseudonyms) is not the only young black boy who is either disengaged or struggling with reading; there is an undeniable achievement gap separating black males and their peers (Garibaldi, 1992; Morrell, 2006). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) report showed that African American males in grade 4 have the second lowest reading comprehension scale score. Unfortunately, many have clung to deficit theories to explain why young black males are experiencing difficulties in literacy classrooms (Ford & Grantham, 2003; Lewis & del Valle, 2009; Tatum, 2005). This deficit view becomes troubling when one begins to examine the ways in which black males have been socially positioned and identified in and out of school (Howard, 2010).

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All too often, these young boys are given up on, and attention to their specific needs and interests is not taken into account, which often leads to wrongful placement in special education programs (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009) and teachers focusing on basic skills because of the desire to meet minimum standards requirements. However, standards instruction alone is not sufficient enough to meet the needs of our African American males (Anderson & Sadler, 2009).

As Tatum (2000) argued, "The problem of how to increase literacy achievement of African Americans is embedded in social, cultural, economic, and historical dynamics" (p. 53). Unfortunately, our academic institutions often fail to consider the whole child, and this creates a chasm between school and student that leads to young black boys falling through the cracks.

### *Pause and Ponder*

- How might you build a sense of community in your classroom, such that students feel that success is a journey that is supported by those around them?
- Reflect on your students and the school community. How can you use literature to connect with your students? What might be possible themes or topics that would resonate with students? How can students' lived experiences be incorporated into the school literacy experience?
- What do you notice about students' current conversations about books? How can you support students to think and discuss texts more critically?

**Table 1** An Annotated List of Web Resources for Engaging Young Black Males in Literacy Activities

Coretta Scott King Book Award Winners <a href="http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/emiert/Coretta%20Scott%20King%20Awardbookawards/recipients.cfm">www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/emiert/Coretta Scott King Awardbookawards/recipients.cfm</a> This website has a list of all of the Coretta Scott King Book Award Winners, dating back to 1970. There aren't generally descriptions of the books, so you may have to search for each title individually. However, this is an excellent resource for teachers who are trying to find books to interest and motivate African American students.
Brown Sugar and Spice Educational Books and Services <a href="http://www.brownssbooks.com">www.brownssbooks.com</a> This website lists books and other educational items for African American males and has descriptions of items, as well as the awards and honors that they have received.
Scholastic Multicultural Books <a href="http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/how-choose-best-multicultural-books">www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/how-choose-best-multicultural-books</a> This website provides tips for teachers in choosing the best multicultural books. It also has perspectives from authors and teachers. This website also includes information about different cultural and linguistic groups.
Getting Black Boys to Read <a href="http://www.gettingboystoread.com/content/getting-black-boys-read">www.gettingboystoread.com/content/getting-black-boys-read</a> This site includes tips, teaching strategies, and links to other resources. Although much of the content is useful, the layout of the website is somewhat confusing, and it can be difficult to find material. However, there are a number of excellent resources.
Success for Black Boys <a href="http://www.successforblackboys.org/1/post/2009/3/teaching-reading-to-black-adolescent-males.html">www.successforblackboys.org/1/post/2009/3/teaching-reading-to-black-adolescent-males.html</a> This website includes information about teaching reading to black males. Although much of the focus is on adolescent males, much of the material is relevant to working with younger students as well.
Schott Foundation <a href="http://www.schottfoundation.org/publications-reports/">www.schottfoundation.org/publications-reports/</a> The Schott Foundation's mission is to "develop and strengthen a broad-based movement to achieve high-quality public education for grades K-12." They publish reports on the state of U.S. education and have done work detailing the needs of black males in particular.

African American males frequently find it difficult to find their place in the literacy classroom. This sense of alienation could be partially attributed to white privilege, which has been described as a set of invisible and often unacknowledged assets (McIntosh, 2003). Because many white teachers are unaware of their privilege in the classroom, they can fail to attend to the specific needs of students with cultural backgrounds. It is important that

white teachers make an active effort to consider their own privileges in relation to their instructional activities and goals.

Seemingly, the educational system has developed an unstated framework for acceptable literacy. This framework seems to be defined by what should be learned and how it should be learned and is often based on the dominant culture's way of knowing and doing (Willis, 1995). Although efforts are being made to reform literacy education

and standards (e.g., Common Core Curriculum Standards), these reforms fail to consider how young black men live and learn (Kirkland, 2011). The standards’ narrow focus on standard English and text complexity could be interpreted in such a way that literacy classroom practices return to a “back to basics” approach that could ignore students’ personal and cultural histories.

These young boys possess an intellect and a profound wealth of knowledge that is not often transferred into the ways in which knowledge must be exhibited in the classroom. If this transfer is to happen, students’ cultures must be used as a vehicle for learning, and students must be held to high academic standards (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

### Critical Literacy

The struggles of black males in classrooms have been well documented; however, there is still a dearth of knowledge about strategies to engage these learners with the literacy curriculum. As Tatum (2008) argued, texts that specifically engage black males are often absent from the curriculum, teachers often lack strategies to increase black males’ engagement with texts, and “educators often find it difficult to use texts to counter in-school and out-of-school context-related issues that heighten the vulnerability level of African American males” (p. 163).

Theories of critical literacy encompass social, political, and historical contexts and allow students to examine the influence of institutions on their everyday lives. In using this framework, students and teachers work to “reveal and disrupt such practices in oral, written, and popular culture texts” (Rogers, 2002, p. 774).

The use of critical literacy strategies can help teachers and students counter the assumptions often made about black

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males in the media and in traditional texts. In addition, critical literacy can provide opportunities for teachers to incorporate texts that may deal with happenings in the very communities in which the students live (Comber, 2001; Heffernan & Lewison, 2000).

Critical literacy can also create opportunities for students to recognize that the experiences they have outside of school are valued as sites for learning within the classroom. Furthermore, when students engage in critical literacy, they are able to “expand their thinking and discover diverse beliefs, positions, and understandings” (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 55) and can work collaboratively to work through issues stemming from the literature and to explore different opinions and beliefs.

Using critical literacy practices with young African American males can create a learning environment that raises expectations for academic achievement by challenging traditional notions of literacy instruction, encourages cooperative learning, and allows students to develop a sense of social justice.

### 3 Cs: Culturally Relevant Texts, Collaboration, and Critical Conversations

In the following sections, we present a model for using critical literacy with African American males that includes three different components: culturally relevant texts, collaboration, and critical conversations. We have chosen to highlight these areas because of

the centrality of text, reader, and task to critical literacy instruction. In each section, we highlight examples and resources that may assist teachers in developing instruction that is responsive to the specific needs of black males.

#### Culturally Relevant Texts

Sean picks up a book, looks at the cover, and jams it back onto the shelf. “All these books are the same,” he says, clearly frustrated. Kadir Nelson’s *We Are the Ship* catches his eye, and he curls up with it on a bean bag chair, carefully examining each page. When his teacher calls the students to come to the reading carpet, Sean tucks the book under his arm and slips it inside his desk. “That one’s different,” he says to his teacher. “The cover looks like me.”

In this moment immediately after the protestations of “I hate reading” and “I hate this stupid book,” Sean quickly judges a series of books by their covers, discarding those that fail to catch his attention. He then gravitates toward a text because he sees himself reflected in the illustration of a black male on the cover, telling his teacher that the book is “different” from the other texts on the shelves and from many of the books he had read in the past.

Unfortunately, Sean’s experience is quite common; black male students are often deprived of opportunities to see themselves, their families, and their experiences reflected in texts. As Walter Dean Myers, the author of numerous books about African American children and adolescents, says:

I loved books and I loved reading, but I never, ever came across books which had my family in it, or people who looked like my family. They never had my Harlem neighborhood. I understood that books transmitted values...I understood what was in the books was valuable and I was not in the books...I began to look at myself as being less valuable than the people I was reading about. (Myers, 2010)

In her discussion of African American children's literature, Bishop (1990) described texts as mirrors, which validate and reflect the cultural norms and values of the reader, and windows, which juxtapose the familiar with the unfamiliar, allowing readers to glimpse into another culture. For students to engage in critical conversations about texts where they question who and what is depicted and how that reflects societal norms and values, teachers and students must move between texts that act as both mirrors and windows.

African American children's literature has long been a contested space (Brooks & McNair, 2009). Both Sims (1982) and McNair (2003) noted a number of issues with children's books featuring African Americans: the misrepresentation of speech patterns, the depiction of whites as active and blacks as passive, and the association of negative traits and ideas as black. Furthermore, some scholars have stated that books written by whites about African Americans constitute African American children's literature, whereas others (Bishop, 2007; Brooks & McNair, 2009) have argued that African American's children's literature should be defined as books written by and about African Americans.

In our work with young black males, we've often struggled to find texts that are written by African Americans and feature black boys in the text. We feel that it is important for young black male students to see themselves not just in the text and illustrations, but also in the

author or illustrator of the text. In an effort to help other teachers facing this same dilemma, we've compiled a list of award-winning books published since 2000 that are written or illustrated (or both) by African Americans and feature black males prominently (see Table 2 for book list).

Classroom libraries are an important component of any classroom; they allow students choice and freedom in selecting texts for pleasure reading. We believe

that teachers have a responsibility to ensure that their classroom libraries include works of fiction and nonfiction that reflect the diversity of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

At the beginning of each year, teachers should not only plan to implement culturally responsive lessons, but should also create culturally responsive libraries by carefully reviewing the available materials in the classroom library to ensure that all

**Table 2** Award-Winning Books Featuring Black Males

Grade Levels	Title	Author (A) Illustrator (I)	Year	Awards
K-3	<i>In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers</i>	Various Poets Javaka Steptoe (I)	2001	CSK ALA
K-3	<i>We Are the Ship</i>	Kadir Nelson	2008	CSK ALA
K-3	<i>Martin's Big Words</i>	Doreen Rappaport (A) Brian Collier (I)	2001	CSK NEW ALA
K-3	<i>Jimi: Sounds Like a Rainbow: A Story of the Young Jimi Hendrix</i>	Gary Golio (A) Javaka Steptoe (I)	2010	CSK
K-3	<i>Henry's Freedom Box</i>	Ellen Levine (A) Kadir Nelson (I)	2007	ALA CAL
K-3	<i>My People</i>	Poems by Langston Hughes Charles Smith (I)	2009	ALA CSK
K-3	<i>Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave</i>	Laban Hill (A) Brian Collier (I)	2010	CSK CAL
K-3	<i>Uptown</i>	Brian Collier	2004	CSK
4-5	<i>Testing the Ice</i>	Sharon Robinson (A) Kadir Nelson (I)	2009	ALA
4-5	<i>Brothers in Hope</i>	Mary Williams (A) R. Christie (I)	2005	ALA CSK
4-5	<i>Before John Was a Jazz Giant</i>	Carole Weatherford (A) Sean Qualls (I)	2009	CSK
4-5	<i>Locomotion</i>	Jacqueline Woodson	2004	ALA CSK
4-5	<i>Ellington Was Not a Street</i>	Ntozake Shange (A) Kadir Nelson (I)	2004	CSK
4-5	<i>Jazz</i>	Walter Dean Myers (A) Christopher Myers (I)	2006	CSK
4-5	<i>Jazz on a Saturday Night</i>	Leo Dillon Diane Dillon	2008	CSK
4-5	<i>Twelve Rounds to Glory</i>	Charles Smith (A) Bryan Collier (I)	2008	CSK

Note. CSK = Coretta Scott King Award; ALA = ALA Notable Books; NEW = Newberry Award; CAL = Caldecott Honor Book.

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students will be able to find texts that they can relate to. In addition, more and more authors are writing texts that focus on issues of diversity (Brooks & McNair, 2009); teachers should be proactive in checking for newly published reading materials. The Coretta Scott King Awards are given yearly; checking the website ([www.ala.org/emiert/ckskbookawards](http://www.ala.org/emiert/ckskbookawards)) as well as other online repositories of multicultural books is a good place to start.

Including and showcasing books that connect directly to students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds is an important schoolwide initiative as well. In January and February, school media centers often feature books with African American protagonists in celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Black History Month. However, these displays are often temporary and suggest to students that their culture is temporarily appreciated. Instead, classroom libraries should strive to feature books written by and for African Americans, in addition to including works by authors from various racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.

Recently, we visited a school with a large population of international students where the library contained different “cultural” sections: books written by African American authors, books written by Latino/a authors, and books written in Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese. Each section included a “thought wall,” where students made and responded to comments about new

things they learned from the texts in each section. We saw students engaging in critical conversations about race, culture, and identity. Although this model may not be possible for some schools because of limited space and the availability of materials, it is essential to make a concerted effort to provide enough textual variety so that students can have the chance to see themselves reflected in the books that are available in classroom and school libraries.

Using texts that feature protagonists that are from the same cultural backgrounds as students may allow them to connect to texts in more meaningful and personal ways. As Guerra (2012) wrote, “From a critical literacy standpoint, urban literature provides rich opportunities for discussion around questions of power, privilege, identity, and race” (p. 391).

Tatum (2005, 2008) has specifically focused on the needs of adolescent black males, examining textual lineages and the crucial role that literary texts play in the identity development of this group of students. He argued that enabling texts are those that move “beyond a solely cognitive focus—such as skill or strategy development, to include a social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic

focus” (2008, p. 164). Expanding the use of these “enabling” texts to include black male students in elementary schools can play a critical role in developing lifelong learners who are both users and critics of texts.

It’s important to understand that if teachers use culturally relevant texts without careful consideration of text content and the specific needs and interests of their students, engagement will not “magically” occur (Tatum, 2008). Furthermore, some texts featuring protagonists that have the same racial backgrounds as students can be “patronizing in their assumptions about what students would be interested in” (Dressman, Wilder, & Connor, 2005, p. 46) and instead reinforce negative stereotypes.

To guide decisions about the use of texts that may provide mirrors into children’s cultures and experiences, teachers must consider all aspects of a text, including the characters, themes, and illustrations. Although it isn’t always readily available, searching for information about the authors and illustrators and their genders and racial backgrounds is another important consideration.

Although African American’s children’s literature can go beyond providing a reflection of a culture to “dispute negative racial depictions” (Brooks & McNair, 2009, p. 130), teachers need to carefully design literacy experiences that both encourage critical examination of texts and foster personal and emotional connections.

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### **Collaboration**

For young black males, creating a space where they feel supported and accepted is vital and reduces common pressures related to reading in the classroom (Davis, 2003). A collaborative environment is one in which the students know and understand that as a group, all are working to become more proficient and critical readers. In this space, all participants fully acknowledge that reading problems do exist. However, all work together as a collaborative group to build a supportive network that supports the development of critical thinking and reading skills (Tatum, 2000).

In the following discussion, third-grade students support each other during a moment of academic struggle:

Kyle: This book is too hard. Why we gotta read?

Jerome: Man, you can do it. Stuff used to be real hard for me.

Kyle: I ain't you! [tosses book down]

Miguel: [picks book back up and hands to Kyle] 'Member what Ms. Green said, we gotta try.

Jerome: Yeah, we can read it together!

During this collaborative reading time, Kyle, Jerome, and Miguel all recognize that sometimes others will struggle or have difficulties during the reading process. The teacher developed a culture that allowed students to encourage and support one another during difficult academic moments. All too often, students are told that if they just try

harder, their reading problems and frustrations will dissipate. However, this often leads to students becoming disillusioned and frustrated when they do not experience success. In contrast, a collaborative environment sets students and teachers up to acknowledge strengths and weaknesses so that students can begin to see not only their growth, but the growth of their peers.

Kong and Fitch (2002), in discussing their work with young students and book clubs, shared: "it is essential to create a learning community in which...culturally and linguistically diverse students would value the prior knowledge and ideas of their peers and thus feel psychologically safe to share personal experiences" (p. 354).

This sense of safety does not come automatically, especially for young readers who may be disengaged or struggling. Instead, this sense of community must be promoted and modeled by the teacher. Teachers must themselves become a part of the group and show willingness to share their experiences and strengths, emphasizing the importance of reading in their own lives (Gambrell, 1996).

Furthermore, teachers who are transparent about their struggles with

reading and writing can provide a sense of comfort for students and can allow them to see their experiences and struggles as being a part of the learning and growing process. In the preceding conversation, Jerome and Miguel serve as a support network for Kyle, helping him realize that the frustration he is feeling is not abnormal or a signal of unintelligence. After sharing his own prior frustrations, Jerome provides a sense of hope by implying that he is now more confident. Miguel offers additional emotional and academic support by continuing to push Kyle toward the academic goal ("We gotta try"), while also recognizing the need for additional reading support for Kyle ("We can read it together").

The following vignette demonstrates how collaboration worked to support Kyle in his reading endeavor:

Kyle: I don't want to read this book. It's hard and dumb!

Jerome: Wanna try somethin' else? Ms. Green brought some new books that are cool!!

Kyle: What books? I bet they're hard too!

Miguel: Naw, I think you'll really like 'em!

Miguel and

Jerome: [show Kyle the new books] Try one of these!

Kyle: Uh, this book looks kind of cool. [picks up *Henry's Freedom Box* by Ellen Levine]

Miguel: Cool! Let's buddy read!

*"The teacher developed a culture that allowed students to encourage and support one another during difficult academic moments."*

Before students can engage with issues of power, culture, and identity (which are all tenets of critical literacy instruction), teachers and students must work collaboratively to create learning environments in which young black male students feel free to share their triumphs and struggles without fear of judgment from their teachers or their peers. Kyle’s experience illustrates the value of peer support and collaboration as a pathway to more critical conversations.

### **Critical Conversations**

Critical conversations provide opportunities for students to “critically examine texts” and “challenge and inform one another’s ideologies” (Muisse, 2001). These conversations can occur in a small group setting or as a part of a classroom discussion; regardless of the setting, students must feel a sense of comfort expressing their own opinions and critiques of texts in front of the peers.

Critical conversations are not merely book discussions in which plot, theme, and facts are being reiterated by group members. Rather, these are discussions in which students take positions and critique what is being said, who is saying it, how characters are positioned, whose voices are being heard, and how they may personally fit into the text. Students shift from being mere receptors of textual information to collaborators with the text in an effort to make meaning (Rosenblatt, 1968).

In this small group discussion with young black males, you will see how students began to personalize and analyze notions of personal identity in response to issues of equity experienced by the main character in *Jesse Owens: Fastest Man Alive* by Carole Boston Weatherford.

Bryan: Jesse Owens could not get in a good college and they had

*“The text serves as a catalyst that shifted the conversation from basic comprehension to students’ reflections on their own identities.”*

to get books from the white people. Like, if y’all were born back then y’all have the tore up books and I would have the new books.

Jason: You not white. You mixed.

Bryan: Mixed is kinda like white.

Eli: No, mixed is both colors.

Bryan: I wanna choose.

Jason: If I was you I’d choose white.

Ms. W: Why?

Eli: Because they get more. They learned better than black people did back in the old days.

Bryan begins the conversation by stating facts from the text (“Jesse Owens could not get in a good college and they had to get books from the white people”). Then, he positions himself and others in the group as raced beings in a historically segregated time. The text serves as a catalyst that shifted the conversation from basic comprehension to students’ reflections on their own identities. They recognize how Jesse Owens was positioned in the text and within greater society and placed themselves metaphorically “in his shoes.” Then, they begin to examine the costs and benefits of what it might have meant to be black, white, and mixed during the early 1930s. Eli recognizes the privileges of being white, noting that whites “learned better than black people did back in the old days.”

Critical conversations give students the opportunity to challenge and inform one another’s ideologies. In

this case, students challenge racialized notions of self, which could have led to a moment of dissension within the group. However, because of the collaborative environment, Bryan did not feel threatened and instead took advantage of the opportunity to think about how he wanted to racially identify himself. This was not an off-task sidebar conversation; it was a critical examination of self and text such that personal lives were included and created a deeper and more meaningful experience. As Tatum (2005) suggested, we must bring the lives and lived realities of students into the classroom.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Recently, one of the authors was at a workshop and was asked, “What strategies can I use with my black male students? They just don’t seem to get that reading is important.” Unfortunately, there is no app for that, no magic bullet or strategy that will miraculously turn struggling and unmotivated readers into thriving and successful ones.

In fact, many of the practices discussed in this article could prove beneficial for all students, and not just African American males. This is nothing new; when Ladson-Billings (1995) described her reaction to audiences who believed that culturally relevant pedagogy was nothing more than good teaching, she said, “My response is to affirm that, indeed, I am describing good teaching, and to question why

## TAKE ACTION!

1. Choose texts that reflect the culture and lived experiences of your students—What do you know about your students' experiences? Use a combination of tools, such as surveys, interviews, and conversations with family members, to get to know your students and use this information when selecting texts.
2. Determine the context in which texts will be used—How will the text be presented (e.g., read-aloud, guided reading, literature circle)? Think about the specific content of the text and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach or a combination of approaches.
3. When beginning critical literacy in your classroom, think about whether you want to forefront a critical theme for the text (e.g., equity, power, race, gender). This may help to focus student discussion—What is the goal of the critical discussion? Do you want students to come up with their own themes, or do you want to center the discussion around a specific issue?
4. During read-alouds, model how to critique texts and encourage students to express their thoughts and viewpoints of the text—What questions will you use to support a critical literacy approach? Having students generate their own questions can also be a way of encouraging critical literacy.
5. Provide opportunities for students to discuss texts independently or with very little participation from the teacher—What supports can you offer students to conduct critical conversations?
6. Create extension activities—How can critical literacy activities be expanded? For example, if there are things about a text that students find problematic, have them write a countertext or a letter to the author. Students could also engage in a class project in which they take action to call attention to a problem in their community.

so little of it seems to be occurring in the classrooms populated by African American students" (p. 159).

This fight for equitable learning opportunities for African American students has continued over the 20 years since Ladson-Billings wrote those words; however, many of our young black males continue to fall further and further behind in terms of literacy achievement. What is perhaps more troubling is the fact that we continue to hear the cries of "I hate reading."

Although the instructional practices discussed in this article (using culturally relevant texts, creating collaborative spaces for literacy learning where all students feel comfortable and supported, and discussing texts using critical conversations) are based on pedagogical principles that benefit all students, we do believe that they have specific implications for young African American males.

First, although different strategies (e.g., culturally responsive and relevant teaching) have been proposed to promote academic achievement for African American students, little is said about the gendered self. Giving black males the opportunity to see themselves in texts can show them that they are not invisible and that others have experiences and struggles similar to their own. We hope that the list of recently published texts that feature black males will provide a useful starting point for teachers in their search for literature that responds to both culture and gender.

We also feel that there are specific teaching practices that will benefit African American males. Because black male students are often marginalized in classrooms, a collaborative approach not only directly engages these students in literacy instruction, but also allows them to share their accomplishments

and struggles with their peers in a comfortable and nonthreatening space. However, we do believe that these teaching practices should and can be used with all students in all classrooms—no matter what the racial makeup.

Finally, critical conversations have the potential to raise the academic expectations for black males. Critical thinking and higher order thinking skills are embedded in critical conversations, and students' life experiences are used as tools to critique and interpret texts. Ultimately, we must foster a sense of achievement and belonging in the literacy classroom to combat the cries of "I hate this stupid book."

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