

Teaching Racially Sensitive Literature: A Teacher's Guide

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The following list recommends consideration of each point *before* teaching any piece of literature that may be deemed racially sensitive.

- Review the standing curriculum, looking for any works that may be deemed racially sensitive—such works as Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, of course, are a given, but do also consider the "safe" texts, such as Shakespearean plays, texts by people of color, and even earlier, canonical works.
- Investigate which texts have been challenged, have teaching rationales on hand, and access resources on the Web sites of the American Library Association (see the Office of Intellectual Freedom at <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/intellectual.htm>) and the National Council of Teachers of English (see the NCTE Anti-Censorship Site at <http://www.ncte.org/about/issues/censorship>).
- Have clear and written objectives for teaching any piece of literature.
- Reread, rethink, and reevaluate every text you are teaching *prior* to using the work in class.
- Know your audience, avoiding any racial, gender, class, or cultural stereotyping.
- Establish guidelines for what will and will not be tolerated in class discussions and activities.
- When re-reading the text, read it from two additional perspectives, namely, making the work relevant to each audience and searching for and identifying words, phrases, images, characterizations, and settings that may be sensitive for students of color.
- Prepare the historical, political, and social frames for the work.
- Select peripheral pre-reads, as appropriate and applicable.
- Collect both visual and documentary material, and, if possible, arrange field trips.
- Prepare students for reading the text—challenged language, situations, stereotypes, settings, and stylistic and literary devices.
- Be prepared to facilitate *close readings* of text.
- Create substantive writing activities throughout the reading.
- Create a debate-research activity in which students divide into groups to assess the pros and cons of reading a particular text.
- Encourage students to contact the author for an interview, when possible, or to conduct research into letters, notes, journals, diaries, and interviews by the author.
- Be very cautious about showing films based on the text.
- Do not encourage reading aloud of sensitive texts.
- Encourage students to journal throughout the reading and class activities. *Do* read and comment on the entries.
- Encourage class discussions, facilitated and guided by you, but do not assume students of color are repositories of experience for each concept or idea expressed in the text.
- Assign mini-research activities—both group and individual—to be reported to the class.
- Invite speakers to class—in class or via telephone conference or video conference. Some may agree to come pro bono.
- Invite students to conduct interviews of scholars, other teachers, families, etc.