

ELA
Curriculum
Initiative
2021-22



Tell Me Your Story

Creating Equitable and Inclusive
Learning Environments

Presented by Susan Nold
RPS ELA Supervisor

Where We Began

RPS Strategic Plan Culture Goal:

Promote a learning culture that embraces passion and perseverance while fostering a spirit of empathy that develops socially and emotionally resilient learners.

- Dr. Derrick Gay, February 2020
What skills do today's children need to excel in the current global reality? It is essential that they develop the ability to communicate effectively across difference, and thrive in a multicultural environment. How should parents cultivate cultural competency to enhance their child's success in the 21st century?
- Diversity and Inclusion Through Cultural Training Courses, 2020–2021
- Reimagining Education ELA Professional Development, November 2020
- ELA Teacher Cohort Professional Learning Communities examining race, culture and identity, November 2020–May 2021
- Equity Exploration through Great Schools Partnership, 2019–the present
- Habits of Learning Professional Development, Summer and Fall 2021

What We Have Learned

- We are committed to diversity, equity and inclusion.
- We need to continue this thoughtful examination to create a culturally sustaining learning environment.
- Our first step in this process is building capacity for ourselves and our students on how to examine diverse narratives while providing inclusive practices to ensure that all students can participate.

Why Do This Now?

- To introduce, utilize, and support skills for exploring topics of race, culture, and identity.
- To prioritize equity and inclusion in our instruction in September which establishes a tone for our commitment to diversity.
- To facilitate community building through shared reading.
- To implement [NJ Bill A4454](#) which passed the State Assembly in March 2021.

What Does This Look Like?

Grades 6-8

Enduring Understanding: Reading literature utilizing grade level themes and norms as critical lenses can help us to understand different perspectives.

In the first quarter, all students read sections of *Tell Me Who You Are*.

Grade 6: ***What is diversity? How do our differences make us special?***

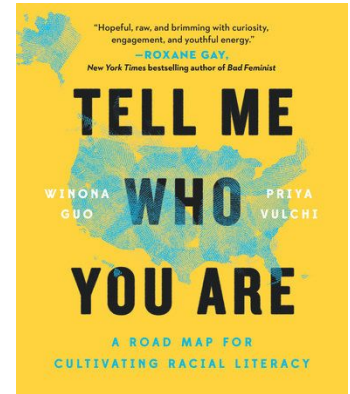
“Lauren,” “Ed,” “Rhonda,” “Barry and Omar”

Grade 7: ***What does it mean to be part of a community?***

“Burton and Shelly,” “Jose,” “Hunter,” A.J., “Aleska and John,” “Lisa,” “Safia,” “Gerry,” “Eryn,” and “Neesho-Homed-Hya”

Grade 8: ***What does it mean to be human? What is a human right?***

“Patience K.,” “Matt,” “Angela,” “Eric, Josiah, and Galen,” “Aubrey,” “Students from Central High School,” “Protim,” and “Ophelia”



What does this look like?

Grades 9-12

Enduring Understanding: Reading literature utilizing grade level themes and norms as critical lenses can help us to understand different perspectives.

In the first quarter, all students participate in book groups.

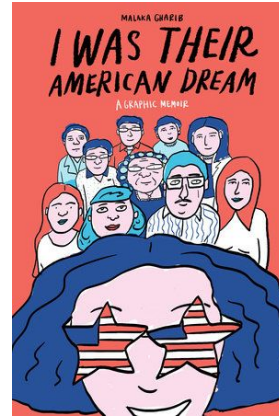
- Each year these book groups will offer new selections of memoirs to extend our exploration of various narratives and perspectives. All students will choose books from the pre-selection, as to establish a community of reading.
- Students will participate in book group discussions. This process facilitates the sharing of perspectives and the metacognition of “thinking about how we think.”
- To facilitate student choice and manage time and space effectively, all books are 90-day ebook rentals.

High School Book Group Choices

September 2021

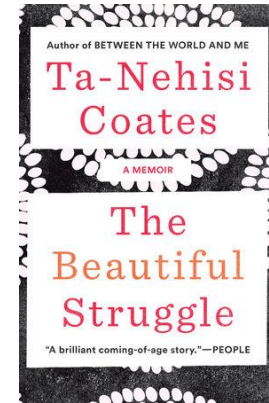
I Was Their American Dream

by Malaka Gharib



The Beautiful Struggle

by Ta-Nehisi Coates



Being Jazz, My Life as a Transgender Teen

by Jazz Jennings



Middle School Teacher Responses

What worked?

“I think it gave us an opportunity to set the tone for what community in the classroom means. A lot of students were also able to share deeper stories about themselves in the final project.”

“This unit gave me the opportunity to directly address speaking and listening skills. The empathy rubric laid out a list of skills that were also expectations for their behavior in the classroom. In the past, we have assumed that students know and understand these expectations, but it is clear to me now that they did not know. This unit set a serious tone for behavior and interpersonal skills in my classroom.”

“My students were overwhelmingly positive about the whole process. Some stated that they were initially anxious to talk and share their thoughts, but they all said that they were surprised at how comfortable they felt discussing their viewpoints (in their small group discussions and most in the Harkness as well). They mentioned that the text rendering process was helpful on this front in addition to seeing their classmates share their honest thoughts and personal experiences.”

“We can refer back to the stories as a commonality throughout the year. Now that the groundwork is there, the connections can continue during conversations.”

High School Teacher Responses

What worked?

“My students enjoyed the ability to research and choose one of the three. I also watched them build social skills and teamwork during the lessons. The smaller group setting encouraged them to participate more.”

“They enjoyed hearing stories and voices dissimilar from their own. Many recognized how fundamentally different their lives are from the the lives depicted in the two memoirs.”

“The students took a lot of ownership of their choices, and our activities allowed for independent learning and discussions.”

“Based on some reflective pieces and class conversations, students seemed to mostly like getting the chance to explore a book without the threat of a grade (essay, project, test) looming over them. There was a consistent refrain that it led to looser, more comfortable, more organic discussions.”

Collaborations and Extensions

- Author visit with Malaka Gharib, author of *I Was Their American Dream*
- Partnership with Ridgewood Public Library
- Creation of “Tell A Person’s Story” Research Unit in Seventh Grade Selective
- Adding more diverse texts onto the ELA curricula through the e-book platform

Communication and Outreach

- Ridgewood Public Schools District Website: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
- Sharing practices with neighboring districts
- Presenting statewide and nationwide (National Council of Teachers of English State and National Conventions)
- RHS Learning Commons' Twitter, and Instagram feeds
- RHS Weekly View

Next Steps

- Selection of 2022 Tell Me Your Story Texts
- Extending Tell Me Your Story Units to Elementary Schools through Library Units
- Continued author visits connected to the initiative
- Continued Professional Development and revision of Tell Me Your Story Units