

This week's question to consider:

**How do I choose a book that helps me along my journey toward antiracism? Does... does it have to be an emotionally heavy book? The days are getting longer but it is somehow still February, and I am still tired.**

*Pro tip:* Excellent news! You can diversify your bookshelf, work toward antiracism, and it can be accessible to you, no matter what you like to read. All it involves is adding new perspectives.

When you become an antiracism and equity coach, one of the most frequent recurring conversations you end up having in your life, both at work and outside of it, is “can you recommend a book?”

I love this question as much as I hate this question. I'll explain.

Of course, I can recommend a book. Naturally. Yes. But I take this question much, much more seriously than it sounds on the surface.

This is the thing: if I were to recommend a book to my own self, a person whose reading tastes I arguably know better than any other person's on the planet, I would have a different answer based on a number of factors. For instance:

What is your current mood? Do you feel like a light book?

A quick manifesto? [We Should All Be Feminists by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie \(2015\)](#)

Or are you ready for a more substantial read? *How to be Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi (2019)

Would you prefer a mystery today? [A Spy in the Struggle by Aya de León \(2020\)](#)

Are you looking for something long to get lost in or would you like something that you can pop in and out of, that will offer you something to go off and think about between bites?

Would you prefer to listen to a book while you paint something outrageous on the kitchen wall and think about what you're hearing? How about a contemporary romance? Or essays?

Are you interested in deepening your understanding of pedagogy of antiracism? [Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria by Beverly Daniel Tatum \(2017\)](#)

Would you prefer to develop your understanding of the natural world? Of physics, and space?

Are you interested in learning more about science?

What about indigenous nonfiction? *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act* by Bob Joseph (2018)

Or would you rather a work of fiction? *Son of a Trickster* by Eden Robinson (2018)

Feel like poetic science written by an indigenous scholar? Cause that's a thing. *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015)

How about poetry? *Home Body* by Rupi Kaur (2021)

No? What would you say to stepping into another era altogether? Or! Oh! How about a visual treat for the eyes? Do you need a handful of children's books? A book on art?

**What do you feel like experiencing?**

And those are questions that I would ask just me! Well. I wouldn't. Ask me, I mean. I'd just sort of... think about them and land somewhere. This is probably why I'm in the process of reading twelve books and keep flipping back and forth between them. You can imagine how much I struggle to offer a Good Recommendation when I have absolutely no context. You might as well be asking me my favourite colour. My answer is unlikely to be useful, and I am going to change it every few days.

So now that you are sitting with me in the enormity of the question, let's see how to go about choosing an antiracist book.

First, a great way to incorporate antiracism in book selection is to select a wide variety of authors and illustrators with varied backgrounds, voices, and topics. By default, this is encouraging of antiracism, because it offers a wide scope of points of view and encourages further exploration.

Also, I am assuming that you don't want to read only one book. If you fall in love with a book, look for other work illustrated by the same illustrator or written by that same author. Writers and illustrators rarely do one piece of work. Look for their recommendations or endorsements where they've come in and written a preface or foreword. It's all a sort of interconnected web.

An important thing to keep in mind is that on social justice issues, the older things are, the less relevant they tend to get, as a general rule. This is why it is important to look at the date of publication (or revised publication), and to look at who the author is. My personal litmus test when looking for new things is this: if it is older than 10 years, look for established publication reviews, and also, have you heard of it? Between five and ten, I've got to see it to evaluate if it still holds up. This evaluation usually involves looking for information on the author/illustrator and seeing whether it has any reviews. If it is newer still and I am intrigued, hooray! I have found a New Thing!

Also, I can't talk about book recommendations without talking about equity. I tried, and I couldn't.

With equitable literature, a good place to begin is to look for LGBTQI+ literature, of which there are countless compiled lists. My current favourite is [this database of LGBTQ2+ resources](#) put together by The Saint John Free Public Library. They update it regularly. You can filter by grade level if you're looking for material for your classroom. Librarians are a font of knowledge and love to share that knowledge with us! Lovely, lovely librarians.

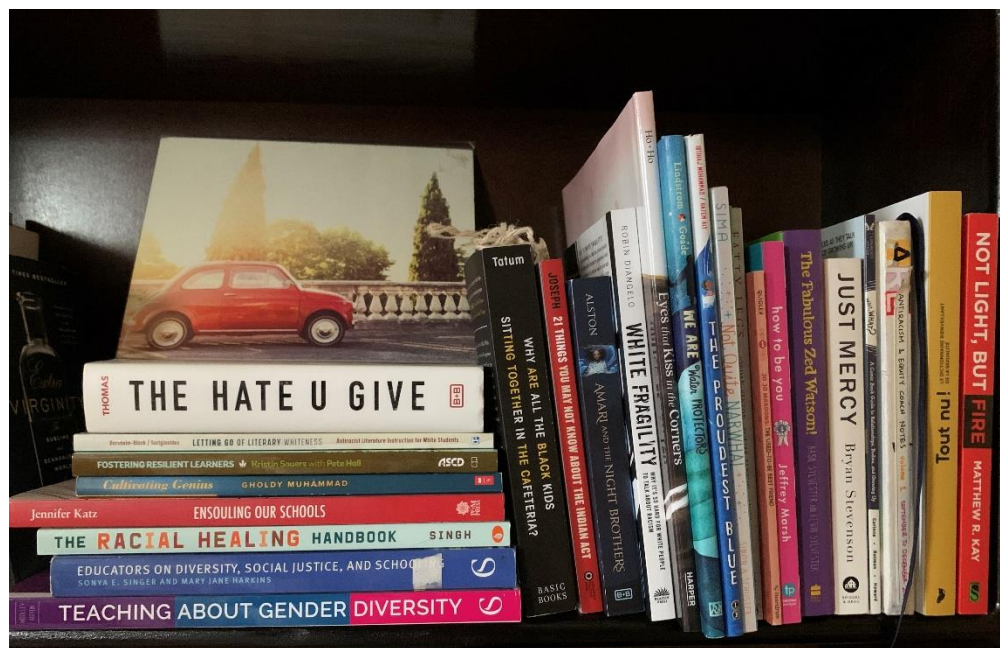
Look for books written by nonbinary people, that centers nonbinary people in a matter-of-fact way. Doesn't have to be the topic. *Laziness Does Not Exist* by Dr Devon Price, for example, is one such book. It's a highly referenced, academically written book, that just happens to be authored by a non-binary person. This sort of thing is subtle but important. It works its way into our subconscious.

Aside from the rainbow community, equity touches on disability, race, and class, mental health, and on the more general theme of social justice. Using key phrases can help locate a book, or a book author who has an intersection of identities that differ from your own.

Don't forget: the more you read and the more you talk about what you read, the more you are able to form your own worldview on a subject. And you don't have to agree with everything someone writes to benefit from having been exposed to them, after all. The whole notion of being able to entertain a thought without accepting it, it is such a powerful idea.

Here is a photograph of a section of one of my bookshelves, which I have designated as books to do with my job directly. Excepting the book on olive oil to the far left, which is about olive oil, they are all books I have come across that touch on subjects of antiracism either directly or indirectly.

There are other books scattered throughout my house and office, but these are the ones that have wandered over to my house. I have read some of them but not all.



Oh, that is just a retro light flared image of a car that I liked and put there. On top of a stack of books. It's not a book.

Overall, the message is this: read the kind of book you want to read but make a bit of an effort to go looking for representation via authors and illustrators. The antiracism and equity will, by and large, be built in.

#### *Recommended Resources:*

All the books, and all the booklists that offer choices that intrigue you. Pick one that you are interested in exploring that seems fun to you.

Diversifying my bookshelf, one book at a time,

Your friendly neighbourhood Anti-Racism & Equity Coach  
Therese Trofimencoff (*she/they*)