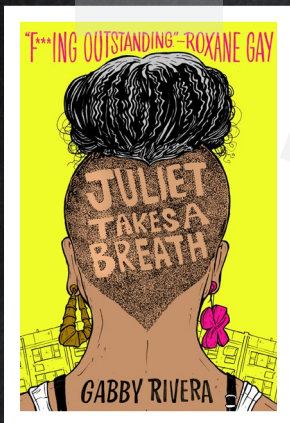
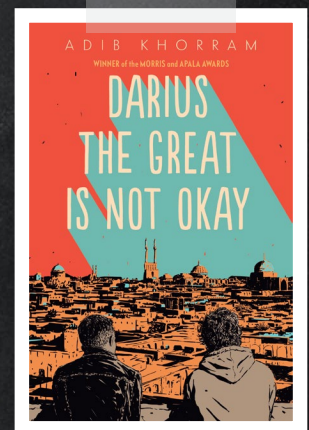
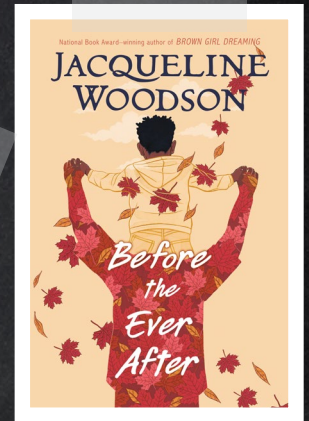


#DISRUPTTEXTS

IN YOUR CLASSROOM WITH THESE 8 TEXTS!



In partnership with #DisruptTexts, learning guides for eight individual texts and how they align to the #DisruptTexts pillars!



DEAR EDUCATOR,

We are honored to partner up with #DisruptTexts to bring you this resource to help you bring equity to your classroom or library! These are, by no means, the only eight texts to use; but we hope they provide a scaffolding to bring change and choice for your students.

SINCERELY,

Penguin Young Readers School + Library Marketing



WHAT IS #DISRUPTTEXTS?

Disrupt Texts is a crowdsourced, grass roots effort by teachers for teachers to challenge the traditional canon in order to create a more inclusive, representative, and equitable language arts curriculum that our students deserve. Co-founded by Tricia Ebarvia, Lorena Germán, Dr. Kimberly N. Parker, and Julia Torres, #DisruptTexts's mission to aid and develop teachers committed to antiracist/anti-bias teaching pedagogy and practices.

There are four core principles to #DisruptTexts:

1. **Continuously interrogate our own biases and how they inform our thinking.**

As teachers, we have been socialized in certain values, attitudes, and beliefs that inform the way we read, interpret, and teach texts, and the way we interact with our students. Ask: How are my own biases affecting the way I'm teaching this text and engaging with my students?

2. **Center Black, Indigenous, and voices of color in literature.**

Literature study in U.S. classrooms has largely focused on the experiences of white- (and male-) dominated society, as perpetuated through a traditional, Euro-centric canon. Ask: What voices—authors or characters—are marginalized or missing in our study? How are these perspectives authentic to the lived experiences of communities of color?

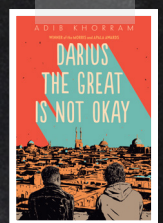
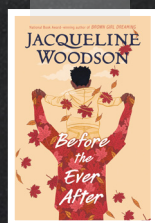
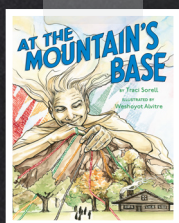
3. Apply a critical literacy lens to our teaching practices.

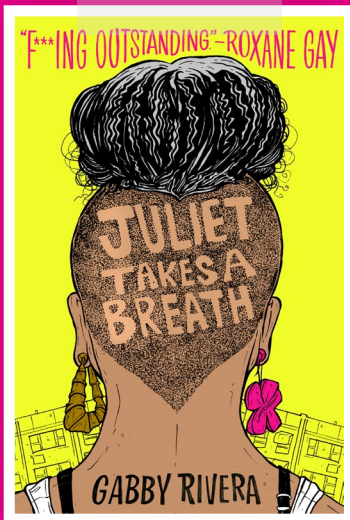
While text-dependent analysis and close reading are important skills for students to develop, teachers should also support students in asking questions about the way that such texts are constructed. Ask: How does this text support or challenge issues of representation, fairness, or justice? How does this text perpetuate or subvert dominant power dynamics and ideologies? And how can we ask students to wrestle with these tensions?

4. Work in community with other antiracist educators, especially Black, Indigenous, and other educators of color.

To disrupt and transform curriculum and instruction requires working with other educators who can challenge and work with us as antiracist educators. Ask: How can we collaborate to identify, revise, or create instructional resources (like this guide) that can center and do justice to the experiences of historically marginalized communities?

Each principle stands for actions that are culturally sustaining and antiracist. Through each principle, teachers aim to offer a curriculum that is restorative, inclusive, and therefore works toward healing identities and communities. As you read this guide, you'll see how each of these principles informs the approach recommended to teach *Juliet Takes A Breath*.





JULIET TAKES A BREATH

by Gabby Rivera

ABOUT THE BOOK

Juliet Milagros Palante is a self-proclaimed closeted Puerto Rican baby dyke from the Bronx. Only, she's not so closeted anymore after coming out to her family the night before flying to Portland, Oregon, to intern with her favorite feminist writer—what's sure to be a life-changing experience. And when Juliet's coming out crashes and burns, she's not sure her mom will ever speak to her again. But Juliet has a plan—sort of. Her internship with legendary author Harlowe Brisbane, the ultimate authority on feminism, women's bodies, and other gay-sounding stuff, is sure to help her figure out this whole "Puerto Rican lesbian" thing. Except Harlowe's white. And not from the Bronx. And she definitely doesn't have all the answers . . . In a summer bursting with queer brown dance parties, a sexy fling with a motorcycling librarian, and intense explorations of race and identity, Juliet learns what it means to come out—to the world, to her family, to herself.

Considerations for Teachers and Students

It is imperative that we teach this text on its own merit. There is a rich analysis that can be elicited from Rivera's words and deep conversations that teachers can explore during a unit based on this book. We encourage educators to consider placing this book as a core text in their curriculum.

The U.S. English middle and high school literary canons are exclusive. This is especially harmful when problematic books aim to present issues of race or racism, but are themselves racist and present characters in damaging ways. In such cases, we encourage that those books be replaced with better, more restorative, and truthful books. *Juliet Takes a Breath* represents a marginalized voice widely excluded from the U.S. English middle and high school canon: that of a queer Latinx woman. It can be used to replace the following books for its parallels and commonalities.

Replace *Catcher in the Rye* with *Juliet Takes a Breath* because both books explore a coming-of-age story, an exploration of identity, and a widely understood complexity of finding one's own path.

Considerations for Teachers and Students (cont.)

Replace *The Great Gatsby* with *Juliet Takes a Breath* because both books explore finding one's self, the heartbreak of relationships, finding your place in society, and striving for growth and development.

Replace *The Scarlet Letter* with *Juliet Takes a Breath* because both books explore a woman facing social expectations, but in this case, Juliet finds support and community, modeling for students what that looks and feels like.

Before starting *Juliet Takes a Breath*, we recommend working with students to consider how their identities and experiences may inform their reading experience. For some students, this book may be the first time that they have read about a lesbian Latinx character and her exploration of her sexuality and beliefs. This may be the first time they encounter open conversations about menstruation, women's bodies, sexual exploration, and the intersection of various issues including gender, race, and sexuality.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT **SEXUALITY AND BODY**

Ideally, this is an opportunity for you, as the teacher, to create a space that is brave enough for students to feel comfortable knowing they can read about ideas on sexuality, gender, and beliefs associated with both. While it may be challenging as an adult to engage in these conversations with a group of young people, we recommend that these books are present so that young people have access to these stories, information, and voices. Then, you can provide resources for young people to follow up with in order to ask questions and receive healthy answers.

Some of the moments in the text that will foster discussion around these topics include Juliet coming out about her lesbian identity to her family, Juliet getting her period and trying non-medical methods of coping with cramps, a moment of intimacy, memories and descriptions of kissing, and body type descriptions. All of the moments are written about with grace and tenderness. They present educators with honest glimpses of a girl's life that could be great fodder for conversation.

One way to find support for these conversations is by reaching out to a school nurse, for example, to come into class and be available for students. You can also offer time during your class where students can visit the school nurse to seek help or obtain answers to questions. Additionally, you can partner with a local organization to provide resources for students if a school nurse is not available. You may want to do it in addition to a school nurse, if that organization's work goes beyond the limits of what a school nurse can offer. All of these suggestions are so that you, as a teacher, can be proactive about questions and/or issues that may surface as you engage in the reading of this book featuring moments of body and sexual expression.

Considerations for Teachers and Students (cont.)

CONSIDERATIONS AROUND RACIAL IDENTITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Throughout the book, Juliet is exploring her identity, particularly on what it means to be both lesbian and Puerto Rican. She is observant of the way others express their identity and is open about her own journey through her reflections and questions. It is critical to understand the questions students may have about Puerto Rico and lesbian identity. Puerto Rican identity is complex due to its history with enslavement and colonization. Many Puerto Ricans speak highly of their Taino ancestors, the Indigenous people of the land. Many also openly acknowledge their African roots, gained through the presence of enslaved people from the continent of Africa. Lastly, the brownness of the Puerto Rican people is also due to the presence of Spaniard colonizers. The Africans and Spaniards have led to the Puerto Rican population we know today. It is important to understand this because it impacts the way Juliet sees her body as well as the way she identifies with others. It will help students understand why she feels a connection to the African American lesbians in the story, as well as why her racial identity feels a bit complex. When considering her lesbian identity, a new name she's openly trying out, her understanding of self is challenged. She begins to explore what it means to be both (lesbian and Puerto Rican) and how she can walk this way in her life.

Key Concepts and Terms

- Intersectionality
- Feminism
- Gender
- Patriarchy

These are concepts you can explore at the start or before your reading. One way to address these concepts is to have students work in small groups to explore what they mean. They can cite articles, videos, and even podcasts. Together, in their groups, they can present their findings to the rest of the class. Each presentation can include a whole class discussion where definitions and statements can be corrected, interrogated, and clarified if/when needed. This process allows for students to own the learning and for them to be centered as they explore these concepts they'll inevitably encounter both in the text and society. You can consider having these words displayed in the classroom or on a digital space, if teaching virtually. The strength in keeping these words visible is that they are accessible and students learn to use them with ease and comfort when they discuss the book and engage in conversations about these topics. Helping them to own this language is work toward racial and social justice-based fluency. This is how we prepare them to have these conversations outside of our unit and classroom.

Themes and Essential Questions

The following are possible themes to consider when teaching this book. You can explore the essential questions below with students as you walk through those themes.

BE TRUE TO WHO YOU ARE.

- Who am I? What are my values and beliefs, and how are those reflected in my thoughts and actions?
- How do we understand and wrestle with being ourselves, especially when who we are might be rejected by others?



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INTERSECTIONALITY IS COMPLEX

- How do my multiple identities, as well as my group memberships, make me unique and complex? How might that intersectionality influence my decisions and life choices? Consider this quote for discussion: "They're down for Harlowe. They're down for each other. They're not down for you, Juliet Palante from the Bronx, you know?" (89)
- How can a person explore their identity and the diversity of who they are without exposure to many different people and ideas? Consider this quote for discussion: "No, I didn't know my gender pronouns. All the moments where I was made to feel like an outsider in a group that was supposed to have room for me added up and left me feeling so much shame." (69)
- Historically, many women of color have critiqued the feminist movement in the United States because of the racial dynamics they've experienced. How do you think racism may have played a role in feminism in the U.S.? Consider the scene on pages 110 and 111.

BECOMING YOURSELF IS A JOURNEY

- How might society define what we as individuals see as beautiful? How might that impact how we view ourselves? Consider this quote for discussion: "Reflections of my womanhood rolled over me with its own expectations like all the times I stared in the mirror as a kid wishing I was pretty like Ava." (287)

Lesson Ideas

The following are literary techniques or devices used in the book that could drive lessons for critical study. It is important to value the way the authors have crafted the stories and voices in these books written by and about BIPOC. Too often when taught, the focus is narrowly about the “newness” or “youthfulness” of the text versus analyzing its literary value. Too often we continue to use these books as a bridge to what teachers consider more rigorous or challenging texts, and those are too often a return to the “classics.” The message this sends is that these books are not rigorous or ones that can be used for critical analysis. This continues to place some books on pedestals and others beneath, with the ones not celebrated being by and about BIPOC.

MOTIF OF AIR & BREATH

“You let Harlowe’s narrative be the air people breathed about you.” (284)

“Huhmm...” I exhaled, thinking all of that over. Polyamory.” (98)

“It’s the sound of damaged good filtering in and out of your chest, past your ears, back into your psyche.” (91)

“I kept breathing until the pain subsided all over.” (134)

Explore the moments where breath and air are mentioned and described. Juliet struggles with her breathing and there’s a direct connection to her emotions and the intensity of the moment. Invite students to notice and observe that. Have them trace the connections between her breathing and her character development and growth. Invite them to observe how her breathing improves as she gains emotional wisdom and strength.

SYMBOLISM OF BLOOD

“Blood is literal. Blood is spiritual. Blood connects through birth, through chaos, and through intimacy.” (196)

“And as for ceremony, periods should always be celebrated.” (127)

Explore the moments that blood in literal and familial ways plays a role in Juliet’s life, the plot of the story, and connections between characters. After an in-depth conversation about symbolism in literature and how it’s often intertwined with other literary devices that craft the story’s impact, invite students to an analysis of blood. Help them get started by considering the quotes above, and then, with partners, students can revisit the text and find moments where blood is named and present. Ask: What might blood symbolize in that scene? How might Rivera’s exploration of blood connect to a possible theme?

Lesson Ideas (cont.)

MOTIF OF LITERACY

“You said reading would make me brilliant, but writing would make me infinite.” (272)

“Why had I come? I pulled out my notebook and answered Maxine’s last question for myself.” (285)

“Libraries had zero tolerance for bullshit. Their walls protected us and kept us safe from all the bastards that never read a book for fun.” (118)

Discuss how literacy is important for people whose voices have been largely excluded from the literary world. In this conversation, explore the author, her story, and the power literacy has afforded her through the writing of this book. Talk about welcoming the voices of marginalized people into classrooms and the impact the book is having on their learning as students. Then, also talk about the role of reading and writing in the book for Juliet. Starting with the quotes above, invite students to explore the role literacy plays in her life and how it’s embedded in her learning about her own identity.

FEMINISM & GENDER IDENTITY

“Like Ava said: Womanhood was radical enough for anyone who dared claim it.” (287)

“Men in public or even in the house should never be able to see the outline of your tetitas or the poke of your nipples. Put your bra on the second you wake up in the morning. Men can’t handle seeing those things.” (65)

Discuss gender and feminism by exploring some of the pairing suggestions from above as well as online videos and interviews. Walk students through a study of what feminism is, it’s development over time, and the U.S.’s exploration of gender identity over the years. Ask: how does Juliet’s understanding of feminism evolve throughout the story?

ALLIES & LANGUAGE

*“I didn’t want to experience Portland or obtain a queer education that way, not from some smug dude. His energy drained me. I didn’t like the way he said **dyke**. Maybe he was allowed to say it by association, but he wasn’t an associate of mine.” (72)*

Use this reading as an opportunity to discuss controversial words/language and who is able to use them or not. For example, words like *dyke*, *queer*, *gay*, etc. have a long history in our society and have evolved in what they mean, how they’re used, and who can use them. Talk about connotations and denotations and how words change over time.

Lesson Ideas (cont.)

ANALYZING SETTING & METAPHOR

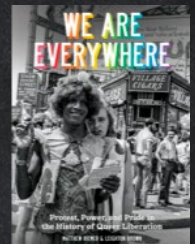
Read pages 12 and 13. Literary devices often work together to create meaning. In this case, Rivera uses setting descriptions as metaphors, often, to reveal characters as well as atmosphere. After an exploration of these literary devices, invite students to revisit those early pages and ask: how does the setting described on pages 12 and 13 speak to her intersectional identity as well as the contradictions she is experiencing? Then, ask: How does each setting that Juliet visits tell a story about her learning, identity, and sexuality? Invite students, in partners, to do a close reading of the setting descriptions and share their analysis with the class.

Supplementing your class's study of *Juliet Takes a Breath* with additional texts and materials is a way to facilitate deep analysis. Often pairing two texts allows for critical thinking and functions as a critical literacy activity. When supplementing, you can explore material that emphasizes or highlights a concept, character, or any other element in the text. In this case, *Juliet Takes a Breath* can be paired with several texts/materials to foster deep critical thinking and analysis.



Consider pairing *Juliet Takes a Breath* and *Pocket Change Collective: The New Queer Conscience* by Adam Eli. Invite students to talk about the ways the two books connect by finding commonalities and direct conceptual connections such as terminology shared in both and how Juliet is developing a new conscience. Invite students to explore how Juliet would respond to Eli, the author. Students can cite Rivera's text directly to write from the perspective of Juliet.

Consider pairing *Juliet Takes a Breath* and *We Are Everywhere* by Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown. Invite students to make oral presentations and reports from their learning in this non-fiction photographic collection. This can parallel the project Juliet takes on in the book during her internship.

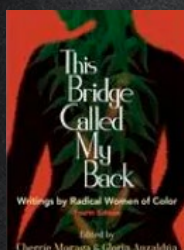
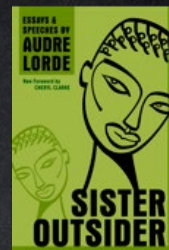


Lesson Ideas (cont.)



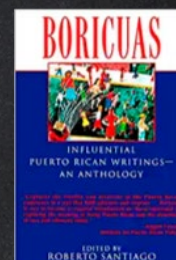
Consider pairing *Juliet Takes a Breath* and *Pocket Change Collective: Beyond the Gender Binary* by Alok Vaid-Menon. Invite students to make connections between this book and the party Juliet attends in Florida. Students can find parallels and direct connections between some of the characters in the story's party and the concepts outlined in this book.

Consider pairing *Juliet Takes a Breath* and *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde. Invite students to use some of the essays in Lorde's book to inform their analysis of Juliet and her experiences. They can use understandings of feminism and womanhood as explained by Lorde to analyze the beliefs of characters and the actions others take.



Consider pairing *Juliet Takes a Breath* and *This Bridge Called My Back* by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. Using this collection from the point of view of women of color about their experiences, students can engage in a conversation about the intersection of race and womanhood across time. Individually, students can write and respond to the readings.

Consider pairing *Juliet Takes a Breath* and *Boricuas: Influential Puerto Rican Writings—An Anthology* edited by Roberto Santiago. You can use this anthology to invite students into a deep dive about Puerto Rican culture. Juliet's ethnic identity is ever present throughout the text and plays a role in how her internship goes, how she processes her gender identity, and how she understands herself and her family. Spending time exploring this part of who she is can enhance students' understanding of the core text.



Consider pairing *Juliet Takes a Breath* and *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson. Use this book to do a gender-based analysis of what it's like for an LGBTQ boy of color to explore his identity in comparison and contrast for Juliet. Ask students: What's similar? What's powerfully different?

Journal Prompts

Students will find many entry points throughout the story to connect with. Writing in response to critical moments of tension in the text can help students reflect and process their own emotions and questions as they read.

Ask students to revisit these passages from the novel and invite them to answer the corresponding prompts.

- “My parents raised me to believe that I should be proud to live in the land of the free. But what the heck did any of that mean if it came at the cost of other people’s countries and lives?” (139) Prompt: This is an example of the various contradictions Juliet explores throughout the novel in her search for truth. How would you answer this question? Also, what are some other examples of contradictions throughout the novel?
- “Fresh-faced, I stared hard into the static of the bathroom mirror, trying to imagine her wanting to kiss me. I looked again and saw myself and it was okay. I’d kiss me.” (160) Prompt: When you look in the mirror, what do you see? How does this quote serve as an example of Rivera’s exploration of identity throughout the novel?
- “All of the women in my life were telling me the same thing. My story, my truth, my life, my voice, all of that had to be protected and put out into the world by me.” (285) Prompt: Do you believe this about yourself? How might this be true for you, too, and what do you have to say to the world?
- “Panic always started in my lungs first and then spread to nervous fingers, knuckles that had to be cracked, and a heartbeat that wouldn’t slow.” (52) Prompt: Do you suffer from anxiety, stress, or panic attacks? If so, what does it look like in your body? If not, how do you handle big emotions when they come? Spend time thinking and reflecting on your emotional health.

Journal Prompts (cont.)

- **“Ask the questions that make you feel like your heart is blasting out of your chest.” (145)** Prompt: What questions do you have in mind and heart? What burning question do you want to ask and what do you think the answer might be? What holds you/us back from asking big and hard questions?
- **On page 17, Juliet tells a brief story about her grandmother.** Prompt: How might her grandmother be an influence in her life?
- **“Why lie? I don’t have a boyfriend. And I think I’m a lesbian,” I said. ‘My words felt like they were being sucked out of me.’” (25)** Prompt: This is the moment where Juliet comes out about her sexual identity to her family. Have you ever shared a deep secret about yourself with someone? How did that feel? Have you ever shared something important about your identity with family? If so, how did they respond and how did you feel?

Extension Activities

- Juliet carries with her a purple composition notebook where she does research and takes notes. We learn about this notebook at the very beginning. This is a great opportunity to embed journaling into your class, if it doesn’t exist already. It can also be an activity you solely use during the study of this book. Welcome students, if you can, in this unit with a composition notebook of their own. This notebook can be a space where they answer the journal and other prompts offered throughout this guide. Journal writing can be a community builder for the class and sign of caring and connection from you. You can consider days where students select a journal entry to share with you or with each other. There may be journal entries students want to read aloud. Requiring the sharing is not something we recommend, however, because the hope is that students will be honest and thoughtful in their writing, and journal writing may be too personal to share.

Extension Activities (cont.)

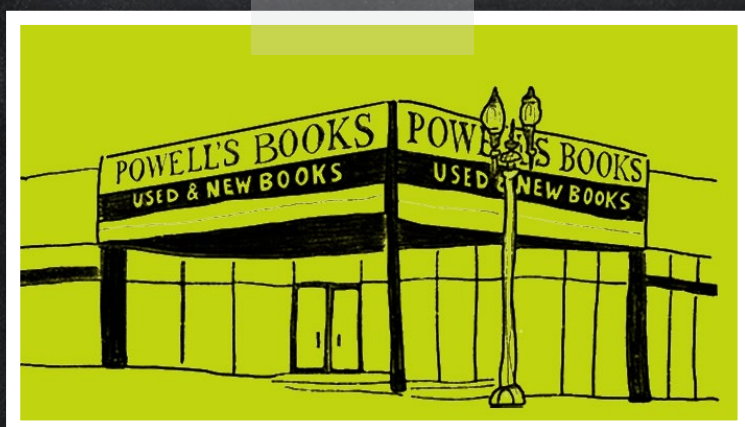
- Invite students to identify a woman in history, from the ones listed in the book and more, and spend time doing research on them. They can learn about their story, their achievements, their strengths, their areas of growth, and make some connections to modern day women and issues. Students can then make presentations, leading the class to collective learning led by students.
 - Invite students to design their dream internship. They can answer questions such as:
 - Who would you intern for?
 - What do you think you would learn from them?
 - Where would your internship be?
 - What task would your supervisor have you undertake?
- Arrange students in small groups so that this can be student-focused and they can learn to manage discussion and productivity. Each group watches one video in this TED Talk series [“On Coming Out”](#) and after discussing, they can share takeaways. You can offer guided listening questions so that their notes help them process the message and prepare for a share out. They can also make connections to the core text, *Juliet Takes a Breath*.
- Invite the class to watch [this TED talk](#) by trans activist Samy Nour. Then, hold a discussion about the history which he describes. Invite students to research LGBTQ activists across a range of time. They can do presentations or reports of their own.
- Invite your class to watch Gabby Rivera’s [TED Talk](#). Then hold a discussion about Gabby’s story and *Juliet Takes a Breath*.

In order to work in community with other antiracist educators and/or BIPOC you can welcome them to either support you in planning or join your classroom. If they join you by supporting you in planning, then they can offer you critical and thoughtful feedback on the implementation of your ideas and strategies for the book study. They can offer you questions and critique so that you can proactively try to avoid harmful or ineffective practices as you engage students in this discussion. If they are joining you in the classroom, then try to find a way for them to speak on direct issues mentioned in the book. Consider some of the following ideas:

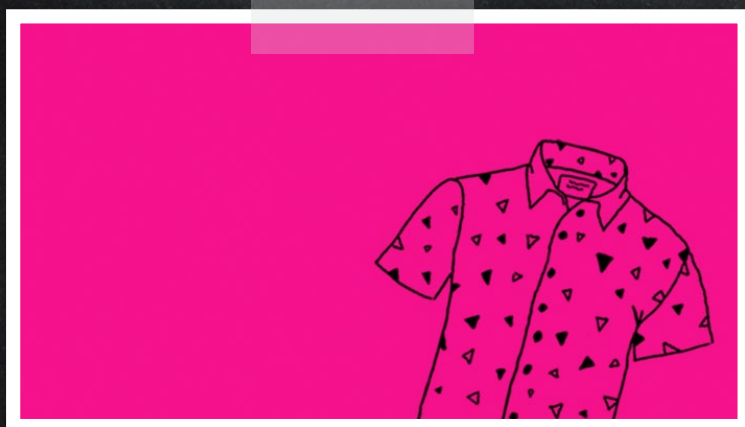
- A Queer person who can share about their story and make direct connections to Juliet’s experiences
- A woman who identifies as feminist and can speak to the experiences presented in the story
- An antiracist BIPOC who can explain intersectionality

Extension Activities (cont.)

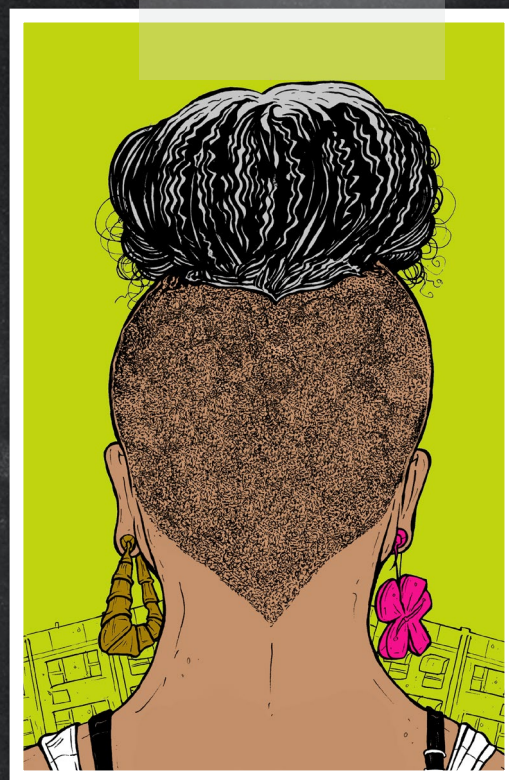
You want to ensure that the guest is fully aware of their role in the conversation and that their story is being centered through this core text. They should be invited to share their point of view as one of many; a complex experience for which there are many perspectives. You don't want to tokenize this person by presenting them as the one voice to answer all the questions and represent an entire group. However, if they understand your goal as a teacher and are aware that you are offering students an opportunity to hear from a person in their lives that can speak to the matters at hand as one story, that's collaboration.



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#DisruptTexts is not simply about replacing older texts for new ones; rather, it is a more nuanced and holistic approach aimed at offering a restorative and antiracist curriculum. #DisruptTexts requires that we as educators interrogate our own biases, center the voices of BIPOC in literature, help students develop a critical lens, and work in community with other antiracist and BIPOC educators. Together we will bring about change in society.

JULIA E. TORRES is a veteran language arts teacher librarian in Denver, Colorado. Julia facilitates teacher development workshops rooted in the areas of antiracist education, equity and access in literacy and librarianship, and education as a practice of liberation. Julia works with students and teachers locally and around the country with the goal of empowering them to use literacy to fuel resistance and positive social transformation. Julia also serves on several local and national boards and committees promoting educational equity and progressivism. She is the current NCTE Secondary Representative-at-large, a Book Love Foundation board member and Educator Collaborative Book Ambassador.

LORENA GERMÁN is a Dominican American educator based in Austin, Texas. A two-time nationally awarded educator, she works with middle and high school students, using an anti bias and antiracist approach to teaching. She's Co-Founder of [Multicultural Classroom](#), through which she supports teachers and schools, and is Chair of NCTE's Committee Against Racism & Bias in the Teaching of English, in addition to being a writer (Heinemann 2021), speaker, and professional development provider.

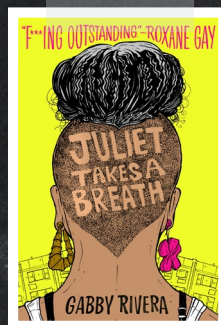
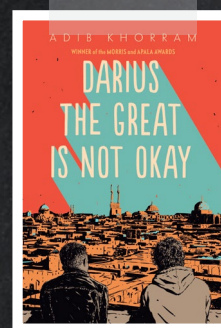
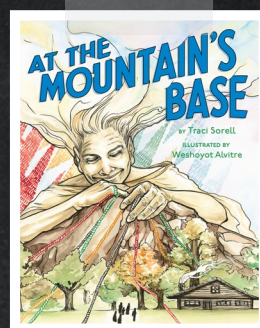
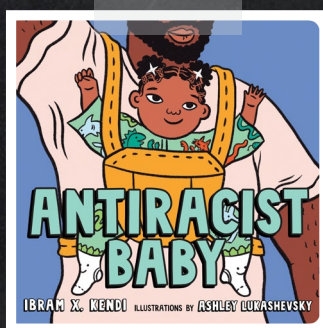
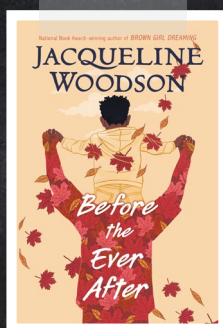
#DisruptTexts is not simply about replacing older texts for new ones; rather, it is a more nuanced and holistic approach aimed at offering a restorative and antiracist curriculum. #DisruptTexts requires that we as educators interrogate our own biases, center the voices of BIPOC in literature, help students develop a critical lens, and work in community with other antiracist and BIPOC educators. Together we will bring about change in society.

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