



An elementary school teacher's guide to studying discrimination

by: Alison Bromley

Why discuss discrimination?

Kids are aware of race from as young as 6 years old, and show preference to others who 'look like them.'

They will see discrimination in their lives, so we need to equip them with the language to vocalize their feelings, and the confidence to speak up.



Considerations for teachers

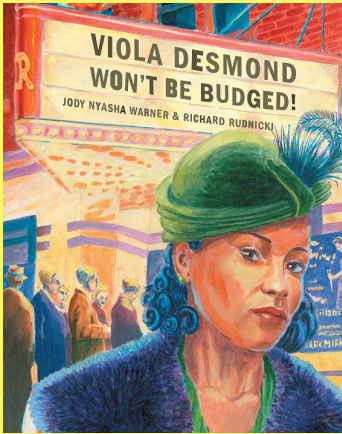
Before engaging with anti-racist pedagogy it's important to critically examine your own biases, classroom context, and curriculum resources.

Viola Desmond Won't Be Budged!

Grade level: 3 to 6

Themes: Discrimination, Segregation, Racism

Subject(s): Language, Social Studies



When to introduce: Use this book to start conversations about Canada's own history of discrimination, and the people who campaigned to end it. Read carefully, with emphasis on important terms and moments, it connects to a number of rich learning experiences that are designed to stir students to action. Remember to remind students that Viola is now on our \$10 bill!

Pre-read: group discussion

Ask Students:

- Has anyone ever heard of Viola Desmond? If so, in what context?
- Has anyone heard of Rosa Parks? If so, in what context?
- Did Canada ever have *segregation*?

Co-Define: racism, discrimination, segregation

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Post-read: question sequence

- Low-level:** How does Viola know that she's being asked to move because of her *race*?
- High-level:** Why might the Supreme Court judge not want to discuss racial *segregation*?
- Convergent:** How is Viola's story like Rosa Parks'? How is it different?
- Divergent:** If Viola had been sitting with a white person, would the usher still have asked her to move?

Connected learning experiences

After close-reading Viola Desmond build on students' curiosity by engaging them in these activities.

The order is only a suggestion— all activities can be completed as stand-alones.

1 Explore prejudice

Get students thinking about how others might view them using paper plate portraits.
Grades: 2 to 6
Subjects: Art, Social Studies
Connection to book: Viola was judged as lesser because of her skin tone, despite her being an independent business owner.

2 Become aware of Canada's history of discrimination

Stimulate thinking about the forms of legal discrimination with interconnected learning activities within Racism in Canada.
Grades: 3 to 6
Subject(s): Social Studies, Drama
Connection to Book: Discrimination took many forms other than segregation— learn more about them.

3 Learn about notable Black Canadians

Continue the conversation about Black contributions to Canada with the interconnected lessons in the ETFO 365 Black Canadian Curriculum.
Grades: 4 to 6
Subjects: Language, Social Studies, Art, Music
Connection to book: Viola wasn't alone in fighting for equality-- learn more about her peers.

4 Think about modern discrimination

Something Happened in Our Town (page 17) asks students to listen to two different scenarios, designed to stimulate thinking about modern discrimination and police violence.
Grades: 2 to 8
Subjects: Language, Social Studies
Connection to book: Discrimination hasn't gone away because Viola helped to end segregation— it just changed forms.



Teacher preparation

How to prepare for anti-racist teaching

Why do we need to prepare before anti-racist teaching?

Even the most conscious person has to recognize their positionality relative to the issues at hand.

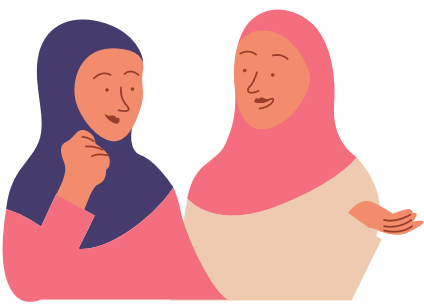
It's important for teachers to model correct language, behaviours, and to check their unconscious biases.



Read: tough conversations

Discrimination can be an uncomfortable topic for teachers because it involves tough conversations.

Read up on how to comfortably lead uncomfortable conversations from [Children Are Not Colourblind](#) or [Talking to kids about discrimination](#).



Learn more: anti-racist pedagogy

Read guides on how to enact anti-racist pedagogy in the classroom— like this [Background Information](#) section of 'Give Racism the Red Card.'



Study: the issues

It's important not to rely on students— or other teachers — of colour to have to be the 'expert' when discussing discrimination.

Read about:

- [police violence in Canada](#)
- [economic racism](#)



Learn how: question sequencing

To get thought-provoking answers, you need thought-provoking questions. Good questions can take the conversation from uncomfortably stilted to open and respectful.

Learn how to write a [question sequence](#).



Diversify: classroom resources

Think about the demographics of your classroom— are the books and materials available reflective of those students' lived experiences?

Consider adding books that reflect marginalized identities, using book lists like [Social Justice Begins with Me](#), or from Queen's University Faculty of Education's [Anti-Racism and Diversity Resource List](#).

Suggestions:

- [The Name Jar](#)
- [The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family](#)
- [Hair Love](#)



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