



How to be an anti-racist librarian

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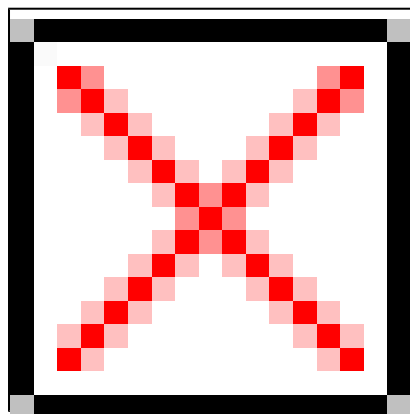
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Zoey Dixon has ways to make your library anti-racist.

Zoey Dixon suggests ways to make your library anti-racist. Her advice will be useful for everyone, whatever your role.



The recent Black Lives Matter protests have shown how many people recognise that systemic racism, and particularly anti-black racism, is rife in everyday life. People are not just angry at the killing of George Floyd, but at the lack of action from industries and organisations that, often unintentionally, uphold and perpetuate the oppression of Black people.

In the library profession, 97% of library workers identify as white (2015 ARA/CILIP Workforce Mapping). We must acknowledge that we are not immune from prejudice - we all have implicit biases, and only by recognising these can we choose to counteract them.?

As children's librarians, supporting Black people and being anti-racist goes beyond just listening and educating yourself; that is the first step, but it is not enough. You can bring a pro-active, anti-racist approach to delivering a library service, which will have an impact beyond your own attitudes and behaviours.?

Here are some actions you could take, focussing on supporting Black people to create a diverse and inclusive book collection, work environment and community space:

1. Look at your stock collection. Update your stock policy and state the need for diverse stock. Set a target percentage of how much of your overall collection will be books by Black writers and illustrators. If you have a community which is 50% Black, it would be reasonable to have an equally representative book collection. Your yearly stock plans should reinforce your stock policy and commitment to reach that target. If you use supplier selection, your specification needs to state this target, be clear about the kinds of books you want, and regularly check the stock that is supplied.

Quality control is particularly important, as you want to have a range of genres and subjects - not just social issues, but fantasy, comedy and even text books. This doesn't mean that you should not purchase any books that discuss racism -

this is an important topic and you should have books that both deal with racism and talk about how to be anti-racist. Sadly, Black children are never too young to experience racism, therefore children are never too young to need these resources. If you work in a secondary school library there are very good adult books that discuss these issues in an accessible way.?

2. It is very easy to only promote books by Black writers and illustrators when it aligns with a certain month (**Black History Month**) or day (**Windrush Day**). Of course, these books should be highlighted during this time, but they should be also be amplified throughout the year. Black writing falls into many genres and covers numerous pertinent topics and should be promoted because of its quality, the same for your author visits: invite them throughout the year.??

Make sure you are reading books by Black writers and encourage your colleagues to do the same. You could set a reading challenge encouraging people to diversify the authors they read. List challenges are a fun way to show just how much (or little) has been read from your collection, and competition can be a great incentive to read a wider range of books outside your usual tastes.

Whether it is an under 5s session or a class visit, make sure you are choosing books to read by Black writers and illustrators that show Black people. Make sure these books don't reinforce stereotypes, eg: stories from Africa that are only set in villages.?

Some libraries host police led story-time sessions as a way to foster positive community relations. However Black communities don't always have a positive relationship with the police and in fact their presence can deter people from visiting your libraries. When we talk about libraries as safe spaces we need to consider how our library users relate to those people we invite to use our spaces.?

3. It is very likely that the majority of your staff will identify as white. If you're in charge of recruitment or can help influence policy, think how you encourage Black people to apply for vacancies. If you don't have any influence on this process, voice your concerns, and suggest ideas. Consider the wording of the recruitment advertisement; where you are placing the job adverts; and even if it is really necessary to hold a library degree.

In Lambeth, where I work, more than 50% of staff are Black or Asian. This is due to a concerted effort made in the 80s to have a workforce that reflected the community. Library managers stopped taking graduates as they were usually white, and didn't have the ?skills to relate to the inner city London children.?? Furthermore, staff can be trained and encouraged to gain a degree or pursue an apprenticeship at a later date. If your place of work is in a position to do so, they could even fund their further education.??

Make sure that you also have Black volunteers, work experience placements and student librarians. These experiences can encourage people into the profession, raising awareness of librarianship as a career and provide role models for future Black librarians.?

4. Identify and challenge racist behaviour. Part of educating yourself is being aware of racist behaviours that can be overt or more insidious, for example: microaggressions. Learn what they are and be aware of them from yourself, colleagues and other students or library users. If you see Black children being treated unfairly by other staff or teachers or hear them say racist things, confront and report it. Examples include not treating a group of Black teens entering the library with more suspicion than a group of white teens.

Unfortunately Black and Asian people aren't immune from perpetuating these racist behaviours. There is anti-black racism within Asian communities and we live in a world where there is a negative view of Black people. We can internalise these messages and unconsciously enforce those same harmful views and prejudices. If you find yourself doing so, stop and think why? It takes work to change behaviour but it can be done.?

I have taken these actions in Lambeth, and I hope by sharing them I can help all children's librarians be better at what they do.

Zoey Dixon has worked for **Lambeth Libraries** since she was 16. After completing her first degree she got a role as

Children's and Young People's Librarian, working in four of the town centre libraries. While she is now a library manager for four community hub libraries, Zoey continues to deliver frontline services to children and teens. She is currently on the judging panel for CILIP's **Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Book Awards** and Vice-Chair of **YLG (Youth Libraries Group)** London.

She has created an [anti-racist reading list](#) [3].

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