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STORYTELLING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Creating Arts-Based Counterstories to Resist Racism

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1. How can storytelling through the arts help young people create counterstories for resisting racism in their schools and communities?
2. How do such counterstories provide opportunities for the creation of new, transformative stories?

The Storytelling Project model described in this chapter offers both content and process ideas for addressing racism through narrative and the arts to realize social justice goals of equity and justice (Bell, 2010). We illustrate how the model can support young people—particularly those most marginalized by race and class—to identify, talk back to, and imagine alternatives to stock stories about them and their communities that rationalize their subjugated position in society. The arts provide a lens and vehicle for expressing counterstories that challenge racism and other forms of injustice and for generating new stories to embolden action and change.

We draw from the definition of social justice outlined by Bell (2007) as both a goal and a process. The goal of social justice is ensuring full and equal participation of all groups in a society that shares resources equitably and provides physical and psychological safety and security. “In such a society, individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities) and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others,” and we believe the process of social justice “should also be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change” (Bell, 2007, pp. 1–2). Central to the Storytelling Project model is a participatory process and community of support that enables young people to develop a critical lens for analyzing inequities and collaborative action strategies to challenge injustice in their schools and communities, using the arts as a vital tool.