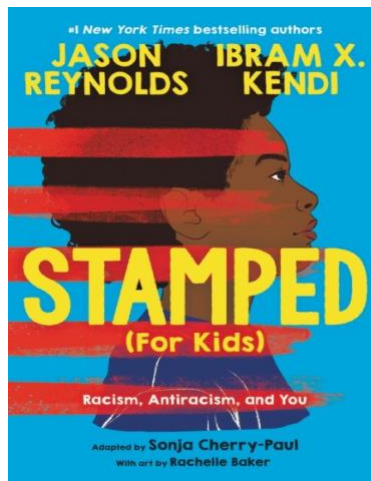


**First Opinion: *Stamped*: What does this book have to do with my life today?**

**Everything!**

Reynolds, Jason, and Ibram X Kendi. *Stamped (for Kids)*. Adapted by Sonja Cherry-Paul, Illustrated by Rachelle Baker. New York: Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2021. Print.

*Casey Pennington*



When conversations about race, racism and antiracism come up, we often hear retorts like: “*What does race, or racism have to do with me today?*” or “*I didn’t own slaves; slavery wasn’t my fault!*”. However, authors Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi eloquently outline how race and racism have *everything* to do with our current experiences across the macro- and micro-landscapes of our lives in *STAMPED (FOR KIDS): Racism, Antiracism, and You*. The authors posit that regardless of the discomfort the topics of race, racism, and antiracism elicit, we cannot

escape the realities and consequences of racism. As they state in the prologue of the book, these topics are like a rope, we are all entangled.

This entangled rope metaphor launches their non-fiction book as a way to illustrate how the topics of racism, race, and antiracism can be used to function like a rope that “ties, pulls, holds, and lifts” each of us, both individually and collectively (Reynolds and Kendi 3). However, with that reality, the authors offer us the rope as a way forward, and arguably to untie, or untangle, our collective and individual selves from the insidiousness of racism. How? By naming it and talking about it across historical and contemporary contexts.

As a starting reflection piece, Reynolds and Kendi pose an important question: *what does this book have to do with my life today?* And well, the answer: *everything*. This book has everything to do with the construction and consequences of race and racism that entangle *you* and *me*. They argue that the only way out is up, and to go up you must really *see the past* to understand the present. They state “until we talk about race, the poison of racism won’t go away” (p.3). And they’re right. If a snake bites us and we don’t tell someone to suck out the poison, we die. We must talk about it; we must get the poison out to live.

To untangle us, or to get the poison out, Reynolds & Kendi center their book on the concepts of *segregationists*, *assimilationists*, or *antiracists*. They argue that we must critically discuss the careers of historical figures of the past, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and W.E.B. Du Bois. Through this process of exploring the complexities of historical figures, the authors implore that we grapple with ourselves and, more importantly, our positionalities. In other words, we need to learn to recognize that we can be the snake, the poison, and the antidote. This is critical self-exploration which makes this book a crucial read for all teachers, librarians, school staff and arguably, families and children. This book is particularly needed in the wake of the conservative family/parent movements taking over schools across America.

Education conservative parent groups, such as The Purple Parents for Indiana, have taken political hold in America and in my home-state (Indiana). The Purple Parents for Indiana publicized HB1134 as the solution for students in public classrooms throughout Indiana to navigate feelings of discomfort when it comes to race, gender, sex, and religion. The Bill has been dubbed the “anti-CRT Bill,” wherein it would have effectively “banned several ‘divisive concepts’ and given more power over curriculum and classroom activities to parents” (Herron). The Bill prohibited

a school corporation or qualified school shall not promote certain concepts as part of a course of instruction or in a curriculum or instructional program or allow teachers or other employees to use supplemental learning materials to promote certain concepts regarding sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin (Cook).

*STAMPED (FOR KIDS): Racism, Antiracism, and You* is timely and sorely needed for teachers, especially those of us in public education as conservative parental groups are fighting for power over the curriculum. Throughout this book, Reynolds & Kendi attend to the realities of race and racism as not only the foundations of American history, but as the landscape of today.

As a White woman in my thirties who has taught in Indiana, I come to this review with trepidation because of my positionality, particularly considering that educators in the field are largely White, whereas students are predominantly BIPOC+. Pew Research found that “America’s public schools’ teachers are far less racially and ethnically diverse than their students” and by far the teacher pool is roughly 87% white whereas students are 71% non-white (Schaeffer). *STAMPED (for kids): Racism, Antiracism, and You* is the exact type of literature I needed in my classroom to learn, and unlearn, the complexities of racism hidden in the curriculum.

Reynolds & Kendi address issues of race and racism in chapter 1, *A Great Big Lie: 1415-1619*. They focus on Gomes Eanes de Zurara who, at the time, was a famous explorer and author. It is from his writings and publications that initially linked slavery *with* skin color. Prior to Zurara’s text, Reynolds & Kendi explain that slavery “had nothing to do with skin color, it just mattered that you were conquered” (Reynolds & Kendi, 9). They ask, “how did Zurara do this?” and, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has eloquently explained before, there is “danger [in] a single story”. Zurara publicized a single story that skin color is directly linked to morality and humanity, which ultimately led to the enslavement of people based on skin color alone. Zurara accomplished this lie through “storytelling,” which took root and flourished in colonization (10).

Reynolds & Kendi infuse storytelling as they follow the historical timeline of racism from 1452-2020. The chapters are short, digestible, and concise. It’s written so that those who have very limited understanding of racism and antiracism can come into the text and leave with a foundational knowledge and a path forward. Their book is not just about history, but rather is like a prism into our present moment so we can see the fractures and fissures that ensnare us. We are entangled in the consequences and realities of slavery, race, and racism. As such, the authors

guide readers to investigate ourselves and our own beliefs, which often vacillate across segregationist, assimilationist, and antiracist ideologies.

The metaphor of the rope illustrates that we are all tied to racist ideologies and realities. We can engage in a tug of war that pulls and pushes with/against racist ideologies and practices, or we can *lift* and actively work towards antiracist policies and actions. *STAMPED (for kids): Racism, Antiracism, and You* should be a required read for all of us working with children, and for children themselves. If we want to be antiracist then all of us must do the work.

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