



Counternarratives in 6–12 Classrooms

Disrupting Harmful Narratives and Engaging Students In Critical Thinking and Reflection

Dr. Christy Howard

- Associate Professor in Literacy Studies at East Carolina University. My research interests include culturally responsive literacy instruction, disciplinary literacy, and experiences of students and faculty of color in predominantly white educational spaces.



Counternarratives in 6-12 classrooms

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01

What are counternarratives?

A counternarrative is...

A counternarrative is a story that stands in contrast to and challenges the *values, beliefs, and an established dominant narrative*. Often, counternarratives do this by focusing on the perspectives that are *missing, marginalized, or actively erased from the dominant narrative* (Ebarvia, 2023, p.3).

A dominant/master narrative is...

“The master narrative is whatever ideological script that is being imposed by the people in authority on everybody else.-*Toni Morrison*”

When we think about education, what are the scripts being imposed on educators across content areas right now?

How do dominant/master narratives hurt all of us?



02

Why do we need counternarratives?

Why do we need counternarratives?

- Stories that only show one perspective can be harmful
 - Counterstories challenge the status quo
- Counterstories help us disrupt deficit perspectives and harmful narratives about people and places
 - Counterstories help to amplify voices that are often silenced
- Counternarratives can help us engage with the world in a more responsible way

Counternarratives help us to disrupt deficit perspectives and harmful narratives

Athletes should "shut up and dribble."-Laura Ingraham



Joshua Dobbs-Current Vikings
Quarterback & Aerospace Engineer



Retired astronaut Leland Melvin was the first pro football player to become a NASA scientist and go to space. He sneaked his dogs into NASA for this official photo, which went viral years after it was taken. Courtesy NASA

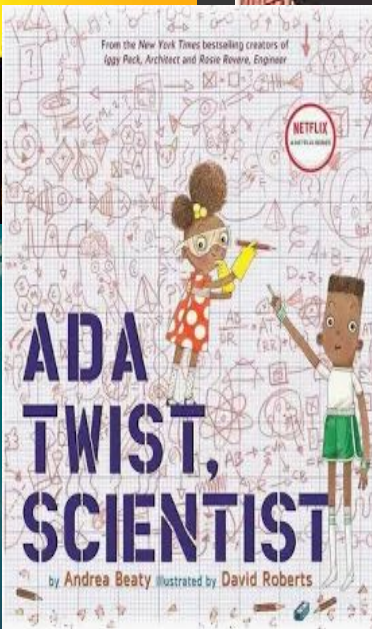
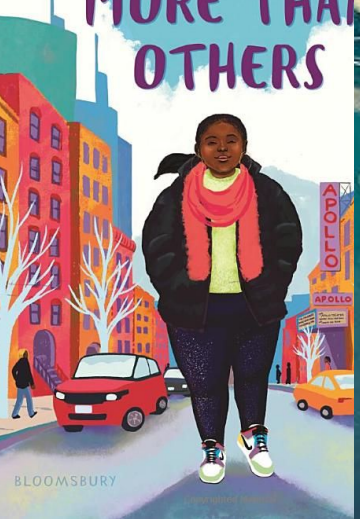
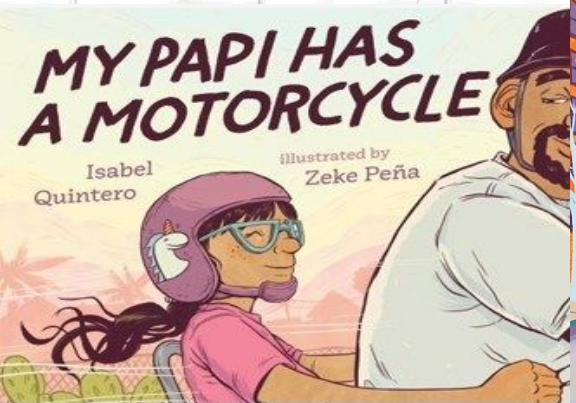
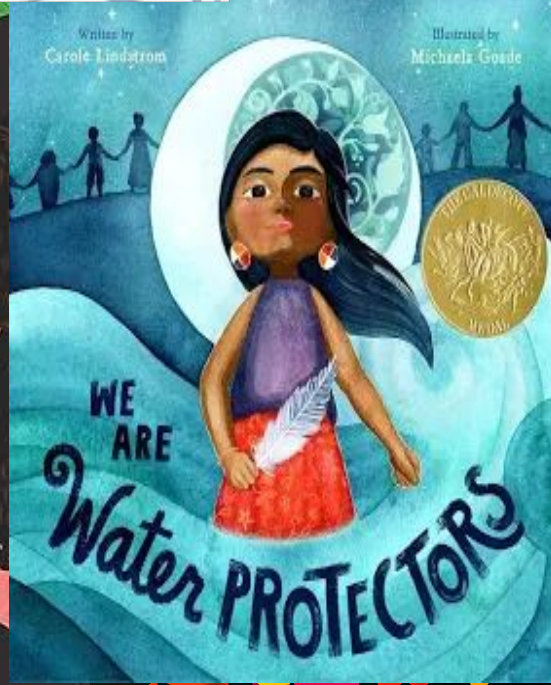
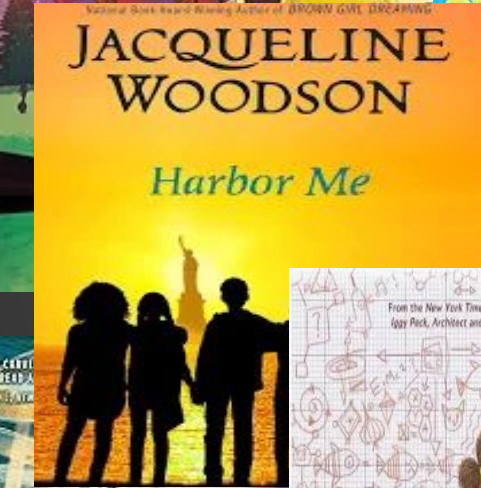
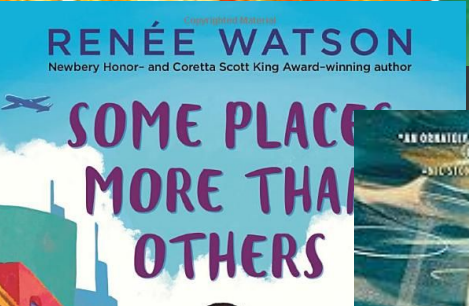
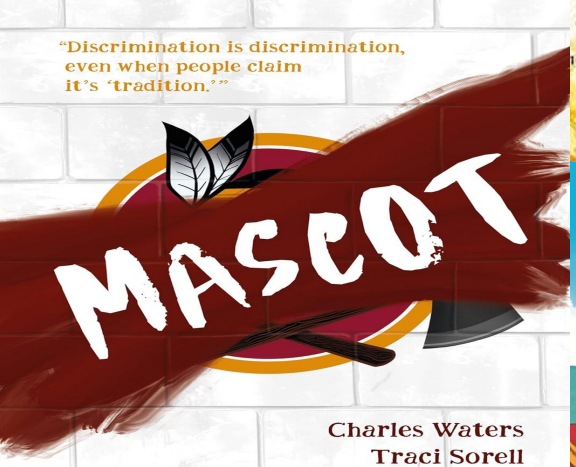
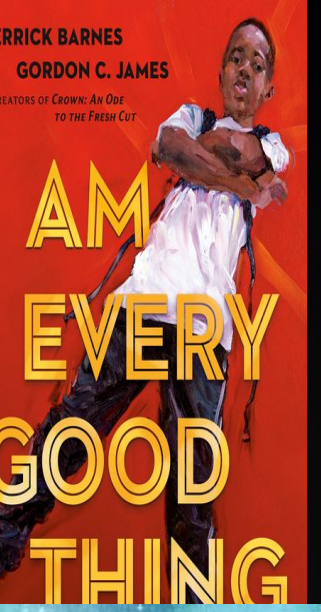
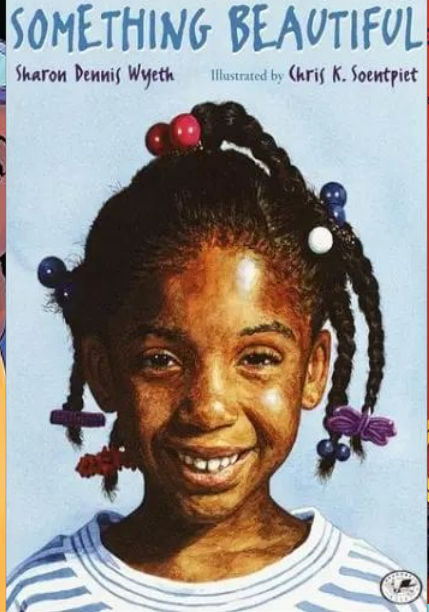
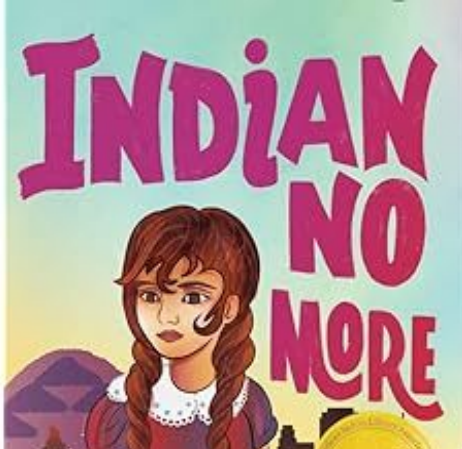
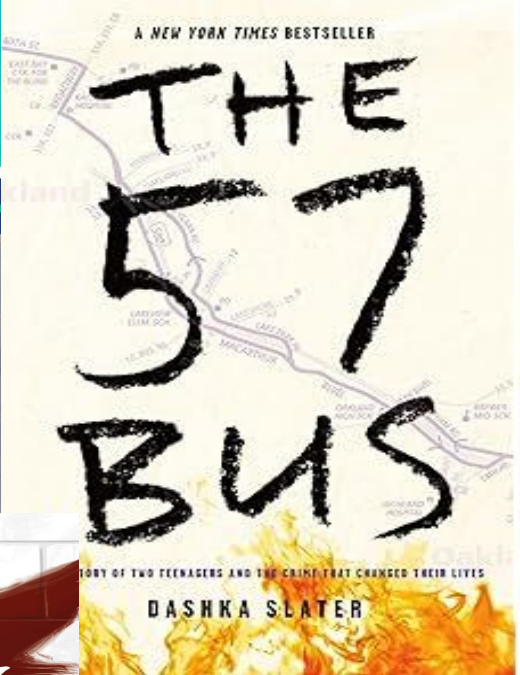
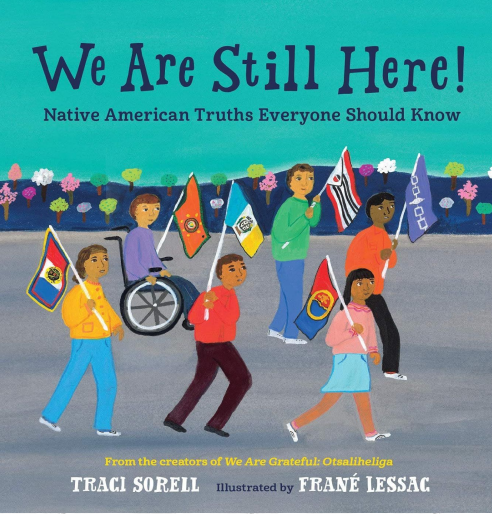
“When I was growing up, some of the teachers said, 'You can either be a jock, or you can either be a scientist or engineer.' And people don't see that you can do both,” Melvin said. "It's just powerful and beautiful to see this right now.”-Leland Melvin



03

Counternarratives
(Reading & Writing in our Classrooms)





Choosing texts (Ebarvia, 2023)

- Can this text provide meaningful insight to students about identities with which they are unfamiliar?
- In what ways can this text help to develop a positive social identity for my students?
- How can this text challenge incomplete or harmful dominant narratives about different identities?
- Does this writer treat their subject with complexity and nuance and avoid stereotypes?
- What does this text not do or include that I will have to supplement with another text? What counternarratives will my students need after this text?

*These questions can be asked across disciplinary texts



“

“In writing about themselves, students learn to praise their beauty that the world overlooks or cannot see.”

— Christensen, 2017, p. 82

Brilliance

Counternarratives (Reading and Writing)

Beauty

Talk back-(Lucille Clifton & Maya Angelou)

Visual autobiographies as counternarratives (photos, drawings, multigenre projects)

Affirmations

Celebrate cultural wealth and community assets (Something Beautiful)

Excellence

Share identities, experiences, stories (through poetry, letters, songs, videos, etc).

Culture

History



Strategies/Activities Across Content Areas

- Paired texts (representing dominant narratives & counternarratives)
- When introducing a new unit (biology, poetry, geometry, World War II, portrait drawing – any topic across any subject) present students with the biographies of scientists, writers, mathematicians, historians, artists, etc. that reflect their identities. Include their contributions and perspectives within the unit, and allow students to identify characteristics they share with the scholars presented (Highlander Institute)
- The 360 approach is a process where students identify their perspective on a seemingly well known issue, then engage in an investigative experience that provides multiple perspectives on the issue. The experience closes with a re-evaluation and discussion of their perspective given the exposure to the new information.
- Researching Family stories and oral histories

Strategies Across Content Areas

S.P.A.C.E.S

ECU History 360 - SPACES technique for analyzing documents

Source	S Write a <u>summary</u> of the text. Be sure to include the central idea(s) and make a clear connection between key details and ideas. RH.11-12.2	P What is the author's <u>purpose</u> ? How do you know? Cite specific textual evidence to support your response. RH.11-12.1	A <u>Analyze</u> the text structure. What specific sentences, paragraphs, images, etc. contribute to the overall meaning of the text? RH.11-12.5	C What <u>claims</u> are made in the text? RH.11-12.6	E What <u>evidence</u> is used to support the claims in the text? Is the evidence relevant? Why or why not? RH.11-12.6	S What is the author's <u>slant</u> ? What similarities and differences do you notice in point of view and presentation of claims between this text and other texts we have reviewed? RH.11-12.6

Questions Across Content Areas

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is telling the story? (novel, textbook, documentary, etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can we challenge negative perceptions in dominant narratives?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does the story change if someone else is telling it? Why does it change?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whose voices are missing? What does this mean? Why does it matter?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does the author want us to think/believe? How does the author show this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whose experiences and voices are centered? Whose experiences and voices are marginalized?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does <u>(topic of study)</u> mean to you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do our experiences shape how we view <u>(topic of study)</u>? What does this mean for how others may view <u>(topic of study)</u>?

We should engage with dominant and counternarratives to understand the perspectives of others and ourselves, know our history, examine our present, and hope for our future.



04

What's Next?



“Counternarratives offer opportunities for us—students and teachers alike—to not just accept the stories the world tells us, but to practice becoming the authors of what comes next.”

— (Jason Dehart, 2017)

Thank you!

Questions?

howardch14@ecu.edu



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