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I Don't Know You, But I Hate You

Building better relationships through literature and writing

by Brandon Warren



Books Brandon Uses to Stimulate Talk and Response:

- *Your Move* by Eve Bunting
- *Tears of a Tiger* by Sharon Draper
- *Forged by Fire* by Sharon Draper

As a new graduate of IUPUI, I entered my urban 4th grade classroom four years ago full of enthusiasm, but as the years went by I was discouraged to find that some students—especially those from African American homes without a positive male influence—seemed to instinctively have a negative reaction to me.

I thought about this a lot and realized that maybe these students had never met anyone like me. I had already joked with friends about being a "double minority" in the elementary classroom since I am both African American and male, but I had imagined that *only I* was affected by that fact. I'd never considered that students might be challenged by it as well—certainly not that they'd be afraid of me or dislike me without cause.

I knew I needed to address the problem, so I turned to what I know best: reading. I sought out literature to counteract the negative African American male stereotype -- the stereotype that suggested I didn't care about students, that I would leave them, or that learning and liking school wasn't cool. I filled my

- *Double Dutch* by Sharon Draper
- *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper
- *The Skin I'm In* by Sharon Flake
- *You Don't Even Know Me: Stories and Poems About Boys* by Sharon Flake
- *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *The Otherside* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *We Had a Picnic This Sunday Past* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Mama Loves from Far Away* by Pat Brisson
- *Leon's Story* by Leon Walter Tillage
- *Thank You, Mr. Faulkner* by Patricia Polacco
- *Drive By* by Lynne Ewing
- *Henry's Freedom Box* by Ellen Levine
- *Creativity* by John Steptoe
- *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* by Tomie De Paola
- *Sister Anne's Hands* by Marybeth Lorbiecki
- *A Shelter in Our Car* by Monica Gunning
- *Through the Cracks* by Carolyn Sollman
- *The House that Crack Built* by Clark Taylor
- *The Hickory Chair* by Lisa Rowe Fraustino
- *Nappy Hair* by Carolivia Herron
- *Grandma's Records* by Eric Velasquez
- *My Name is Yoon* by Helen Recorvits



Colorful bookshelves surround Brandon's students.

classroom with books that had characters that looked like my students and me.

Not only did students' interaction with me improve, students began to open up about themselves as well. When we read *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson, one student told the class his dad was in jail, too, and he knew how the girl in Woodson's story felt. No one laughed or ostracized the student. On the contrary, our community grew stronger, more accepting, supportive.

These books I've gathered aren't texts I use for an isolated six-week unit. I now make sure we use books that reflect my students' real lives in every unit and regularly in my read-alouds. When we read a book like Eve Bunting's *Your Move*, for example, we can talk about how hard it is to make the right decision. And, students can always choose to read more about real life challenges in their independent reading.

I've compiled a list of books that have helped me in the classroom (see list at left). I call it my "I Don't Know You, But I Hate You" list, because I've seen how these books can break stereotypes and transform relationships. Thanks to the Indiana Partnership for Young Writers and Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, I was able to present my story and my book list during a breakout session at the 2011 NCTE conference in Chicago. I'm happy to share it with you, too.

Brandon Warren is a 4th grade teacher in Wayne Township in Indianapolis. He is also a teacher-leader in IPYW's Young Leaders in Urban Education group and a member of IPYW's administrative advisory board.



Peek inside Brandon's writing workshop for an excerpt of a read-aloud and discussion.



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