How to Read When the World is on Fire

Abstract

As Aparna Mishra Tarc does through her evocative words on engaging texts today, I contemplate how texts, specifically children's books, open pedagogical possibilities to reckon, repair, and reworld in a world that is on fire. From climate change to racial justice to other issues and matters that we confront, it is children's books, I believe, that can also make us care about the world we live in. At the same time, they can guide and support us in developing an ethics of care with our students, first, as we are touched by history and then as we begin to think with care. Through these considerations, I foreground how children's books can be discussed, engaged, and provoked such that our children and students reckon the ruin and wreckage of terrible human history and its ongoing affect. I consider this reckoning as a form of knowledge that makes one care by being "touched" by something. From this notion of touch, I argue how we can think about the work of repair, taking into consideration our own silences and subjectivities when we examine difficult knowledge. It is, in other words, to think with care such that we do not distance ourselves from the histories that mark us. From the work of reckoning and repairing, I finally suggest that children's books can be used as springboards to reworld while remaining cognizant of colonial care and shifting instead toward care that is rooted in justice.

> To repair social relations requires our attentiveness to an inherent brokenness within, between, and across our shifting.
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> — Mishra Tarc, 2011, p. 354

Engaging Texts and Terrible Human History

The opening epigraph holds the words that steer me as we live in a world where we are constantly asked to grapple with what Mishra Tarc (2011) refers to as terrible human history. From the Atlantic Slave Trade to the British Empire to the Holocaust to the Residential "School" System, and much more, we are tortured by apartheid, genocide, and violence in ways that cannot be easily described or put into words. We are, as well, pressed by current global affairs, where fascism and neoliberal rhetoric are on display at a broad level such that no corner of the world is untouched by its heavy machinery, wrought by powerful men who take out their trauma on the rest of us. We can think here about politicians with access to weapons of mass destruction, and who threaten each other to demonstrate their authority and rule over one another while citizens watch in dismay. As they exchange insults with each other, the rest of us, as Lynn (2018) writes, "live in a moment of political and cultural turmoil" (p. 1).

Such distress and unrest can be observed as we are confronted by one of the greatest catastrophes of our time, climate change, and here we have some of the most narrow-minded men who masturbate in public and trade blows with each other instead. Scientists have warned us about the potentially irreversible effects of emissions (Suzuki, 2019) among other lasting consequences. Yet, instead, as the world is on fire, quite literally, we are witness to some of the most insidious responses from state governments to global organizations, making matters only worse. Therefore, we live in a world that is often cruel and uncaring, siphoned by greed and selfishness, where collective responsibility is hindered and relegated such that it is made insignificant.

For those of us who are teachers, working at the site of the classroom, we are affected by the weight of the world both through the curriculum and pedagogy, as we contemplate and determine what is important for our students to (un)learn and how we must teach it. In other words, we must decide what is crucial to contemplate, interrogate, and study when there are so many alarming and impeding discussions to be had while we also "work with and against the grain of a moribund curriculum" (Morawski & Palulis, 2009). Though I maintain a degree of ongoing contemplation when it comes to what is most significant to teach, I concur with Owusu-Ansah and Kyei-Blankson (2016) who remind us: "The constructs of care and connectedness are crucial at all levels of education" (p. 1). It is the ethics of care and connectedness that I believe is critical and necessary to engage and study with students to form a collective responsibility, as we wrestle with issues and matters that inevitably confront us all.

Through my teaching life, I have learned that our children and students are gripped by terrible human history, and thus I insist a pedagogy of care cannot be divorced from the world writ large, for political and social issues seep into the classroom. Having been an elementary school teacher in Ahmedabad teaching Grades 1 to 4, the oral testimonies of my students have revealed the nature of internalized racism as a fixture in their lives (Author, 2023) and my conversations have come to inform my academic and scholarly pursuits. Later, as a student teacher in Ottawa in

a Grade 1 classroom and then in a Grades 3 and 4 classroom, I was even more convinced that I could not separate the world from the classroom. I noticed how they often held assumptions and biases about themselves and each other, internalizing and mimicking forms of oppressions like racism and sexism. Still, my students have also demonstrated a willingness to deconstruct their beliefs, and an even greater volition to unsettle the catastrophes that have beset humanity. Like Allen (1997), "I have found that many children develop a sense of social and political justice earlier than I had come to expect" (p. 518), and so, I am even more steadfast in the importance of provoking the inherent brokenness that Mishra Tarc (2011) names.

However, European and Western demagogues and proponents want us to engage in what I call a curriculum of forgetting or historical amnesia. In the nation-state referred to as the United States, teachers know this well from the banning of books to making Black History Month optional (Chatelain, 2022). Though there has been outrage against colonial legacy and its unyielding impact, such attempts at erasure are also present in the nation-state of Canada, especially when it comes to the integration of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education. In fact, those who oppose the introduction of curricular changes to include worldviews that are not white(ned) will do everything in their power to censor and underscore the efforts of those who seek to pushback on dominant narrative. To borrow the words of Wolfe (2006), efforts of erasure are a part of a settler-colonial project of elimination. Therefore, the curriculum remains a project of white supremacy, "actively erasing parts of the past to serve a colonial narrative and invalidating the lived experiences of so many" (Lander, 2021, p. 11).

Here, we can turn to Mishra Tarc (2020) who suggests that engaging texts can "gift us with the language so desperately needed to articulate cruel and inhumane rhetoric, policies, acts" (p. 33). Through her provocation, I argue that we can draw on the power of texts, specifically children's books, to instill and probe a form of care in our classrooms—one that does the work of reckoning, repairing, and reworlding—to study some of the most pressing issues of our time while steering our fragile and fractured selves toward another world. In the way Mishra Tarc (2020) writes about texts of our past generation, in other words, I believe texts can sustain us, and, as Lynn (2018) says about literary writing, for me reading is "one of the most effective means for interrogating and challenging social oppression, inequality, and injustice" (p. 1).

One might wonder, however, if children's books can really bring about revolt. With Lynn (2018), we might even ask: "Does literature really allow for engagement and action in a meaningful way?" (p. 1). I believe with utmost confidence and resolute optimism that children's books and other texts have the potential to invigorate and revitalize political action and protest. For words, in the way Mishra Tarc (2020) discusses Toni Morrison's literary writing, have the pedagogical potential to stir us. Texts and words, as I suggest, can give us rise to speak back against the atrocities of our time, and, most of it all, they can make us aware in developing an ethics of care that departs from retrogressive enactments of care to ones that support a collective responsibility—one that is shaped by feminists who think about the integration of care and justice (Held, 2006). What I discuss here as such is a consideration of children's books and their irrefutable capacity and measure to develop an integration of *care* and *justice*, working toward reckoning, repairing, and reworlding through the theoretical underpinnings of care engaged by profound thinkers such as Simon (2005), de la Bellacasa (2017), and Narayan (1995).

Reckoning through the Intimacy of Touch

As a starting point, children's books can alert us to what Maynard and Simpson (2022) refer to as the wreckage of the world. In *Rehearsals for Living*, they contemplate the "centuries of European atrocities [that] have wreaked on [their] people," but what is most significant about their conversation is how they grapple with terrible human history while imagining another world, which "more than seeking to escape, people committed to justice continue to ask one another, in all of the ways we know how, what would it take to interrupt this murderous normality" (p. 143). In other words, to reckon means to also repair and reworld at the same time. In that manner, to reckon the past, as I discuss further here, means to reckon the present and the future as well, as Maynard and Simpson (2022) warn about the constructs of linear temporalities so that we do not frame terrible human history as a thing of the past. Though, at times, the past too has been erased in our curriculum and removed from our historical consciousness.

I begin with the past, as such, for I believe it can support students in developing a critical consciousness while unsettling how the present has been shaped by its wreckage. When we read the book, *I Am Not a Number* by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer (2016), the ongoing legacy of genocide in the nation-state of Canada is witnessed in one girl's account of the Residential School System and a glimpse of the past is revealed. Through the contents of her story, more specifically, we are confronted by the harrowing and painstaking realities of assimilation, isolation, and separation. One cannot read the story, told from the life of Dupuis' grandmother, and feel no emotions at all. Similarly, I can never read *Where the Streets Had a Nam*e by Randa Abdel-Fattah (2008) without feeling the immense heaviness that it unravels. Reading it to students, one chapter at a time, they too feel its weight as they listen to thirteen-year-old Hayaat and her experiences living under the Israeli apartheid. Without reading Hayaat's words, however, we cannot recognize the brute force and violence of the Israeli government and military, as well as its deleterious effect on Palestine. As some of us know all too well, the realities of Palestinians have often been one of what Desai and Shahwan (2022) call an erased curriculum, and so too has been the case for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples whose contexts and histories are often untold, purposefully so. In that way, *I Am Not a Number* and *Where the Streets Had a Nam*e are two texts that push us to consider the depth of human violence that often goes unnamed and unspoken.

Such children's books, I believe, make us aware of the past, say, for instance, of colonial rule, but they also inform us of oppression's continued existence and historical ramifications. Indeed, "[b]ooks are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar and strange" (Bishop, 1990, p. x). They are windows, for instance, into the fractures, ruptures, and segments of wreckage that have sought to decimate peoples and destroy lands. Through those windows, they tell us something that we do not know or have not fully grasped until our immersed reading of a specific text takes place. Therefore, one can recognize how children's books and engaging texts of all forms can help us reckon with the past and its ongoing legacy—something Indigenous activists and scholars have long proclaimed—of a human history that is complex, ineffable, and perhaps even irreparable.

I have witnessed the power of children's books in studying terrible human history in my first of teaching in Ahmedabad. *Otto* by Tomi Ungerer (2010) is one such piece of literature. It has the potential, as I have seen firsthand, to grip students who listen to the narrative of a German-

born teddy bear named Otto who tells the story of being separated from his owner, David, a Jewish boy whose life is undeniably torn by the Holocaust. Though it is devasting to get through and read, Otto's perspective is a tale that cannot be ignored or left out. As my own students have demonstrated, they can gauge the ruins of the Second World War in detail rather than what was before categorized and left unaddressed as a "bad event" in our history.

Some might suggest that children are too young to read words and view illustrations that depict the atrocities and terror of war. I disagree, for, do the children of Palestine, who are bombed and injured, not deserve our attention? What about the children of Somalia who are born into the category of refugee and never able to imagine a return to their homeland? I am insistent, much like Freire (1983), that "[r]eading the world precedes reading the word" (p. 5). Elsewhere, Freire (1985) elaborates: "Thus, we see how reading is a matter of studying reality that is alive, [the] reality that we are living inside of, reality as history being made and also making us" (p. 18). Reading *Otto*, as well as some of the other children's books that I have mentioned so far, speaks to the histories that have been made and that make us, and to which we must pay attention.

But what else does reading the world afford us? Like Choudry (2019), who shares his thoughts about *Suffer the Little Children* by Tamara Starblanket (2018), I am reminded of the words of Ella Baker: "In order to see where we are going, we not only must remember where we have been, but we must understand where we have been." Through children's books then, we can acknowledge and reckon the wreckage that has been done and not forget the terror that has been inflicted throughout human history. To reckon, even more so, means to regard something, like the weight of the past, and truly develop an understanding of where we have been. Again, a children's book like *I Am Not a Number* allows for such a recognition, as the authors fill the pages such that no details are unarticulated or omitted.

When teachers bring forth such texts, we are confronted by several valences, two of which are quite pressing: for one, we work against what Peters (2015) calls a white curriculum that already pervades our classrooms, and, as well, we must grapple with the staunch opposition to a critical curriculum, fueled by some of the most unread advocates, who seek to maintain settler colonialism and other structures of oppression. I am uninterested in what can be done to engage those who resort to and spew bigotry and hatred. I do not have time for their vitriol because I think of racism like Toni Morrison does: as a distraction. As a teacher, however, I am dedicated to ensuring that we do not replicate such a disconnected and uncaring generation of students. Therefore, we are, just as ever, in need of a critical curriculum that confronts and examines real-world issues, as Au (2012) suggests. And, like Chatelain (2022), we must teach the truth if we want to give rise to thoughtful conversations about our past and the present.

A text like *I Am Not a Number* can unsettle the historical amnesia of the past that is often maintained in the nation-state and in schools, but teachers have a responsibility to take up the *ongoing* nature of historical injustices as well for a curriculum to be critical. Regan (2010) suggests that the truth of Residential "Schools," for instance, is necessary to reckon the colonial relationship that remains intact today. Heeding the words of Simpson, "the present moment is a collapsing in of the past and future" (Maynard et al., 2021, 154). For Miles (2018), as such, teachers can support students to interrogate how settler colonialism has shifted over time while also unnerving the continuities that are sustained. This examination, as the author suggests, shifts the historical

injustice out of temporality such that coloniality is not relegated to the past. Pedagogical possibilities can further unfold in such a provocation: to ask questions about a nation-state's past and how colonial legacies are maintained in the present, for instance. To perhaps "see the past in the present" (Maynard et al., 2021, 154).

Through a critical curriculum, where issues of inequity are taken up (Au, 2012), I am also adamant that reading children's literature can also allow us to ultimately build empathy and can support us in changing the course of the current conditions that stifle the world—to reworld, in other words. I am like Trelease (2001), an educator who has advocated for the instructional practice of reading aloud to students, and who claims a read aloud can reach the heart. It is empathy, at least at first, that establishes some form of care to take place. For, if one does not have empathy for another, then care cannot be nurtured and sustained. If we are unsure whether students are capable of such empathy or if we think of empathy as being empty, we must think again. Think about the difference between the question "How are you?" that a child poses and that adults ask. Children are innately inquisitive and when they ask for something they do so with a desire to truly know. In other words, they *care*.

As a student teacher, I learned firsthand that students are profoundly engaged when it comes to building criticality, empathy, and other valences that demonstrate their care for each other and the world. When I introduced *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch (1980) to a group of third and fourth graders, a robust conversation about gender roles took place. Most of all, the students empathized with Elizabeth, the main character, who had gone out of her way to rescue Prince Ronald from a dragon, only to be accosted by Ronald for looking unruly. I have read this book in every classroom that I have worked in, including in my beginning years as a teacher in India, and the response is the same: students revel in Elizabeth's narrative and showcase resounding support for her. Some relate to her situation and others are touched in a way that they recognize the issue that surrounds gender roles in our own classroom. Here, they are not touched in a way that they feel sorry for her, but they investigate how gender roles, as well as norms and stereotypes, cohere with their own interactions and relations. In that way, Elizabeth's account draws students in, asking them to reckon with the world around, and her story can be leveraged to think about patriarchal and sexist thinking historically and to open conversations about gender roles are perpetuated and reaffirmed in today's world through which texts become entanglements of our own positionalities. Indeed then, as Grumet (1988), notes, "the text is material, it has texture, it is woven; we pull and tug at it, it winds around us, we are tangled up in it" (p. 144).

This is true, as I have witnessed by reading texts about the Partition of India in 1947 to the occupation of Palestinian territory, and in other texts that I have already mentioned before. My students and I are pulled in by the devastation and ruin, touched in a way that makes us reckon with these events without dismissing the turmoil that consumes us all. There is care, I believe, in being touched here. When it comes to the past or the past repeating itself, it is specifically the touch that Simon (2005) discusses that comes to mind, where students and teachers reckon with traumatic events and memories. As the author reveals, "To speak of touch is to emphasize the primacy of a response that reveals the vulnerability of the self to the approach of another" (p. 177). Students, who are the sincerest humans of us all, respond with utmost sensitivity when they are touched by what they read. They feel compassion, too, in ways that adults simply cannot. Like my students do for Elizabeth or for the mattering that they see in Hayaat's story, to name two

examples. To touch, as such, is to think about "what it means to take memories of others…into our lives and so live as though the lives of others matter" (p. 9). And it is the notion of touch, as I borrow loosely from de la Bellacasa (2017), "opens further meanings of knowledge that cares" (p. 93).

Though, as de la Bellacasa (2017) suggests, "care remains ambivalent in significance and ontology" (p. 1), I think of care first and foremost in the way that Simon (2005) does as I described above, where touch becomes a disruption and disentanglement of the history that has shaped us. It is, in other words, to think of care through the notion of touch as a way to unsettle what we know, and, as I have explained so far, to reckon with the past and to also situate the present in its own repetition of atrocities and terror. It is what Simon (2005) reiterates as the importance of remembrance, and such an engagement sanctions Freire's (1983/1985) call for reading the world—over and over, I would add. It is my assertion that children's book, as a pedagogical instrument for remembrance, presents a formation of care, or rather, gives way to make us care about the world in our classrooms, and, most of all, with our students so that we can then think about the work of repair that must follow.

Repairing through Thinking with Care

Simon (2005) warns us: "To be touched by the past is neither a metaphor for simply being emotionally moved by another's story nor a traumatic repetition of the past reproduced and re-experienced as the present" (p. 10). This brings me to de la Bellacasa's (2017) seminal work on an ethics of care. The author insists on "thinking with care," where erased or silenced voices are centred and where we put ourselves into context in relation to those voices. For, if we only read children's books to reckon the wreckage of the world before us, we might fail to discern both how we ourselves repeat devastating histories and how we remain wounded by it. In other words, we fail to do the work of repair that is necessary if we restrict ourselves to only caring to the point of being touched and then never grappling with it further beyond reading the world. In fact, as de la Bellacasa (2017) makes clear, "these ways of thinking don't need to translate in expectation that contact with the neglected worlds of touch will immediately signify a beneficial renovation" (p. 98).

We can read a children's book like *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom (2020), where the main character defends the water of her people against the expansion of oil pipelines, but nothing can come out of it we only momentarily or tangentially care about what we read. For sure, we can be roused by words and there is great power in that awakening, but we must also engage texts to reverberate the "un" of unlearn such that we do not remain burrowed in the fodder of reading without meaning. For me, as a consequence, reading does not only grant us the knowledge of where we have been, but it also determines how we found ourselves there in the first place. This can be framed as "a condition of possibility for true learning—one which bears the risk of being dispossessed of one's certainties" (Simon, 2005, p. 10), which, as I demonstrate in the next paragraph, begins with the assumptions, biases, and uncertainties we hold of ourselves.

Having taught mostly Black and Brown students, children's books about colourism, for me, are integral to conversations that allow my students to think about how we have internalized dominant values that lighter skin tones are more desirable, and of course, the affirmation of skin

tone as a standard of beauty is only one dominant value that children internalize. Though I broach the discussion in several ways, it is in the pages of a children's book like *The Color of Us* by Karen Katz (2002) or through a video on the doll test, where children are asked to attach words like bad, nice, and ugly to either a Brown-skinned doll or a white one, that students are most jolted and provoked such that they cannot retreat from the impact of racism on their cultures and identities. As we read other texts like *Sunflower Sisters* by Monika Singh Gangotra and *What's Wrong with my Skin?* by Marjorie Frenette (2022), we read ourselves and our worlds in sentences, and we are offered an opportunity to (de)construct, (re)connect, (un)learn from a personal standpoint. Thinking with care, in other words, means to ask what each of us knows and how those knowledges have an affective and ineffable mark, which sometimes, as I contend, can only be brought to light through children's books and other texts. It is, as Bishop (1990) heeds, children's books that are mirrors, providing reflections of ourselves in the context of the broader world we live in.

I pinpoint the above example because I am like Mishra Tarc (2011) in that I believe repair requires attention, as unveiled in the opening epigraph, and it starts with our own complex and fractured vantages. We must be able to look within and recognize repair as an inward and reflective engagement first and foremost. Nowhere is this more accurate than when I read children's books that speak to the lived experiences and realities of my students, as they again see a reflection of themselves. In a way, we can think of children's books here as a form of intervention in the way hooks (1994) describes theory "to look and the world differently" (p. 59) from a place of introspection, encouraged by reading comprehension strategies such as making connections through the text-to-self. Children often feel they can connect to a character in a text more than any other anywhere else, as I have noticed over and over again.

We can turn here to *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi (2003), a children's book that I have used in almost every classroom I have taught, through which students recognize the ways in which our names, especially for those of whose names do not ascribe the familiarity of the English language, are contrived and truncated. The discussions and written responses students engage after the read aloud reveal some of their innermost experiences with their names. They confess, sometimes in bits and pieces and at other times in greater detail, to having a home name (Author, 2021) or mispronouncing their names for the ease of others (Author, 2020), as I know intimately from my own experiences with my name. These revelations, whether in conversation with our students in the pedagogical space(s) we nurture or in the responses we ask them to write, I frame as the formation of a reparative curriculum that Mishra Tarc (2011) puts forth. It is what she describes as a shaky attempt to learn from a history that cannot be redeemed or forgotten. Moreover, it is where the fragile, fractured, maimed, and shrouded parts of us can be accounted for and made significant.

Such text-to-self connections are not reparative, however, until and unless we take seriously the pedagogical engagement(s) required to bring the words of a text to life. We must be willing, for instance, to ask questions that not only divulge how we situate our experiences in the world but also how the world, seized by dominant ideologies, situates our realities. The confession a child makes of "I hate the way my name sounds" must be questioned and taken up. Not, of course, in a way that barrages the revelation, but in a way that attempts to situate what renders us to feel a certain way about our cultures and identities. We must insist in that way, as hooks (1994) does through her own teaching, to evoke an engaged pedagogy, "striving not just for knowledge

in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world" (p. 15). This, I believe, is a form of thinking with care.

With just as much candour and vigour, we must also be willing to address and challenge our own dominance in relation to the other, heeding the words de la Bellacasa (2017) to unfasten our secured positions as outsiders. Here, we can turn to Mishra Tarc (2011) to think of children's books as a pedagogical apparatus to a reparative curriculum, which "asks learners to encounter the other's unaccounted-for experiences of extreme suffering and mass violence that persistently affect our present understanding of social and political life" (p. 351). Through Britzman (1998), however, we are made aware about the ways in which difficult knowledge, where social traumas and truths are examined and taken up, comes with pedagogical risks. For, as Garrett (2017) describes, it elicits several interactions and responses:

> Difficult knowledge locates a pedagogical relation within a particular situation that can arise from within the content (e.g., the Holocaust) or the context (e.g., a particular student's suffering). Difficult knowledge is a recognition of the unsteadiness of one's understanding of the world and our place in it that comes about through learning. In learning what we did not want to know, sometimes we lose our balance. Difficult knowledge is an orientation toward learning about the tumultuousness of society, recognizes the tumultuousness of our orientations to it, and further takes uncertainty as a central feature of the learning encounter. Difficult knowledge is a walk toward the ways in which that tumult can make one feel diminished, worried, guilty, sad or, alternatively, victorious, justified, and certain about a course of action. (p. 19)

At times, difficult knowledge might evoke responses of discomfort, marred by a disconnection to the histories of dehumanization and violence that are introduced and presented to students. It is a detachment that occurs when we are asked, whether as students or as teachers, to confront and interrogate our own relationships to the past and its ongoing presence, witnessed through mass bombings, military regimes, and settler colonialism. Thus, difficult knowledge asks us to consider "what gets in the way of learning a lesson from history" (Garrett, 2017, p. 21).

We can turn to both Mishra Tarc (2011) and Simon (2005), who write about teaching Indigenous histories, to reveal the emotional responses that students often display that make the reparative curriculum even more shaky. Working with teacher candidates who are about to step into the teaching profession, Mishra Tarc (2011) notices removed witness as an issue. This happens when Canadians "abdicate their responsibility with regard to, the ongoing conditions of injustice that are part of the day-to-day lived experiences" (Simons, 2005, p. 94). In other words, they distance themselves from the content and realities that challenge the notion of a kind and just nation (Mishra Tarc, 2011), absolving themselves at the same time of a relationship to the histories of Indigenous peoples and the horrific history of a nation-state like Canada.

Like them, though in the context of students in an elementary classroom, I have observed discomfort as well, while in a different way: through silence. Any teacher can tell you how immersed students in the primary and junior grades happen to be when books are read to them or even when they read to themselves or with each other, with their eyes unable to shift away from the illustrations and words that are in front of them. Sometimes, we read in silence, devouring a

story in the quiet it deserves, and, at other times, we engage texts with lively participation when teachers read to students. However, silence often overcomes students who are either unsure of what to say or uncomfortable with the content and our relationship to it, constricted by questions that make us grapple with our own power and privilege. That is not to say that children and students become uncaring when made to situate their own assumptions and biases, but, like adults, they reveal an uncertainty that hinders their connection to a text.

To that end, a teacher might wonder what can be done to address the distances, removed witnesses, and silences that seep into our classrooms. It is the act of reading that Mishra Tarc (2011) employs to challenge the emotional responses, marked by indifference that her students enact, separated from their own subjectivities. In assigning Robert Arthur Alexie's (2002) *Porcupines and China Dolls*, a student later reveals he was wrong to have believed Indigenous peoples were blaming Canada and making excuses (Mishra Tar, 2011). I similarly suggest that reading children's books to students, in the way Freire (1983) thinks about teaching reading and writing to adults, is thus "a political act, an act of knowledge, and therefore as a creative act" (p. 10)—one that can allow us to (re)consider what we know. And, at the same time, epistemic humility is of significance. To have a willingness to listen, as Marya and Patel (2021) suggest, and to recognize that we do not know everything. To think with care, as such, is to make amends with our ignorance and unknowing, without which the work of repair is unthinkable.

Epistemic humility also lends to a listening that is attentive rather than being combative and dismissive about texts that are inherently political or that ask us to consider how we exist in relation to others. When we listen and when children's books are leveraged to bring resonance to the stories and voices that we need to hear the most, they can give us a language on how we can care with each other. At the most foundational level, we can read a children's book like *I Walk With Vanessa* by Kerascoët (2018), told only using pictures, to demonstrate how kindness can be extended to support someone, in the case of this story, a girl named Vanessa who is bullied at school. Such a picture book is significant in a world where children are confronted by the unkind nature of others. Whether during the picture book is read or afterwards, students can be engaged in conversation and reflection about their own silences and subjectivities in relation to both personal and social issues that intertwine their lives. It is, as such, important to think with care, as de la Bellacasa (2017) in how we engage—to be "*in touch* with everyday living and practice" (p. 96). Even more pressingly, it is to ask, as the author does, "How can thinking lead to material change?" (p. 111).

More specifically, how do we think with care such that we can do the work of repair? Some might read my words here and feel disappointed, for I do not offer a response to this, at least not in a precise manner. What I have put forth here is the provocation that children's books allow us to engage our students in texts to think about what repair means. Thus, when we begin to contemplate the conjunction of care and repair in these smaller, more intimate moments with each other, we can then imagine with our students what it means to repair a world that is in constant turmoil, who might otherwise "distance themselves from their knowing" (Mishra Tarc, 2011, p. 363). We can think here of *The Water Walker* by Joanne Robertson (2017), which I consider a text that makes room for a reparative curriculum, and which can be engaged to discuss "difficult" questions, and, even more importantly, study how our own actions might be imbued in the bigotry and hatred that shape what and how we exist with each other. As Simon (1992) informs us, texts

therefore can be a site of pedagogical possibility, and I claim children's books can show us what repair feels and looks like such that we do not repeat the grave and serious mistakes of our past and ongoing present.

Reworlding in Times of Crisis and Uncertainty

If reckoning the past such that we are touched by the histories that have shaped us allow us to consider how we can do the work of repair, then, it goes without saying, that I believe a reparative curriculum opens up a conversation about reworlding the future, and so too are the remnant of the present. Here, Black and Indigenous scholars like Maynard and Simpson (2022) have been at the forefront of offering alternative futurities, other worlds, and a liberation that remains in question. Like them, scholars like Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2023) who attend reworlding from and in the Global South, especially in the Black radical traditional, have given me a language to make sense of reworlding. As the author suggests, reworlding involves a double move, where a critique of the colonizer's framework of the world is made and from which another world is imagined. As Simpson reiterates, in other words, "[w]e need to continue to cultivate a collective set of practices for finding, seeing and creating opportunities to escape the violent normalities that currently order the world" (Maynard et al., 2021, 141).

My own contemplation of reworlding, as well as reckoning and repairing, is somewhat less nonlinear than theirs, as I both mirror a linear structure of thinking and subvert it at times in small acts of revolt by provoking the present as an ongoing conversation with the past and present, as Simpson encourages (Maynard et al., 2021). With my students, nowhere is this more apparent than in our attention to the immediate and obstructive repercussions of climate change that we are subject to while corporate and government actors, who are the greatest purveyors of destruction, do nothing. Though the discussion on reworlding that follows might not read as immediately profound, to me, they "engage texts to carry our lives to sustain us…to regenerate our fragile and fraught co-curricular existence" (Mishra Tarc, 40).

We can reworld through a children's book like *Old Enough to Save the Planet* by Loll Kirby and Adelina Lirius (2021), where students can meet twelve young activists who find creative and meaningful ways to respond to climate change. Our students, attending to the resolve of the characters that they read, feel compelled to do the same, taking up issues that they believe cannot be ignored or sidelined. In classrooms and schools, students have come together, inspired by a text, to bring forth community gardens, composting initiatives, and recycling programs. On a larger scale, we have witnessed this in the tremendous efforts students have showcased to take to the streets and propel a climate movement. We have heard, as well, their outcry in response to gun violence and mass shootings, where signs with "Protect Kids Not Guns" are a stark contrast to the disheartening and underwhelming inaction of some of the most futile and inept leaders of our time.

As adults and some of us as teachers, we must match the courage and volition of our children and students with texts that support their activism and political action, so that they are prepared and not left to do the work on their own. We must therefore, as Spivak (2002) suggests, think of reading not only as a vocational skill but as an invocation to do something more. Think here about Libresco's (2015) article on using picture books as a springboard to a social justice issue like labour unions through *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type* by Doreen Cronin (2000).

Another, finding its way to me at the height of the Black Lives Matter Movement, is *We March* by Shane W. Evans (2012). This, too, can be a springboard, as students learn about a historical march from the past to discuss the significance of protest in today's world. From class action to climate change to racial justice, we can leverage children's books and other texts for a wide range of issues and matters, where care and justice intersect and take form.

Although we can engage texts to focus on the project of reworlding specifically, we can also use a children's book as *Strictly No Elephants* by Lisa Mantchev (2015) to do it all at once—to reckon, repair, and reworld. Through the friendship of a boy and an elephant, we can make text-to-world connections between the exclusion that a children's book presents to events that have taken place in the broader world. How we might speak up to those exclusions might further offer ways forward in terms of repairing and reworlding. Let us also think creatively through a story about a boy and an elephant who are barred from the Pet Club and what it can offer us in creating and sustaining other worlds. The pedagogical possibilities, once again, are many.

What is most notable about these children's books, framed in the hope and sustenance of reworlding, is that they allow us to reverberate a collective responsibility and connectedness as we imagine what the future can hold. In reading about climate change and the environment, for example, students can become aware of what de la Bellacasa (2017) refers to as "disentangling human and nonhuman relations of care" (p. 2). How we exist in relation to air, land, water, and other resources that are affected by our existence is pertinent. To care, thus, is a commitment to actors described as "neglected things" that are often excluded (de la Bellacasa, 2017), including nonhuman ones, as we unsettle in *Old Enough to Save the Planet*.

So, too, are the words we read in other children's books that enable us to consider the exclusion of humans as well. We can return to those texts to realize how there are possibilities, as Mishra Tarc (2011) suggests, in Simon's (2000) thoughtful framing: "to remember other people's memories is to be wounded by their wounds" (p. 10). It is to ask, as Simon (2005) does, the following:

> Our lives together may indeed depend on questions such as: how, in what sense, and under what conditions might events such as the recent slaughter of Tutsis in Rwanda or the Mohawk uprising in Oka, Quebec, or less immediately, the Irish Great Hunger, or the events of the Middle Passage, which instituted slavery in the Americas, become "personal" for me? What might be the substance of a point of connection at which I am touched to respond to the memories of others, not in the sense of some meaningless sentiment, a too easy empathy, or the false nostalgia of a late imperialism, but rather as a means of experiencing certain events as part of ongoing relations of power and privilege, the legacy of which I participate and I am called to transform? (p. 91)

Although I am often at a loss as to how this can be achieved, I have experienced such transformation through the introduction and use of children's books, and it is why I feel so compelled to make the case that such literature can indeed have a moving and profound impact.

When we are able to situate our personal existences and lives in the inconceivable histories that have shaped this world, Narayan (1995) asks us to be careful and vigilant to not establish a

colonial care, where, for instance, colonizers categorize colonized subjects as "inferior." The author warns against notions of "saviourism" or "the white man's burden," for those framings have been used to justify domination as a form of care. We can draw here on the examples of Christian missionaries in India who have interspersed care with colonial complicity. Or the teachers in the Residential "School" System who relied on a rhetoric of care to make sense of their abusive and violent actions, even being described by one senator as "well-intentioned" (Miles, 2018). Therefore, Marya and Patel (2021) insist on shifting from a patronizing approach of "caring *for*" to one of "caring *with*," as the former frames groups of people as inferior or subordinate whereas the latter seeks to remove such inscriptions—ones that assume superiority of one group over another. Moreover, the authors explain how the framing of "care about" is paternalistic because it can be rooted in oppression and recreate supremacies. Thus, what de la Bellacasa (2017) writes elsewhere is important to consider when we put ourselves into context in relation to the world: "Thinking in the world involves acknowledging our own involvements in perpetuating dominant values, rather than retreating into the secure position of an enlightened outsider who knows better" (p. 197).

It is for the above reason, as Narayan (1995) suggests, we also have to be concerned with both care and justice—something Marya and Patel (2021) also reverberate. As Narayan (1995) writes, "Justice concerns have been central to so many social and political movements because asserting and gaining rights have been instrumental in transforming certain groups of people, however imperfectly, into citizens whose concerned mattered, into people whose human worth mattered" (p. 138). Said differently, one can think about care and justice in the way Held (1995) does: "We should care for one another as persons in need of a habitable environment with a sufficient absence of violence and with sufficient provision of care for human life to flourish" (p. 132).

With that, I return to de la Bellacasa (2017) who thinks about agency and ecological ethics in relation to the crises of the world, and who poses an important question: *How to care?* I do not have a response to this question and nor has my writing here traced a genealogy of care to provide a robust enough answer. What I resort to instead, yet again, are the children's books that I have mentioned here and the ones that exist beyond these pages. They, as I suggest, offer us the ability to take the ruins, hold them closely, repair the fragments, and put the question of reworlding into question. Let us lose ourselves in the pictures and words that we read to engage in such a process. Allow each other to fumble, to make mistakes, to unlearn against and with the pages of those books. And let us think about what it means, animated by activism and political action, as well as the texts we engage, to reworld without the colonial care that has plagued us before and to establish an ethics of care that is both different and transformative.

Words and their Pedagogical Possibilities

Mishra Tarc (2020) is both prescient and profound when she writes, "To those who say poetry, literature, art, knowledge, these curriculum texts can do nothing to stop injustice, intervene in racism, reunite families at the border, I say, think again" (p. 39). My own teaching life, often buried in a moribund curriculum, comes alive the most when I engage children's books and other texts that alert us to some of the most challenging and pressing social justice issues and matters of our time. Children's books, more than anything else, allow us to revolt, as Kristeva (2014) suggests

about texts. It is in the nooks and crannies of a children's book where we can meet other children and adults, whose lives are written in words, and with whom we can build a relationship. Through the intimate details that we learn about them, we can also reckon with the present and its continuing relation to the past and future, and then untangle ourselves from histories of destruction and violence. We can think of this as unlearning, so to speak.

Through said process, we can also recognize the potential of children's books to repair and to *think* with care in the way de la Bellacasa (2017) advises and the pedagogical possibilities that might open up. For one, the present is a progeny of the past and we must think carefully and thoughtfully about how we are prone to repeat terrible human history, as we bear witness through currents forms of violence such as climate disaster, deportations, and the war on terror in a list too long to write out fully. And the curriculum of forgetting or historical erasure, siphoned and then weaponized by powerful men who remain parochial and uncaring, maintains that such atrocities and terrors go on unnoticed, unnamed, and without critique.

But, as my students have taught me, there is significance that are held in the contents of the texts we read, and creative and literary works can guide us in doing the work of reckoning, repairing, and reworlding—sometimes all at the same time. Together, with our students, we have to construct and rebuild in other ways. Start over. Find ourselves inspired by the words in children's books and begin anew or piece together the fractured valences of ourselves and each other. To make a life out of the ruins, even, as Maynard and Simpson (2022) contemplate in their work.

To do so, I have pointed to the narratives found in some of the children's books that I have mentioned, which compel us to reckon, repair, and reworld in ways that we once might have found unimaginable. Though there are several other ways to do this, for sure, I am convinced like Mishra Tarc (2020) that engaging texts can offer us a way out. For, as I end with the words of Brand (2002), "Books leave gestures in the body; a certain way of moving, of turning, a certain closing of the eyes, a way of leaving, hesitations. Books leave certain sounds, a certain packing; mostly they leave the elusive, which is all the story. They leave much more than the words" (p. 191). Children's books, I believe, have the power to mark us in ways that enable us and our students to do what we once thought was unimaginable. They give rise to us, stir us, and rile us up. That, for me, is what we need as we are suffocated by dereliction, destruction, fear, terror, violence, and so much more. It is children's books, I argue, that can guide us in profound ways, and I am willing to die on a hill for that stance.

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