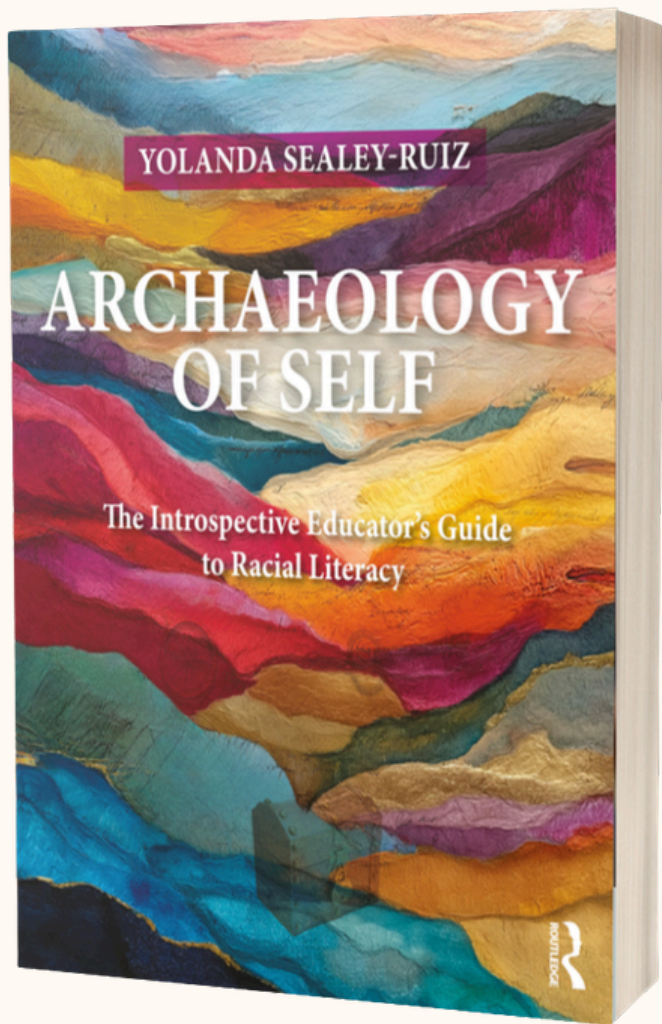


ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

ARCHAEOLOGY OF SELF

THE INTROSPECTIVE
EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO
RACIAL LITERACY



BY

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ENGAGEMENT
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Across her scholarship, teaching, and the educator resources she develops, Victoria works alongside teachers to examine the histories, perspectives and practices that shape their classrooms and to imagine more liberatory possibilities for education. Her work is grounded in a belief in literacy as both a source of personal empowerment and a means of reimagining and reshaping our world.

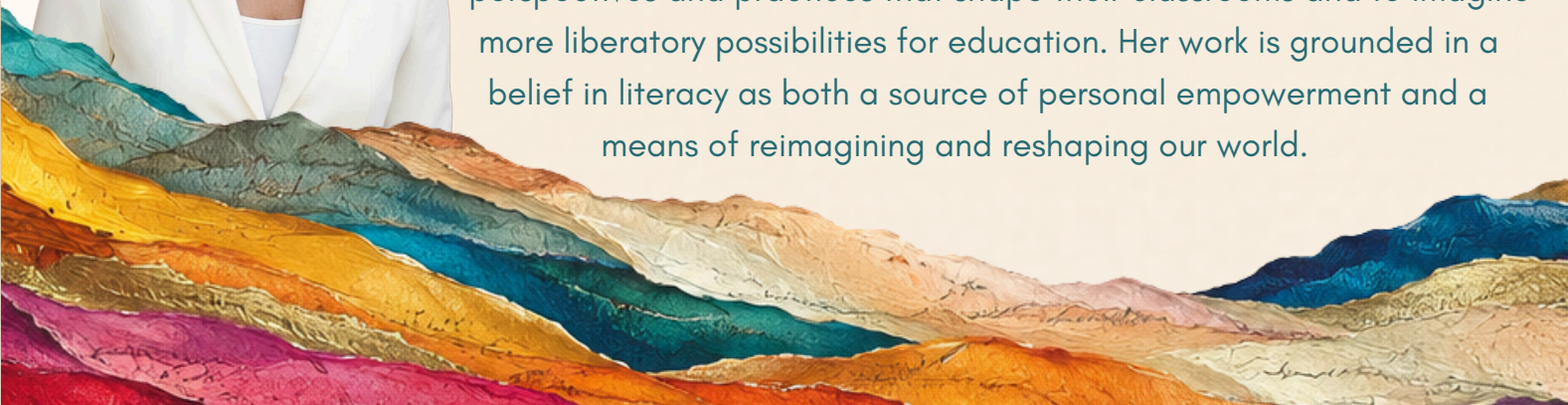


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The Foundation Is Love

“Educators, I need you to understand this: the love you seek—from the world, from others, from institutions—must first begin within yourself.” —Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz

Dear Educators.

I write to you fresh off another round of self-excavation, sitting in the aftermath of uncovering what I wasn't looking for, but needed to find. Every time I return to this work, I leave with a deeper understanding of myself than the one I carried in. That is why I am genuinely excited for you. I don't know what waits beneath the surface of your own excavation, but I can testify that if you commit to the Archaeology of Self, it has the power to transform your relationship with yourself. From there, it begins to reshape the way you see your students, your classroom, and the community you're called to serve.

As you begin your own season of self-excavation, I'd like to share a few truths that helped steady me along the way.

TRUTH ONE

The Archaeology of Self is not for everyone. It is for those who desire to remain faithful to the purest form of teaching: critical love. The kind of love Dr. Sealey-Ruiz identifies as "the heartbeat of racial literacy and transformative pedagogy." Throughout these pages, you'll discover that critical love allows us to stand in the fire of self-examination without being consumed. It calls us to remain there until the truth has done its work. Though the invitation to the Archaeology of Self is open to all, not everyone will choose to accept it. This book was written for those who do—for the educators who have decided that the legacy of their pedagogy will be how deeply they loved.

TRUTH TWO

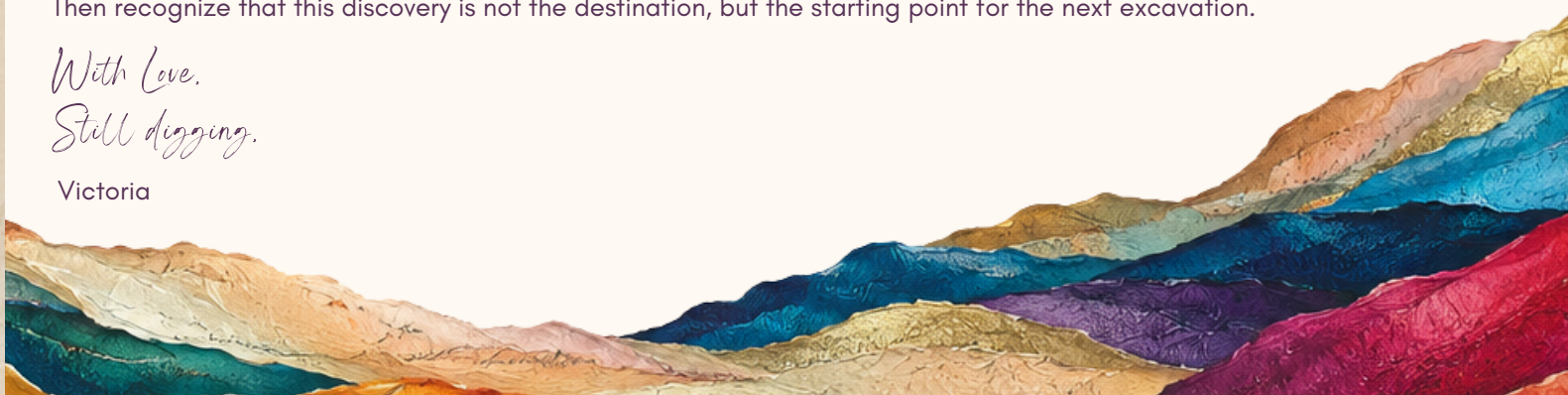
Self work is not a sentence to solitude. It is easy to assume that because this work begins with the self, it should also be done in isolation. It shouldn't. We need people who will celebrate our growth, challenge our thinking, ask us difficult questions, and lovingly remind us of who we are becoming. As you move through this engagement guide, I encourage you to find a partner or a community of educators committed to this work. Read together. Reflect together. Wrestle with difficult questions together. Create together. Some of the most transformative discoveries are made when we allow others to witness our excavation, and when we are willing to witness theirs.

TRUTH THREE

There is no graduation from the Archaeology of Self. No moment when the excavation is complete. There will never come a day when we stop uncovering, unlearning, healing, and growing. If this engagement guide leaves you with more questions than answers, it has done its job. On the other side of self-excavation is another invitation to go deeper, and one of the clearest signs that the Archaeology of Self is taking root is when your heart no longer resists that invitation. So dig. Uncover the educator your students, your community, and, perhaps most importantly, you have been waiting for. Then recognize that this discovery is not the destination, but the starting point for the next excavation.

*With Love.
Still digging.*

Victoria



Dr. Sealey-Ruiz chose the metaphor of archaeology intentionally. She draws on the practices and principles of Black archaeology to invite us to examine ourselves with the patience, care, and curiosity of an archaeologist.

From this point forward, consider yourself in the midst of an excavation that began long before you became conscious of it. You already possess artifacts waiting to be uncovered—memories, relationships, family stories, identities, beliefs, experiences, poems, journals, songs, and moments that have shaped who you are. With each chapter, you will gain new tools and practices to help you sit with these artifacts more honestly.

And so, together, we'll accept Dr. Sealey-Ruiz's invitation to do what archaeologists do.

EXCAVATE

The courageous work of uncovering what we've learned to bury.

DECONSTRUCT

Examining inherited assumptions, questioning long-held beliefs, and disentangling the stories we've been told from the ones we choose to carry forward.

RECONCEPTUALIZE

Imagining new possibilities for ourselves, our students, our leadership, and the communities we serve.

“

“This book is both a mirror and a map. With this mirror, you can look inward and reflect on your own racial literacy journey. With this map, you can identify a pathway forward that offers real stories, strategies, and practices showing what is possible when you commit to this work. Each chapter is an invitation to reflect, to unlearn, and to grow.” – p. 6

INVITATION:

Before you begin, pause and reflect:

- What do you hope this book will help you see about yourself?
- Where do you hope it will lead you as a human being and educator?

Your answers may change as you move through these pages. Return to this reflection when they do. Add what you are beginning to understand about yourself and where this work may be leading you.

Growing Up Bronx:

Racial Literacy Lessons from My South Bronx Beginnings



CHAPTER FOCUS

“

“Our source, our origin, and our identity are intrinsically tied to our ancestors and our birthplace. Together, they shape how we see the world and how we teach in it.” – p. 15

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz opens the book by introducing us to one of her earliest teachers: the South Bronx. More than a neighborhood, it offered lessons about love, power, resilience, equity, and justice that shaped her understanding of what it means to be an educator. In this chapter, we explore how the places that raised us become our first classrooms, and how the hidden curriculum of our lives continues to shape the educators we become.



EXCAVATE

“

“Before I knew their words or understood the strength of their legacies, I had already been shaped by the lessons of one of my first and most powerful teachers: the South Bronx.” – p. 16

REFLECTION

- What truths were planted in you long before you entered a classroom?
- What voices from your formative years still echo in the way you love, teach, lead, or make sense of the world?
- If someone excavated your life, what artifacts from your past would help explain the educator you have become?

INVITATION

Where I'm From

Using Dr. Sealey-Ruiz's poem as a mentor text, write your own *Where I'm From* poem. Begin each line with “I am from” and fill it with fragments of your place based stories. Gather the smells. Notice the sounds. Remember the family sayings. The music. The people. The streets. The rituals. The ordinary moments that became extraordinary teachers.

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY

YOUTUBE





DECONSTRUCT



“Where we come from shapes who we are, and how or why we fight for change.”— p. 24

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz reminds us that curriculum does not begin when school begins. Every one of us arrives in classrooms carrying lessons inherited from family, neighborhood, faith, media, music, silence, and survival. Some of those lessons help us love more deeply. Others deserve to be questioned. Deconstruction asks us to name what we learned before deciding what we will continue to teach.

REFLECTION

- What did your earliest teachers (both people and places) teach you about race, power, belonging, brilliance, and who gets to matter?
- Which of those lessons continue to shape your teaching in ways you embrace, and which have you come to recognize need to be intentionally unlearned?
- What lessons do you hope your students will inherit from you?



RECONCEPTUALIZE



“When we pause, lean in, and choose to truly see, we can uncover what was always there: a fuller, more complicated, more beautiful story waiting to be honored.” – p. 18

INVITATION

Beneath the Surface

Just as Dr. Sealey-Ruiz invites us to see beyond the single story of the South Bronx, this activity invites us to look beneath the labels. Move through three layers of Archaeology of Self using the silhouettes on the next page.

Layer One:

The Story I Inherited

Around the outside of the silhouette, write the labels, messages, and assumptions you received about yourself.

Layer Two:

The Story I Internalized

In the next layer, write the beliefs that grew from those messages. What did you come to believe about your intelligence, your worth, your voice, or your belonging?

Layer Three:

The Story I'm Reclaiming

At the center of the silhouette, write what is true. Complete the prompts: I carry... I know... I have survived... I create... I dream... I deserve... I am becoming...

REFLECTION:

How might your teaching change if you committed to seeing every student from the inside out rather than the outside in?

Archaeology of Self

Beneath the Surface

LAYER 1

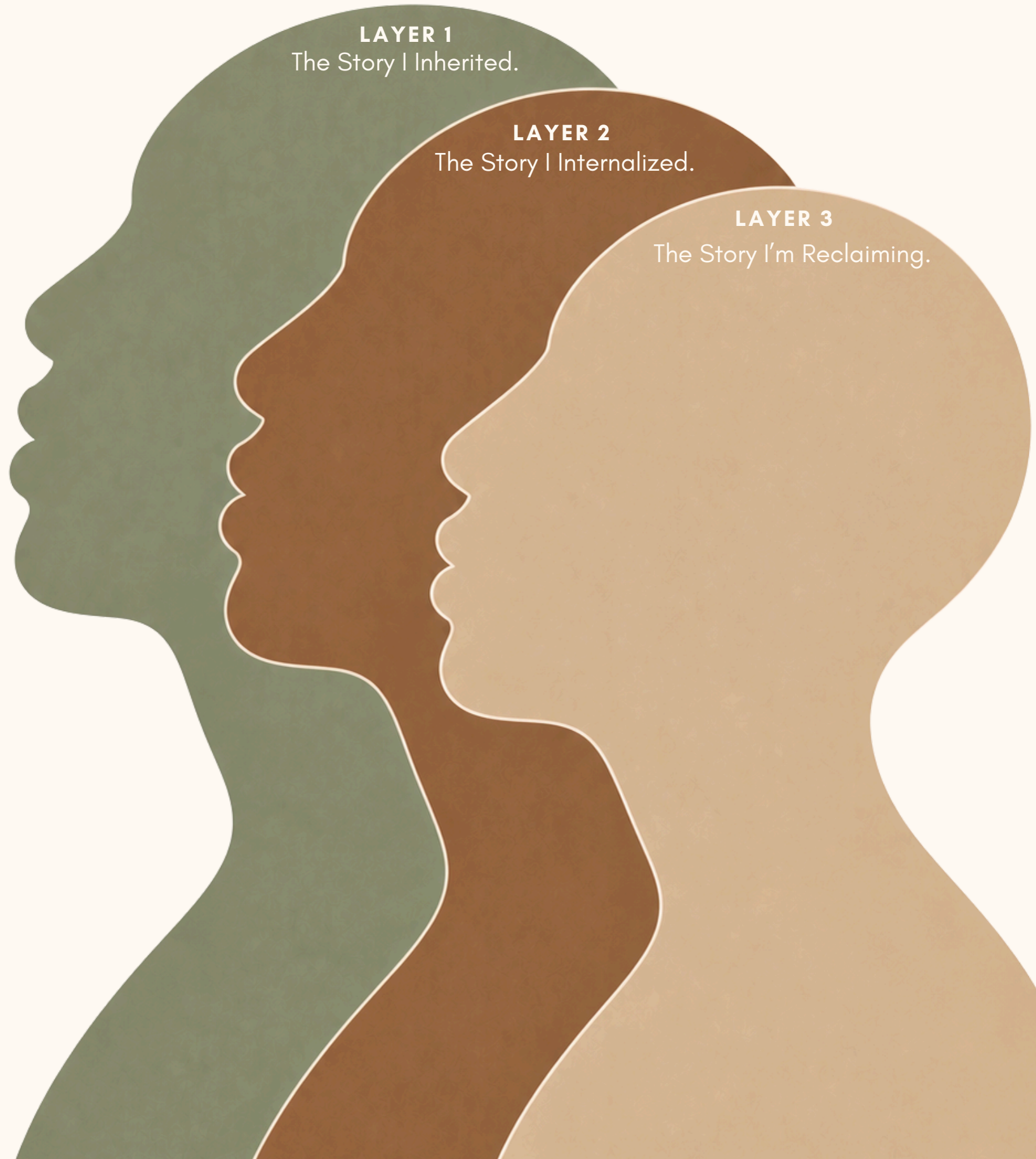
The Story I Inherited.

LAYER 2

The Story I Internalized.

LAYER 3

The Story I'm Reclaiming.



From Self-Discovery to Collective Change:

The Journey to Racial Literacy



CHAPTER FOCUS



“Before we can interrupt racism in our schools, communities, and workplaces, we must first ask: Where does it live in me?” – p. 32

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz introduces the Racial Literacy Development Model and reminds us that racial literacy is not a destination but a lifelong practice of becoming. Through the Archaeology of Self, she invites educators to examine how antiblackness, inherited beliefs, and historical literacy shape the decisions they make every day, revealing self-excavation as the foundation of racial literacy. She also reminds us that while the work begins within us, its true purpose is realized through the collective impact of how we teach, lead, and act alongside others.



EXCAVATE



“I began to question the scripted lines: Who told me this? Where did this belief come from? And more importantly—who benefits from me believing it?” – p. 33

We are all handed scripts. They assign roles, establish expectations, and suggest how our stories are supposed to unfold. Over time, scripts that go unexamined can become so familiar that we mistake them for truth, allowing them to shape our biases and decisions. As part of her Archaeology of Self, Dr. Sealey-Ruiz questioned the scripts she had inherited about race, belonging, and respectability. Her journey reminds us that self excavation asks us to pause and consider whether the scripts we carry are ones we want to continue reinforcing through our actions. Racial literacy helps us recognize that antiblackness is one of the foundational scripts of American education, shaping whose humanity is affirmed and whose is denied.

REFLECTION

Choose one script you carry and have rarely questioned. It may be a belief, assumption, or expectation that influences how you interpret your students, your work, or your role as an educator. Use the reflection questions to excavate it.

- What is the origin story of this script?
- How has this script shaped your assumptions, biases, or decisions as an educator?
- Who benefits when this script goes unquestioned? Who is harmed by this script?
- How might you interrupt this script in your classroom, your school, or your community?

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE





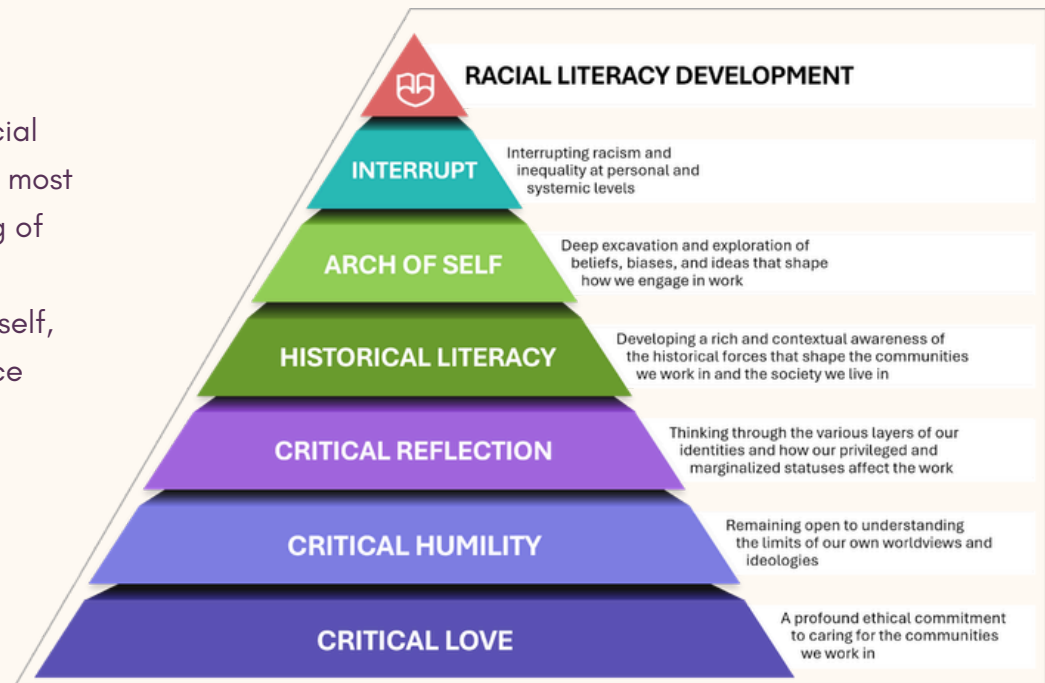
DECONSTRUCT

“When educators stop looking outward for change and begin looking inward, transformation happens.”—p. 38

Through the Racial Literacy Development Model, Dr. Sealey-Ruiz offers a framework for cultivating the habits of mind and heart that make interrupting biases and choosing new ways of being possible. As you explore the model, reflect on how it challenges the assumptions you've held about the work of racial literacy.

REFLECTION

- Which component of the Racial Literacy Development Model most reframed your understanding of racial literacy? Why?
- What assumption about yourself, your students, or your practice does this model invite you to reconsider?



RECONCEPTUALIZE

“When educators shift their thinking and their actions, and begin to expect different behaviors from those around them, they expand what is imaginable for students in schools. This is where personal racial literacy becomes collective potential.”—p. 39

REFLECTION

- How has your thinking shifted through this chapter?
- What belief, habit, or relationship might embracing racial literacy ask you to reevaluate?
- How might a commitment to growing racial literacy change the way you interact with colleagues, students, or your school community?
- Where do you sense courage may be required as you continue this work?

Doing the Work Where We Are:

Advancing Racial Literacy in Education



CHAPTER FOCUS



“If we treat racial literacy as just another academic concept to discuss and debate, without applying it to how we teach, lead, and live through the world, then we have missed the point.” – p. 47

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz shows us what becomes possible when racial literacy is given space to live. Through the story of the Racial Literacy Project@TC and the educators who have taken up and reimaged the Racial Literacy Development Model, she explores racial literacy as a practice of healing, critical love, and educational transformation. This chapter calls us to move the work beyond isolated conversations and into the classrooms, institutions, and forms of scholarship that shape educational life.



EXCAVATE



“Educators, we have to move beyond just reading about race and attending professional development sessions. It's time to do the real work of digging into our biases, excavating our wounds and our histories by asking ourselves some questions.” – p. 46

REFLECTION

Racial literacy involves more than learning about race or participating in workshops. It requires turning inward and confronting ourselves with honesty. Sit with the questions Dr. Sealey-Ruiz poses on page 46.

- How has my identity been impacted by my race?
- What messages about my own race and the races of others have I internalized?
- How do I exercise power and privilege in my everyday life?
- How does my fear and discomfort stop me from fully participating in the work of racial literacy development and racial justice?
- How can my racial literacy development facilitate my personal healing and racial healing for others?

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE





DECONSTRUCT



“Guilt will likely show up as an emotion along the way, and when it replaces humility, it can prevent our transformation instead of inviting it. Guilt can even become harmful when it turns into shame or self-protection.” – p. 48

WHEN GUILT IS SPEAKING...

- “I didn't mean it that way.”
- “I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing.”
- “I feel attacked.”
- “I've already done the work.”
- “I don't want people to think I'm racist.”
- “What about all the good things I've done?”
- “This really isn't about me.”

WHEN CRITICAL HUMILITY IS SPEAKING...

- “My intentions matter, but so does my impact.”
- “I may get it wrong, but I'm willing to learn.”
- “I'm uncomfortable, but I will stay present.”
- “This work is ongoing and I still have more to learn.”
- “My concern should be the impact of my actions, not protecting my image.”
- “My past actions don't exempt me from continued reflection and accountability.”
- “What is my responsibility in this moment?”

REFLECTION

- Which statements feel most familiar to you?
- When conversations about race leave you feeling uncomfortable, what is your first instinct?
- How can you tell the difference between guilt that centers yourself and humility that opens you to learning?
- What would it look like to respond with curiosity instead of defensiveness?



RECONCEPTUALIZE



“I wrote about racial literacy as an invocation, an injunction, a calling. In the poem my goal was to name the injustices that linger, and point out that racial literacy necessitates analysis and activism; radical self-exploration and actualization.” – p. 53

INVITATION

Create something that represents your current understanding of racial literacy. You might write a poem, compose a letter, make a collage, create a playlist, sketch or paint, photograph an image, write a story, compose a piece of music, or design an experience for yourself or your community. Choose the form that best captures where you are in your racial literacy journey today.

The Archaeological Approach to Teaching



CHAPTER FOCUS

“

“The work of Archaeology of Self is not just about personal excavation; it is about creating collective liberatory spaces where knowledge is reclaimed, history is honored, and truth is centered.” – p. 67

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz explains why archaeology serves as the central metaphor for racial literacy development. She invites us to see teaching as an act of excavation that uncovers hidden histories, challenges deficit narratives, and creates liberatory learning spaces rooted in truth, critical love, and justice.



EXCAVATE

“

“We must teach with truth if we are serious about justice. That means reconstructing narratives that have been lost, stolen, or silenced and allow the past to live honestly in the present so that it can no longer cause harm.” – p. 61

REFLECTION

Stacey Joy’s testimony on pages 59–60 urges us to excavate the educational gaps from our past that we have carried forward. But uncovering these gaps is only the beginning. What we learn through excavation should move us toward action, filling the gaps, seeking out what we do not yet know, and committing ourselves to continued learning. As Dr. Sealey-Ruiz reminds us, this work is both a “professional and moral imperative.”

Consider the reflection questions that follow.

- Where are the gaps in my knowledge, and how have they shaped what I teach?
- What stories, voices, or perspectives have been overlooked, or silenced in my curriculum?
- How am I including Black life, history, and culture in my teaching?
- What is one step I can take to reconstruct a fuller, more truthful story for my students?

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE





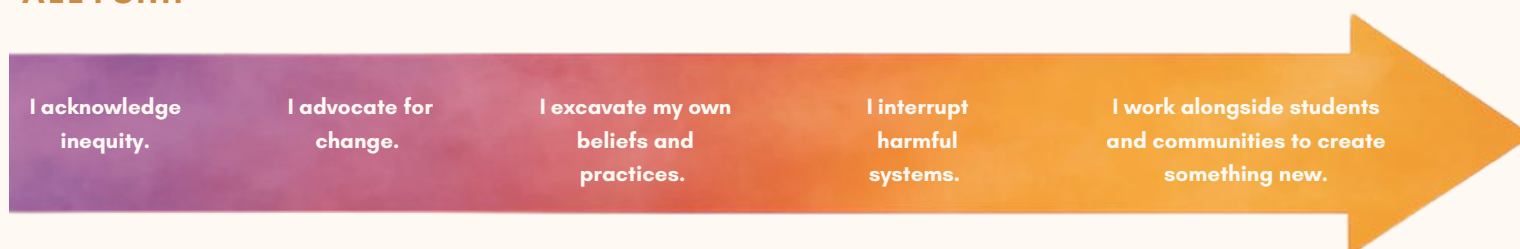
DECONSTRUCT



“Educators must be prepared to move beyond allyship—someone who acknowledges, supports, and advocates for students who are harmed by the system—to co-conspiratorship—someone who uses their position to actively disrupt the harm and injustice.” – p. 64

ALLYSHIP

CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP



REFLECTION

- Who holds power in this learning environment, and how is that power communicated?
- How do my teaching methodologies reproduce or interrupt harm?
- Who are the experts I quote, assign, or draw from in my teaching? What do those choices reveal about the knowledge traditions I privilege?
- What might I have to risk in order to stand with my students more fully?
- What artifacts from my practice provide evidence of where I am on the continuum between ally and co-conspirator?



RECONCEPTUALIZE



“How do I make sure my classroom is a site of possibility? How do I teach the Archaeology of Self in a way that students learn, excavate, reclaim, and rebuild?” – p. 67

INVITATION

If your classroom became a site of possibility, what would it look, sound, and feel like? Using the Four Principles of Black Archaeology (pp. 66–67), sketch or map the routines, relationships, and experiences that would invite students to learn, excavate, reclaim, and rebuild.

Principle 1- Breaking down barriers to equity through representation.

Principle 2- Building an antiracist foundation and decolonizing our work.

Principle 3- Creating the house frame: clarifying our understanding of race.

Principle 4- Sustainability through mentorship and community networks.

Archaeology of Self as Practice:

An Invitation to Teachers



CHAPTER FOCUS



“Archaeology of Self is a way of being and becoming.” – p. 71

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz deepens our understanding of the Archaeology of Self by exploring it as both a concept and a practice. She introduces the peril, promise, and power of self-excavation, along with the three tenets of racial literacy that guide this ongoing work: questioning assumptions, engaging in courageous conversations, and practicing reflexivity. She reminds us that the deepest work of teaching begins within and shapes both who we become as educators and the legacy we leave.



EXCAVATE



“Journeying into the self, we find out more about who we really are—and can be—ideally free from the conditioning of racism and other harmful ideologies that work against the person we wish to become. This discovery is liberation. Discovering the truth helps to free us from the lies that have been told to us about ourselves, others, and our students.” – p. 70

INVITATION

Choose one of the excavation activities on pages 74–75. As Dr. Sealey-Ruiz invites, take it seriously. Write down your answers. Sit with them. Return to them. Notice what they reveal over time.

- 1. First Memory of Race
- 2. Your School Story
- 3. The Unspoken Messages You Carry
- 4. Your Reactions to Students
- 5. Your Role in Interruption

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE





DECONSTRUCT



“These three tenets offer a deliberate, guided pathway to change our thoughts and actions—an ultimate goal of racial literacy development.” – p. 73

The three tenets of racial literacy ask different things of us. One asks us to examine what we believe. Another asks us to examine how we engage with others. The third asks us to examine how we live what we believe. Consider the questions below.

REFLECTION

- **Question Assumptions:** What assumption about race, teaching, or your students are you feeling called to question? Where did that assumption come from?
- **Engage in Critical Conversations:** What conversation about race and injustice have you been avoiding? What would it look like to approach it with courage, historical understanding, and a willingness to listen deeply?
- **Practice Reflexivity:** Where do you notice your beliefs or biases showing up in your teaching, relationships and daily decisions? What is one shift you feel called to make?



RECONCEPTUALIZE



“Will I be remembered as the educator who truly saw my students? Will I be remembered as the educator who listened when they told me what they needed? Will I be remembered as the educator who used my influence to liberate students rather than confine their abilities?” – p. 80

INVITATION

Ancestral Affirmations

This chapter closes with a profound question: What kind of ancestor will you be? After reflecting on Dr. Sealey-Ruiz's questions on page 80, write a set of Ancestral Affirmations. Complete each statement as a declaration of the educator you are choosing to become. Return to them often as a reminder of the legacy you hope to leave.

Begin each affirmation with the following phrase:

I will be the ancestor who...

Layers of the Self:

Uncovering Teacher Identity



CHAPTER FOCUS



“The work of racial literacy demands that we face ourselves first because only when we do that can we truly see, uplift, and honor the students in front of us.” – p. 90

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz invites us into the journeys of Amira, Leah, and Vivianna as they wrestle with the discomfort, courage, and transformation that the Archaeology of Self requires. Their stories remind us that racial literacy is cultivated one honest reflection, one courageous conversation, and one intentional choice at a time.



EXCAVATE



“They often experience what I call ‘racial epiphanies’—the moment they suddenly understand the ways in which racism has been integral to their worldview.” – p. 86

INVITATION

Racial Epiphany

Reflect on the stories of Amira, Leah, and Vivianna. Then turn to your own journey. When have you experienced a racial epiphany, a moment when you “suddenly understand the ways in which racism has been integral to [your] worldview” (p. 86)?

Write the story of a moment that shifted the way you understood your relationship to race, racism, and your role as an educator.

- What happened?
- Why did this moment stay with you?
- What changed because of it?

Preserve this story as part of your personal archive of racial literacy and consider sharing it with a trusted colleague or learning community.

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE





DECONSTRUCT



“The most dangerous biases are actually disguised as care...racism hides itself—beneath assumptions of ‘helping,’ within policies that claim they are neutral, inside systems that have molded us to consider whiteness as the norm and all else as deviant.” – p. 91

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz offers different reflection questions for white educators and educators of color as an invitation to examine the ways implicit bias and internalized oppression shape our teaching. Answer the questions that correspond to your experience.

WHITE EDUCATORS

- Am I ready to be uncomfortable?
- Am I ready to be honest that I benefit from a system that holds others back?
- Am I ready to engage in this work completely, and move beyond the language of privilege and redefine my identity beyond the myth of racial superiority?

EDUCATORS OF COLOR

- Where have I compromised?
- Where have I silenced myself?
- Where have I been complicit in antiblack, in anti-Indigenous, anti-Asian, and anti-Latinidad thinking and behaviors?



RECONCEPTUALIZE



“...all of us, will need to become comfortable with discomfort. This is a necessary part of the process. When we shift to accepting this, and recognize it as a natural part of racial literacy development, we may see that in these quiet moments of tension and challenge—moments that await our brave response—our growth tends to bloom.” – p. 93

Transformation often begins with one courageous interruption. Reflect on the questions below, then identify one pattern you are committed to interrupting even when discomfort arises.

REFLECTION

- What discomfort am I being invited to become more comfortable with?
- What belief, habit, or silence am I ready to interrupt?
- Where is courage calling me to act differently?

INTERRUPTION PLAN

The next time I notice _____,
I will interrupt it by _____.

An Artful Journey:

Excavating Identity and Bias Through (Un)Final Multimodal Storytelling Projects



CHAPTER FOCUS

“

“These art-based narratives go beyond fulfilling my course’s requirements; they are sacred excavations. They reveal the courage it takes to confront inherited narratives, and the power of racial literacy as a practice rooted in self-awareness, truth-telling, and the pursuit of justice.” – p. 71

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz demonstrates that art can be a powerful form of Archaeology of Self and that some discoveries cannot be explained through words alone. The collection of (un)final multimodal projects found in this chapter reveal how creativity becomes a pathway for excavating identity, challenging inherited beliefs, and imagining new possibilities for teaching and learning.



EXCAVATE

“

“The following multimodal projects are a few of the many I have collected over the years that illustrate how identity and racial literacy development are not static endpoints, but each is an unfolding process, one that, when engaged through the Archaeology of Self, becomes a lifelong and beauty-full act of being and becoming.” – p. 97

INVITATION

Return to what you created during Chapter 3’s Reconceptualize activity as you sought to articulate your understanding of racial literacy. Before making any revisions or additions, look at it with fresh eyes. What still feels true? What surprises you? What feels unfinished?

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE





DECONSTRUCT



“The (un)final nature of these multimodal art projects reflects the continuous process of racial literacy and self-awareness.”
— p. 108

REFLECTION

Consider your creation through the questions Dr. Sealey-Ruiz poses below. What do they help you see in your piece that still needs to be unearthed?

- What layers are you still being invited to peel back to teach with an equity mindset and a heartset filled with love?
- What are you still being invited to feel, remember, or unlearn in order to see yourself and your students with greater clarity, care, and love?



RECONCEPTUALIZE



“Creative practices, like the multimodal (un)final project, challenges students to embrace the complexity of identity and the courage to move forward with purpose beyond the finality of the written word.” — p. 108

INVITATION

Build upon what you created in Chapter 3 and let your work bear witness to how your understanding of racial literacy continues to evolve.

You might...

- Write a response to your original piece from the perspective of who you are today.
- Annotate your work with questions, reflections, or moments where your thinking has shifted.
- Add a missing voice or perspective that you now realize belongs in the piece.
- Introduce another medium (words, images, music, movement, or another form of expression) to explore what your original form could not.
- Leave part of the original untouched and build around it, allowing both versions to exist in conversation with one another.

Towards Critical (Self) Love



CHAPTER FOCUS

“

“When we teach through love, we can say: I see your lineage, your wounds, your brilliance. As we practice critical love, we are not learning only about race, and how to navigate its harm. We are learning to love ourselves and others through the wreckage left behind by racism.” – p. 112

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz reframes critical self-love as an essential practice for educators committed to justice. She reminds us that we cannot teach with critical love if we have not learned to extend that same love to ourselves. Through poetry, personal reflection, and the wisdom of educators and scholars, she invites us to see self-love as the foundation for teaching with integrity, humanity, and hope.



EXCAVATE

“

“In the Archaeology of Self practice, we are required to excavate not only our biases but also our brilliance. It requires that we identify when we show up for ourselves and treat those moments as sacred memory.” – p. 110

Self-love begins by recognizing and honoring who we are. Reflect on the questions below as you explore what it means to "declare yourself" (p. 110).

REFLECTION

- What does critical self-love look like in your life right now?
- What parts of yourself have you learned to celebrate? What parts of yourself are you still learning to love?
- What parts of yourself have you hidden in order to belong?
- When do you feel most fully yourself? What makes those moments possible?
- What are you still seeking permission to embrace about yourself?
- What beliefs about yourself are you ready to release? What would critical self-love ask you to reclaim?
- What practice will help you notice and document your growth in critical self-love?

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE





DECONSTRUCT



“Love without self-examination is merely performative. It becomes theory, without action.” – p. 110

Throughout this chapter, Dr. Sealey-Ruiz reminds us that critical self-love is revealed in the moments that ask the most of us. She challenges us to see love as a responsibility that shapes how we teach, especially when doing so feels difficult. Her questions on page 111 invite us to examine whether that love is reflected in the choices we make every day.

REFLECTION

- What does your love in action look like?
- Do you see your students fully?
- Do you teach them as though your integrity depends on it?
- Do you model the kind of love you hope they extend to one another and to themselves?



RECONCEPTUALIZE



“The message here is clear: critical self-love is not a luxury but a revolutionary necessity. On this foundation, racial literacy, educational justice, and transformative teaching can be built.” – p. 117

INVITATIONS

Critical Love Commitments

Imagine your classroom if critical love shaped every decision you made. Using Dr. Sealey-Ruiz's three indicators of critical love (p. 113), write one commitment for each area. Consider the ways your curriculum, classroom structures, and daily practices can become expressions of critical love.

- To honor my students' identities, I will...
- To protect my students' dignity, I will...
- To help my students thrive, I will...

Love This Way

Return to "Love This Way" (pp. 117–118). Choose one line that you want to carry into your classroom this week. Write it somewhere you'll see it often, and let it guide the way you teach, listen, and love.

Archaeologists of the Self: Addressing Trauma, Healing, and Growth



CHAPTER FOCUS

“

“Healing is not separate from your racial literacy development; in fact it is a necessary part of it. You cannot do this work fully and sustainably if you do not channel the healing into yourself first.” – p. 128

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz shares how her friendship and collaboration with Dr. Angel Acosta opened new pathways for understanding healing-centered education. Their work with the Acosta Institute demonstrates that personal reflection, mindfulness, and collective healing are essential practices for educators seeking to create communities where people can truly flourish.



EXCAVATE

“

“When we can look at ourselves with critical love—naming our wounds, fears, and our responsibility—we create the conditions for healing. Facing our reflection and meeting ourselves with honesty, compassion, courage allows for our healing to begin.” – p. 127

INVITATION

Place a mirror where you can comfortably look yourself in the eyes. Set a timer for one minute. Spend the entire minute looking at your reflection without looking away. Try to hold your gaze and breathe evenly. Resist the urge to judge the thoughts, emotions, or memories that arise. Simply notice them with compassion. When the minute is over, sit quietly for a moment before reflecting on the questions below.

REFLECTION

- What was the very first thing you noticed when you looked at yourself? Why do you think your attention settled there?
- What emotions came up as you held your own gaze?
- Were there any wounds, fears or memories that emerged during this exercise?
- What have you spent years trying to see in yourself? What have you spent years trying not to see?
- If your reflection could speak, what truth might it be asking you to acknowledge?
- What would it look like to meet yourself with the same grace and acceptance you hope to extend to your students?

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE





DECONSTRUCT

“

“Racially literate educators and leaders who lead from a healing-centered stance have usually taken ownership of their own healing, and this changes students’ experiences in profound ways. We move from reacting to responding. We stop watching students for “behavior” and start seeing them as whole people who need to be heard, held, and understood rather than judged. The question that guides this healing-centered work is as simple as it is radical: What are you trying to heal from, and how can I support you?” – p. 133

INVITATION

Imagine yourself several years from now. You have continued to return to the work of healing and self-excavation. Write a letter from your future self to the educator you are today. As you write, claim the more healed version of yourself now. Reflect on what you will have had to forgive, release, and make space for to become that person, and let your future self speak back to you. Notice which beliefs about yourself no longer have a place in the life your future self is living.

Keep this letter as a reminder of who you are becoming. Healing is shaped by the choices we make each day and every time you choose the path of healing, you become a more healed version of yourself.



RECONCEPTUALIZE

“

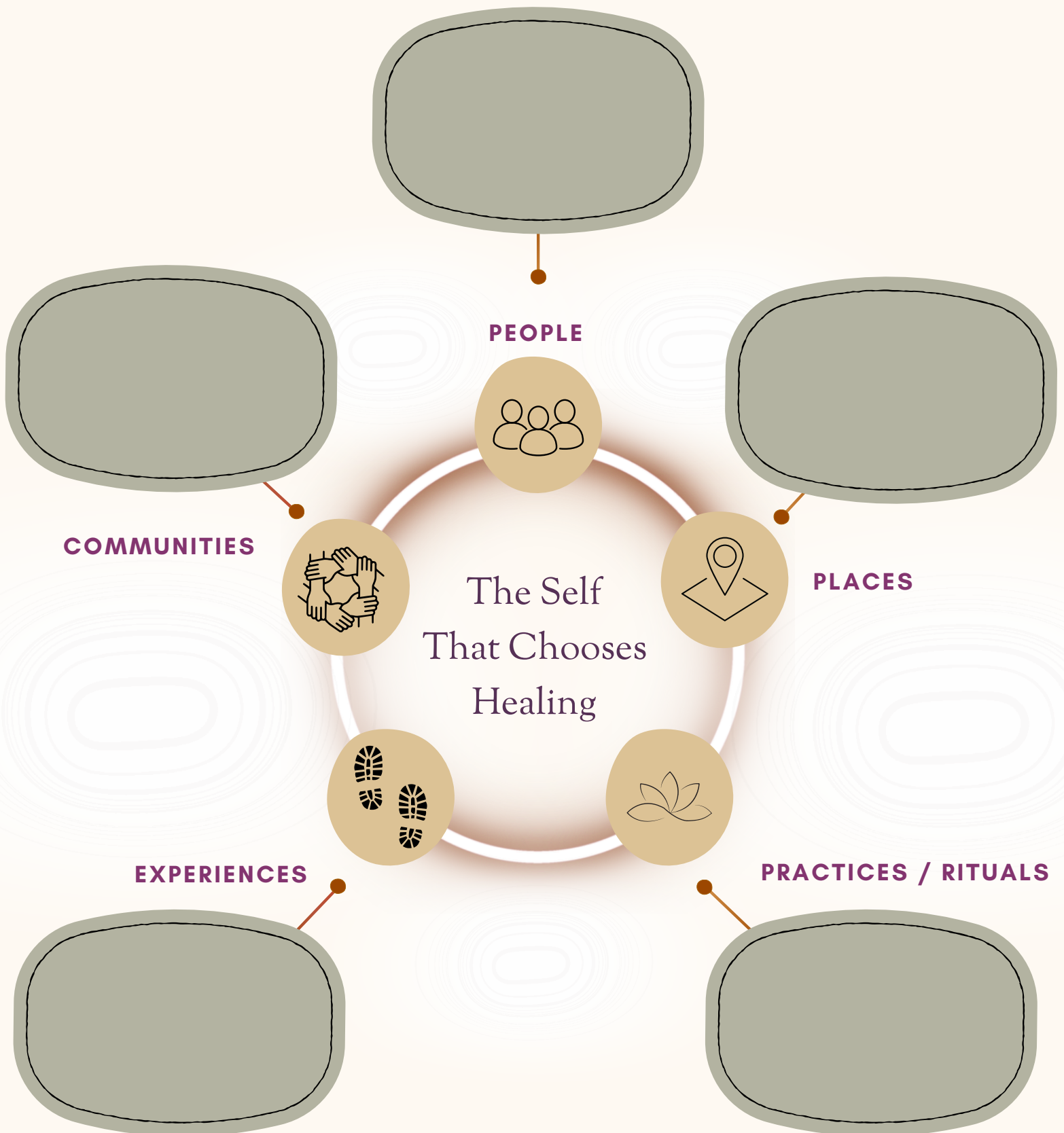
*“We believe our healing cannot happen in isolation.”
– p. 129*

INVITATIONS

Throughout this chapter, Dr. Sealey-Ruiz demonstrates that healing is strengthened through relationships and spaces where we can reflect, be witnessed, and grow together. Consider the people and practices that help you return to yourself and create your own Healing Ecosystem. On the following page, use the Healing Ecosystem worksheet to identify the people, places, practices, communities, and experiences that help you return to yourself. Fill each space with the sources of support that sustain your healing.

Archaeology of Self

Healing Ecosystem



Reconstructing Self and Community for a Just Future



CHAPTER FOCUS

“

“We learn to look at our cracks (biases, antiblack ideologies, racism, and trauma wounds) as a starting point for transformation and healing. It requires that we sift through the shards of our histories and identities, and mend them with reflection, honesty, and love; to see our wounds and failures not as flaws, but as pathways to self-knowledge and a source of strength.” – p. 128

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz uses the art of kintsugi as a powerful metaphor for the ongoing work of self excavation, healing and racial literacy. She reminds us that our wounds and brokenness can become the very places where new stories of hope, healing and justice emerge.



EXCAVATE

“

“Like the bowl, our wounds and hardships do not diminish us—they shape us. When we embrace our scars, we transform into something even more extraordinary.” – p. 142

INVITATION

The bowls that follow offer a space for you to excavate your experiences through the art of kintsugi.

Bowl 1: The Cracks That Shaped Me

Using the first bowl on the following page, write words or short phrases along each crack to name experiences, losses, disappointments, fears, identities, or moments that have shaped you. These cracks may represent personal wounds, professional challenges, or inherited stories that continue to influence who you are today.

Bowl 2: The Gold They Revealed

Using the second bowl, return to each crack from the first bowl. Along the matching gold seam, rewrite that experience by naming what has emerged from it. Identify the strengths, insights, relationships, boundaries, wisdom, compassion, or hope that have grown because those cracks exist.

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE

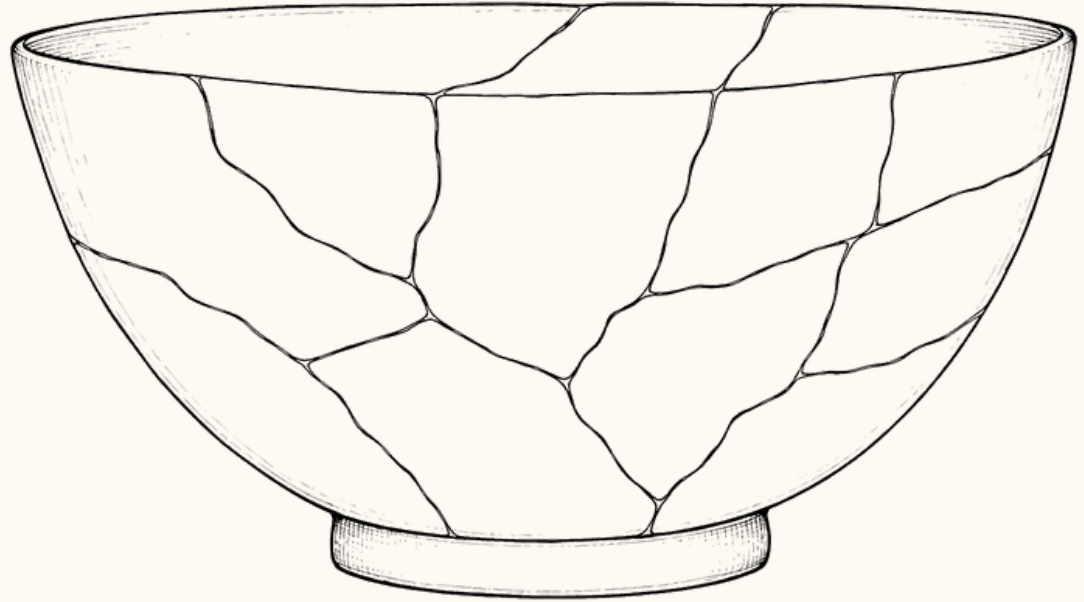


Archaeology of Self

The Art of Repair

Bowl 1: The Cracks That Shaped Me

Using the first bowl, write words or short phrases along each crack to name experiences, losses, disappointments, fears, identities, or moments that have shaped you. These cracks may represent personal wounds, professional challenges, or inherited stories that continue to influence who you are today.

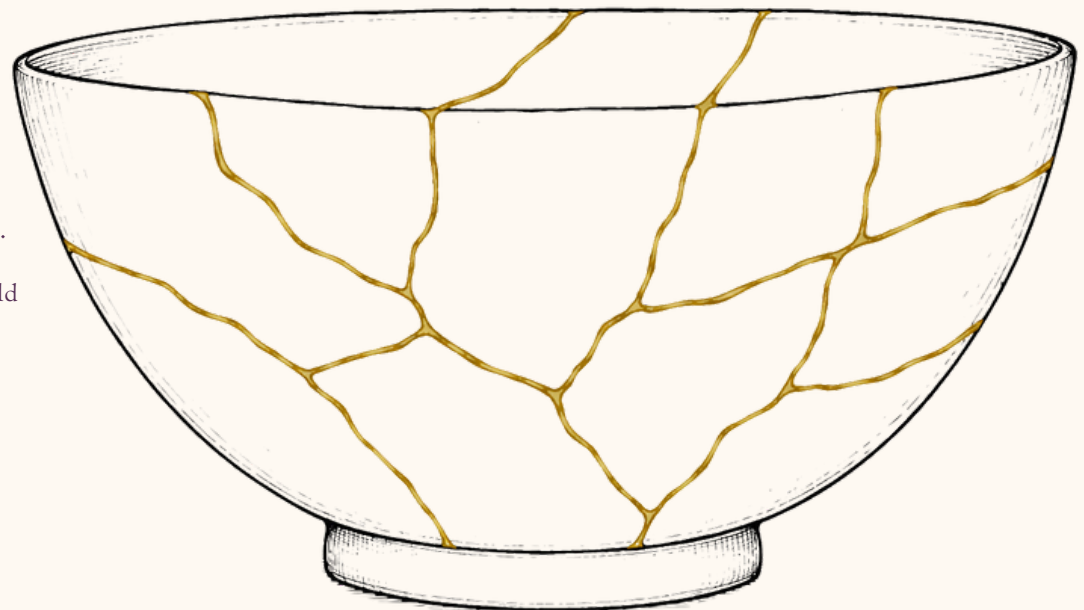


Bowl 2: The Gold They Revealed

Using the second bowl, return to each crack from the first bowl. Along the matching gold seam, rewrite that experience by naming what has emerged from it. Identify the strengths, insights, relationships, boundaries, wisdom, compassion, or hope that have grown because those cracks exist.

When I Broke and Bloomed

I used to hide the pieces—
So ashamed of every crack and imperfection.
But then I saw how light entered—
Rumi promised; what was shattered would
heal.
I traced the brokenness with gold,
And wrote poems into the openings.
My healing commenced—
and my fear vanished.
I could not return to who I was.
so I surrendered and became someone new.
stronger
for having been broken,
brigher, for having now survived.





DECONSTRUCT

“

“Educators, we must ask ourselves: How will we take part in today’s need for educational Reconstruction? How do we ensure that our students experience a more just education system than the one we endured? How can we move beyond knowledge and into action; short-term inclusion into true transformation?” – p. 145

INVITATION

For Dr. Sealey-Ruiz education is an act of repair and racial literacy development is a pathway to continuing the unfinished work of educational reconstruction. Reflect on the questions below from page 145, then take up her invitation to continue the conversation with a trusted educator colleague.

- How do we begin to fix the cracks in our educational system with “precious material”?
- How do we teach our students that their scars—personal or collective—do not define them, but give them an opportunity to show their fortitude to survive?
- How can we make the gold in kintsugi not just decoration but declaration?
- How can our districts, schools, and classrooms become community-centered healing sites?
- How do we begin to heal the wounds that the education system has inflicted on our students, and in some cases, ourselves?



RECONCEPTUALIZE

“

“But I also saw light filtering through the cracks—threads of resilience, creativity that allowed us to build ‘something-from nothing’ and constantly make something anew.” – p. 147

INVITATIONS

Sit with the passage below and allow yourself to consider what this vision of education invites you to become.

“I keep wondering: what if healing were the central purpose of our work—would the journey toward justice feel less brutal? How do we untether people from the lie that power over others equals humanity? What if education’s primary work was truth-telling, reconciliation, and the transformation of systems that depend on harm to keep going? Educators, what does it mean to repeatedly see, hear, and vicariously live the harm our students endure—and do nothing? What does it do to our souls to know we are, in small and large ways, protecting the status quo of inequity? Do we have the will to look into our own buried darkness—and then use what we find there for the good of our students, and ourselves? Kintsugi teaches us that the brokenness should not be hidden. They are spaces through which light shines and transformation enters.” – p. 146

REFLECTION

If healing truly became the central purpose of education, what would change in your classroom?

The final three chapters shift from excavation to application, through examples of racial literacy in practice and resources to sustain the work long after the final page.

Purpose Meets Preparation: A National Call for Racial Literacy Lesson Plans



CHAPTER 11 FOCUS

“

“Curriculum—like teaching itself—is an ever-unfolding, living organism of possibility. It is akin to an excavation site where what we unearth has the potential to transform the mindsets and heartsets.” – p. 149

Dr. Sealey-Ruiz offers insight into her national call for racial literacy lesson plans and the overwhelming response it inspired. She introduces some of the educators who answered that call, whose stories reveal the many ways racial literacy takes shape across classrooms, disciplines, and communities.



EXCAVATE

“

“To all the educators who have answered this call, thank you. You remind me that racial literacy is a journey best taken together. Racial Literacy is a practice that is more sustainable when done within a community, with the open hearts and minds of individuals who are willing to do the hard work of self-excavation.” – p. 152

REFLECTION

Choose one lesson plan designer whose story stayed with you. What do you notice about the way they have made the Archaeology of Self visible in their teaching? What might their example invite you to examine in your own practice?

INVITATION

After journeying through this guide, take a moment to name the educator you are becoming by writing a brief educator bio that reflects who you are as a practitioner of racial literacy. Consider what you have excavated about yourself and how those revelations shape the way you show up as an educator. How has the Archaeology of Self served you? What commitments are you carrying into your classroom? What do you want students, families, and colleagues to know about who you are and how you approach your practice?

Let this bio be both a declaration and a dedication. You are naming and committing to who you are, who you have chosen to be, and who you are still becoming.

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE



Practice Makes Possibility:

Racial Literacy Lesson Plans



CHAPTER 12 FOCUS



"The collection of these lessons demonstrate an intention to teach with courage and care. They are another invitation into the six components and three tenets. They are designed to assist you in taking the components of racial literacy from theory to practice in your classroom."
— p. 159

Through lessons spanning multiple disciplines and grade levels, this chapter illustrates how critical love, critical humility, critical reflection, historical literacy, the Archaeology of Self and interruption can move from educational theory into everyday classroom experiences.



DECONSTRUCT



"During fraught times in our society, a racially literate curriculum provides opportunities for students to make meaning out of the challenges they will confront in their lives. As we build our racial literacy alongside our students', it helps all of us to engage the world thoughtfully and critically, strengthening our collective commitment to democracy." — p. 159

INVITATION

Choose one lesson from this chapter and complete it as a learner before exploring how you might teach it.

- How did it feel experiencing the lesson from the student's seat?
- How did this lesson deepen your own racial literacy?
- What invitation does this lesson hold for you as an educator?
- What possibilities could a lesson like this open for your students?
- What conditions would need to exist for your students to experience a lesson like this fully?

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE



Artifacts, Tools, and Resources



CHAPTER 13 FOCUS

“

“This work doesn’t end on the last page. Racial literacy calls us back, again and again, to dig deeper, love harder, and teach with more intention grounded in the radical belief that transformation in schools is possible. This chapter exists to support your journey, offering resources to meet you wherever you are.” – p. 249

In this final chapter, Dr. Sealey-Ruiz offers a carefully curated collection of books, films, poems, speeches, and reflective resources designed to deepen your learning, strengthen your resolve, and sustain your lifelong commitment to racial literacy and healing.



RECONCEPTUALIZE

“

“From the provocative insights of James Baldwin to the transformative power of Paulo Freire’s love, these resources help make sense of race, power, and identity in schools and society... These are not comprehensive lists, but offerings—meant to spark dialogue, deepen understanding, and move you toward action.” – p. 249

INVITATION

Create your own Racial Literacy Learning Plan. Select one resource from each category in Chapter 13 to engage with over the coming months. As you make your selections, consider why you chose each resource and what you hope it will help you better understand about yourself and your practice.

Books and Readings

Next to Explore: _____

Speeches and Talks:

Learning From the Voices of Our Time

Next to Explore: _____

Poetry: Excavating Truth Through Artful Writing

Next to Explore: _____

Films and Documentaries:

Visual Narratives of Race and Resistance

Next to Explore: _____

Websites: Searching the Digital Terrain of Racial Literacy

Next to Explore: _____

Children’s and Young Adult Literature:

Building Racial Literacy Early

Next to Explore: _____

Mindfulness, Meditation, and Healing Websites:

The Self-Work We Must Do

Next to Explore: _____

Chapter Playlist

SPOTIFY



YOUTUBE



Reflect. Dig. Write. Repeat.

“The work you will do to build your racial literacy and support your and your students’ healing goes beyond this book. It will live in the discussions that emerge with others after you read it, and in what lingers from those conversations. The work will continue with the questions you dare to ask yourself, and what you find in the answers. Reread chapters or sections as often as needed. Create your own questions. Reflect. Dig. Write. Repeat. The answers live in the silence where the truth awaits their revelation.” –Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz

Dear Educators.

You have spent these pages excavating memories, questioning assumptions, embracing healing, and imagining new possibilities. You have gathered artifacts, uncovered truths, and practiced seeing yourself with greater honesty and compassion.

When you began this journey, you were invited to approach Archaeology of Self as both a map and a mirror. Looking back now, what did the mirror reveal that you did not expect to see? Where has the map led you?

Now comes the most important question. What will you do with what you've uncovered?

PAY IT FORWARD

This guide opened with three truths from my own excavation. I hope you'll continue that tradition. Share this book and engagement guide with another educator, and offer them three truths you uncovered about yourself that you hope will support them as they begin their own Archaeology of Self.

*With Love.
Still digging.*

Victoria

