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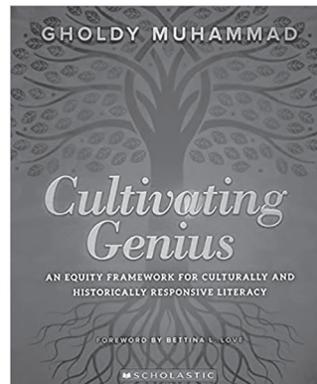
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# Book Review *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework For Culturally And Historically Responsive Literacy*

by Raven Jones Stanbrough

Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*. Scholastic Inc., New York, NY. ISBN: 978-1-338-59489-8



*From my lenses as a teacher, scholar, school board member, researcher, and teacher educator, I have come to learn that there is much that we can do to improve how literacy education is framed today.* (Muhammad, 2020)

Every child and student deserves a champion. Someone to clap for them as they are wobbly pursuing balance when they take their first steps. Someone to smile and cheer with emphatic glee when they utter their first words, matriculate through school, and navigate their academic and social worlds. Whether at home, school, or in other spaces they occupy, children and students deserve for their (literary) lives to be affirmed and celebrated in affirming ways and at every turn. As a homeschooling mother, scholar-activist, and teacher-educator, raising a knowledge-seeking daughter, I intentionally promote my daughter's thinking and literacy awareness while centering our Blackness, cultural excellence, and academic inquiries. I recognize that there are and will continue to be differences in the ways in which I educate my daughter, in contrast to what curricular choices might be used or valued in schools, which often includes the erasure of Black and Brown histories and stories. When championing for children, all teachers must know that their students deserve to be advocated for and respected. Students deserve to experience instructional wellness, which I am defining as teaching from



**Raven Jones Stanbrough**

pedagogical lenses and practices that do not include academic, emotional, psychological, physical, or spiritual harm. Rather, a child's instructional wellness should center their identities, joy, and interests across disciplines. It should promote anti-racist thinking and community building. Young people are dope! They deserve to know that their minds are beautiful and brilliant.

Scholar and literacy activist, Dr. Gholdy Muhammad is a social justice warrior who proudly praises students and tells them that they are dope! She is a living example of someone who is equipped to use her thinking to dismantle literacy oppression. She claps and cheers for children, students, parents, and teachers, and others as they cultivate their own genius. Whether she is teaching, speaking at national conferences, or conversing with loved ones and village members, Dr. Muhammad's soul-work is deeply rooted in equitable restoration for students in classrooms and across varying spaces. She reminds students that they can use their pens, minds, and literacy experiences to fight ongoing injustices. She is a champion for children and students. Connected to this, Dr. Muhammad's book, *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*, is a direct representation of such championing and cheerleading. In the text, she delineates an equity-based framework centered in histories

and stories that promote pedagogical approaches in literacy education for all students, especially youth of color. While turning the pages of *Cultivating Genius*, readers can expect to learn from what Dr. Muhammad has defined as *Historically Responsive Literacy*, which stemmed from her work examining Black literacy societies in the 19th century. She states, "...Black people developed literary societies or "literary institutions," which were essentially collaborative teaching and learning spaces to construct knowledge and engage one another toward cultivating a literary culture" (p. 9). In speaking with other scholars, students, and teacher educators about *Cultivating Genius*, they have expressed a profound gratitude for Dr. Muhammad's work highlighting how literary societies were a space to thrive, and for participants to read, write, and create together.

*Cultivating Genius* includes eight chapters that include literacy definitions and terms, an outline of her framework, and examples of historically responsive texts and lesson plans. Written and categorized in three parts—Part One: Drawing From History to Reimagine Literacy Education; Part Two: Teaching and Learning With the Four-Layered HRL Framework; and Part Three: Implementing Historically Responsive Texts and Lesson Plans. In each part, Dr. Muhammad provides practical and necessary thinking that helps educators support and celebrate the cultural and literacy capital that young people innately represent. The equity framework includes four learning goals or pursuits:

- Identity Development: Helping youth to make sense of themselves and others
- Skill Development: Developing proficiencies across the academic discipline
- Intellectual Development: Gaining knowledge and becoming smarter
- Criticality: Learning and developing the ability to read texts (including print and social contexts) to understand power, equity, and anti-oppression

These four learning pursuits offer opportunities for teachers and students to participate in meaningful dialogue and sense-making that are culturally and

historically responsive. I am so grateful for this text, the new knowledge it presented for me, and for how it beautifully celebrates cultures and criticality. I could not put this book down. It has contributed to how I (re)define my own teaching and mothering. I was and am drawn to the questions and inquiries that Dr. Muhammad encourages us to consider. I invite you all to read every word and to begin or continue or your own journey as a champion for children and students.

## Works Cited

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## Author Biography

**Raven Jones Stanbrough** is an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University. Her teaching, research, and publications focus on literacy, culture, race, equity, and the educational and lived experiences of students of color in urban contexts. Dr. Jones Stanbrough creates and facilitates debate education programs to promote and expand educative thinking and creative engagement. She is also the Co-founder of *The Zuri Reads Initiative (TZRI)*, which provides and organizes literacy-related events and resources for Detroit-area children, students, and families. When she is not teaching, playing Scrabble, or listening to The Clark Sisters, Dr. Jones Stanbrough can usually be found at Target, purchasing Legos and dresses for her daughter, Zuri Hudson. She can be contacted at: [jonesrav@msu.edu](mailto:jonesrav@msu.edu).

