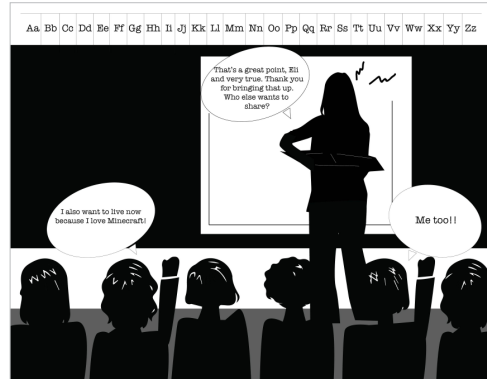
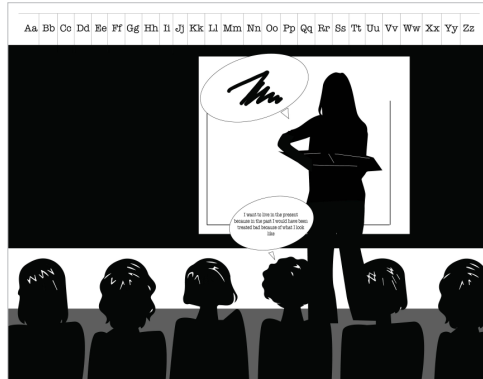
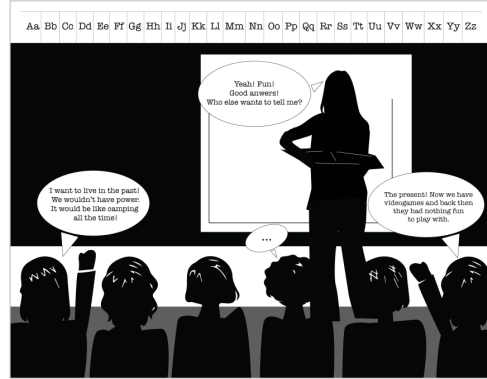
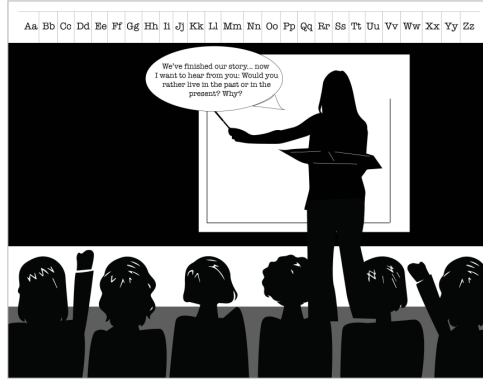
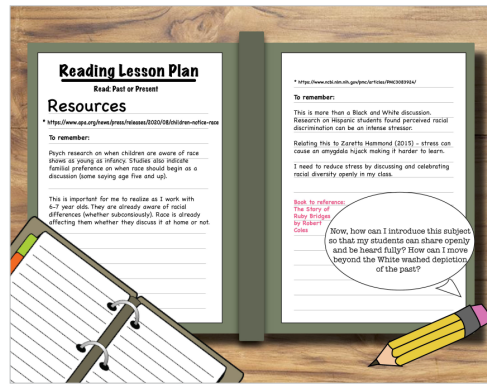
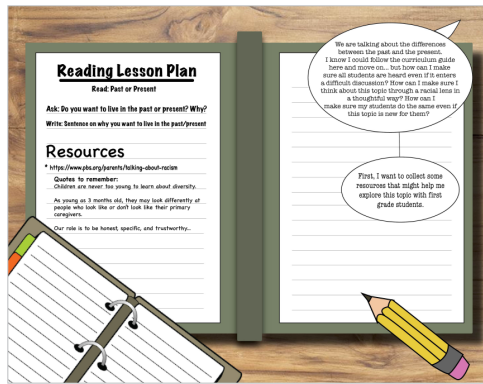


What Happened



What Could Have Happened



My alternative project was a graphic book style representation of a dilemma I faced confronting racial discussions with young first grade students. The book zooms in on one incident in which one of my Black students initiated a racial dialogue. I reflect on how I handled this conversation and illustrate what I would do differently/how I could reimagine this moment in a more thoughtful, culturally responsive way.

I chose a graphic book style to visually represent how my experience as a White student influenced me as a White teacher. The initial pages summarize this conversation on a class reading regarding the past versus the present. These pages depict the class in silhouette style to represent my unconscious color-blind mentality – where I was unaware of my own positionality and had not built strong understandings of my students and their cultural assets. Students sit facing the teacher all in a row and raise their hands with large text talk bubbles, a depiction of my understanding of what school should look or sound like based on my own experiences in school as a White female student. In comparison, a Black student who brings racism into this conversation has a smaller text/talk bubble, representative of how student voices and difficult racial discussions may be minimized in my classroom simply because I do not prepare for them.

The subsequent pages start to highlight brighter colors, representing my actions to remove colorblind tendencies. I illustrate my planning in a more literal sense, showing a desktop view of how I might think about this lesson before it even began. I also show my notations with resources and reminders as to why discussing race is important with young students (e.g., they are already aware of race whether they know it or not, and celebrating racial diversity and speaking truthfully about the history of racism can reduce stress). I finally show an illustration of how the conversation might have gone if I had planned for this lesson in a more thoughtful way.

The creation of this graphic book allowed me to reflect intensely on one moment of racial discussion in my class that I did not handle well. Yet this reflection allowed me to see clearly the ways in which my positionality may cause me to frequently fall into the familiarity pitfalls of: sit still, raise your hand, and avoid difficult discussions of race – especially with young students. I have learned I have the power to build a safe environment where every student feels heard and valued. If my 6-7 year old students of color are aware and willing to talk about issues or celebrations of race, I need to encourage every person in the room (including myself) to face those realities head on.

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