# Teaching Antiracist Reading

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**ABSTRACT**

In this article, Inoue offers an antiracist reading practice for students in literacy classrooms of all kinds. This practice draws on a number of disciplines in order to help students read in ways that help them see the structural and personal in the judgments they make with and in language as they read. Central to an antiracist reading practice is understanding White language supremacy and how all readers and texts participate in it, even as some struggle against it.

When I was asked to participate in this special issue of the journal, I knew I wanted to talk about teaching reading. I wanted the article to be practical enough to inspire teachers to find ways to teach reading as an antiracist practice of assessment in classrooms of all kinds. When I say reading as an antiracist practice of assessment, I mean the act of reading becomes itself an inquiry into the reader's own language habits and the larger dominant structural forces and influences outside the reader, ones usually a product of White supremacy and White racial dominance.

Much of my own writing pedagogy is centered on practicing reading in particular ways, mindful ways, critical ways, ways that ask readers not simply to think about what the text in front of them says, but how they come to understand that text in the ways they do. What social structures inform their personal ways of making sense of the text? In other words, what habits of language and judgment help a reader read a text, where did that reader get those habits, and where do those habits come from in the world? What do they do in the world, or to the reader, by being used? Answering questions like these, I believe, helps readers understand in flexible ways their own habits of language and the inevitable politics they engage in when they read or use language. Answering questions like these about our habits of language as we read helps us do antiracist work by attending to the mind and language structures that structure us in a racist world.

The reading practices I'm thinking of are really judgment practices, as all reading really is. So my central question in this article is this: *How does a teacher make the reading of a text, be it a shared text for discussion in the classroom or a peer's draft, a practice of antiracist assessment?*

My short answer is: Help students engage in *antiracist reading practices.* These reading practices, which I'll elaborate on in this article, ask students to do more than decipher text, or respond to a text. They ask them to also investigate the deep and hidden structures that make up their personal reading habits, personal reading habits that are also structural and social. These reading habits are both in the language habits that students embody, and in the larger,

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historical, and social structures that surround them and make up their own histories with words. So antiracist reading is a kind of reading that simultaneously looks into the individual's habits of language and out to larger structures that determine those habits.

Why look both directions (at personal and social habits) when one is reading? And how does this kind of practice make for an antiracist reading practice? Ibram X. Kendi (2019) offers a good reason for why this kind of practice is antiracist. He says: "The opposite of 'racist' isn't 'not racist' It is 'antiracist' .... One either allows racial inequalities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequalities, as an antiracist" (p. 9). This is the center of his argument in the book, and it rightly assumes that all institutions and social structures in society are by default racist. Why? Because they have been produced in a racist and White supremacist history.

In order to be antiracist, because of how racism and White supremacy function so ubiquitously in society and all of its institutions, including our academic disciplines and habits of language, readers cannot simply stand aloof if they even wish not to participate in racist practices. We cannot avoid racist stuff by not doing anything, by being aloof. Not doing racism is allowing it to continue, and in many cases, it's actually doing racist stuff. This is true for our habits of language and judgment when we read and form opinions and arguments from those texts. We do so from the racist and White supremacist material we have to make meaning as we read.

So if Kendi is right, and I think he is, then we need a reading practice that is a kind of anti-reading practice, an antiracist reading practice that helps the reader identify the habits of language being used and inquire into where those habits come from in the larger world. This will help begin the antiracist practice of calling ourselves out, or forward, to notice. It helps us understand better the language habits we participate in, and whether and how those habits participate in racism and White language supremacy. Doing this gives readers opportunities to find ways forward and out, to change, to be anti-.

## What I'm Drawing On

My approach to this antiracist reading practice is an interdisciplinary one, one that uses literature and theories from assessment, Marxian studies, cultural studies, sociology, contemplative studies, and psychology. I start by understanding reading as primarily assessing. That is to say, to read is to make judgments about language. And people are socially built to make judgments in and through language. Our habits of language afford us the ability to make judgments from and with language. These habits come from particular places, structured into our lives and material conditions in dialectical fashion. We often rehearse judgments from the judgments that we know or experience. Judgments in the world structure judgments made by individuals in the world, which dialectically circulate as judgments in the world,

which then structure more judgments. And the cycle continues. If you're looking for an antecedent and consequent, they will be difficult to find. These two aspects of our judgments are a kind of chicken and egg paradox.

I formulate this view of language and judgment by applying Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of *habitus* to embodied language practices in the world that have racial, gendered, ableist, class, and other social dimensions accumulated with them. If reading is assessing, and we learn this from the conditions we are in, which include other people, then reading is a set of habits that have racial and other dimensions. Bourdieu (1984) explains that *habitus*, or bodily, performative, and discursive habits, are not just inscribed on the body and performed, particularly through markers of status like the vestments of priests and other authority figures and the language and rituals conducted, but are themselves "structuring structures" that are designed to structure the world and the people in it (p. 170).

As I discuss elsewhere, Bourdieu theorizes *habitus* as "multiple, historically situated structures composed of and conditioned by practices, material conditions, and discourses, that iterate into new structures … all the while these structures are durable and transposable, even when history and conditions alter them superficially" (Inoue, 2015, p. 43). In brief, if reading is a set of language habits that we do and have done, then they are also connected to the material conditions that spawn them. Those material conditions are social and include other systems that are themselves built by race (and racism), class, gender, ableist assumptions, among other biases. In the simplest terms, our language habits are formed because we are what we do in the places we are at with the people around us. Racial, economic, and gendered segregation and separations in various places in our society make our languaging racialized, economically determined, and gendered.

Seeing the habits of reading as implicated in our social world in this way— and not simply random personal ways of experiencing text—means that dialoguing with a teacher or student colleagues is important. Reading can be a site of dialogue and engagement with others (colleagues and teacher), so I'm not speaking of the dialogue a reader might have with the text or author. I am also resisting the term "negotiation" in this instance because it suggests that there is a single, unified, agreed upon conclusion or meaning of a text or a reader's response that the parties involved are working toward.

Negotiation tends to imply that there is a singular outcome, a decision that must be made. In antiracist reading, I don't wish to focus attention on compromises between participants, which suggests that positions and points of view are somewhat static. In this paradigm, compromise happens when you are generous enough to give up an idea or outcome that you still think is right or preferrable. This kind of negotiation is useful in many cases, but when it comes to racism and White supremacy, compromise means you allow part of the unfair system to remain. In this way, there can be no

compromise if one really wishes to be antiracist. This makes the practice challenging, difficult, and brave work.

Dialogue, on the other hand, can imply a more open-ended outcome and allows for all parties to sit with and inquire about their differences and discomfort. I want to say that dialogue can be "brave" work in the way that Arao and Clemmens (2013) discuss the way race talk in classrooms should be. They argue that the classroom must be a "brave space," one that encourages everyone to sit in discomfort, to investigate their own privileges that allow for some to avoid such race discussions, and to be compassionate to each other, although they don't invoke the language of compassion (p. 142).

This reading practice that centers on dialogue I migrate from the field of writing assessment. The dialogue, however, is not just between readers and writers. It's also a kind of internal dialogue of the reader alone during the act of reading. Brian Huot (2002), for instance, argues for what he calls "instructive evaluation" when reading student texts (pp. 69–70). His idea is that if classroom assessment of student writing is to be meaningful and helpful for students, then it should engage them in a dialogue with the teacher that helps in a particular way.

Huot (2002) explains that feedback to students should engage two sides of the response practice, which I see as fundamentally a reading practice, explaining that "[a] dialectic between theory and practice shifts the focus from *how* we respond to *why* we respond, making us reflect upon and articulate our beliefs and assumptions about literacy and its teaching" (p. 112, emphasis in original). Huot is speaking of teachers' reading and responding habits, but I'm simply extending this good advice about evaluating student drafts to include all reading in a course, even the reading (and judgments) students do around texts we assign them, or the reading they do of their colleagues' drafts. As Huot says about teachers, "we need to come to an understanding of where our comments come from" (p. 112). I believe, if we wish to engage in antiracist reading, *all readers* must come to understand where their *judgments* come from in our racist world.

In the broader assessment literature, Guba and Lincoln's (1989) influential "fourth generation evaluation" model is a clearer and more thorough account of what I'm translating to student reading practices. Guba and Lincoln are theorizing assessment practice for a broad set of contexts and applications. They use social constructivist models of knowledge that counter old, positivist notions in order to offer a "hermeneutic dialectic circle" as a way to do assessment. This is a way to accumulate a number of perspectives on a decision or judgment in an assessment. It attempts to value more than one way of seeing or judging, say, language. This agrees with how most humanist and social science traditions today understand the way that knowledge is socially constructed, and the way language itself is epistemic (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 152).

Bob Broad (2003) uses the insights of fourth generation evaluation to create a process explicitly for writing assessment that is versatile and flexible, called "dynamic criteria mapping" or DCM (p. 13). It's really a way of reading student texts together in order to create rich and thick explanations of that group's various ways of valuing student texts. In DCM, teachers map in a variety of ways things like "textual qualities" and "textual features" that they read and find in student texts (pp. 33–37). What I appreciate about Broad's DCM is not just that it embraces social constructivism, fourth generation evaluation, and involves many people dialoguing in the act of evaluating texts, but it focuses on the process of understanding what teachers value when they read student texts, and resists thinking in terms of pre-defined outcomes or judgments. This kind of assessment takes to heart what later Chris Gallagher (2012) calls "consequences" or "aims" of assessment, which he sets against assessment outcomes, and says that assessment consequences are "potential," both "means and ends," and "cannot be predetermined and imposed upon those who undertake the activities" (p. 48). Gallagher (2012) explains, "consequences, as ends-in-view, are always emergent within educational experiences; they cannot be fixed beyond or outside those experiences" (p. 47).

DCM is a process that's focused on emergent consequences of readings by many readers dialoguing together. It is a process for understanding what we value when we read something together. Meanings emerge from the process. It does not assume one reading is good enough to understand the full value of any text. It also realizes that socially constructed meaning requires as many diverse voices as possible, and values multiple meanings. You get better explanations of texts and their readers when your group of readers is more diverse, when more meanings are produced in different ways.

DCM, then, is a process of reading in order to understand the diverse values a community of readers really has when they read and judge texts together, not what they say they have beforehand in rubrics or lists of expectations. This is a similar process I want each student to go through as they read. Only, I don't want to leave it up to chance as to what students should be looking for in their reading practices. There are reasonable and expected things we can look for.

I want students to consider the cultural and social structures that may seem outside of their habits of language and judgment but are consubstantial to them, interconnected. This includes their own values, assumptions, and biases, as much as it means their experiences and places in which they've grown up. In order to investigate our own reading practices as languaging and judging, we have to understand the way our material conditions, which include our histories with languages and our own language habits, form a dialectic (similar to Huot's) with who we are and what we think we come to understand individually as readers when we read a text.

Our language habits and the dialogue with ourselves that we might have about them, which come from the reading of a text, is a similar kind of a dialectic that Huot describes. Marxian theory helps understand this dialectic. Antiracist reading is at its core a process of dialogue between what we understand about the social and historical habits of language (the structural) and our personal and internal habits (the individual). Raymond Williams offers a good way to conceive of this relationship. It's a version of the Marxian dialectic between base and superstructure, or material conditions and how we theorize or talk about our conditions.

In my antiracist reading model, the base is the lived life of experiences in changing material conditions in history, conditions we can understand as White supremacist by default, while the superstructure is both in those conditions and what we make of them, or the rhetoric and theories we use as people to describe our material conditions (Williams, 1977, pp. 81–82). In a simple way, the reading dialectic that explains the practice of antiracist reading is this: On one side, there are the things we do in our lives that accumulate our reading and language habits, the systems and structures around us; on the other side, there are the ways we talk about our reading and language habits, our words about us and our language.

Williams (1977) explains that this dialectic can be understood as a mediation process. It's an active and productive process of understanding and articulating reality that is both separate from reality (not reality) yet in and a part of it (p. 98). Neither side of the dialectic is first or last. They are simultaneous and influence each other. Base and superstructure mediate one another, existing and influencing each other at the same time. So in order to practice antiracist reading, we must account for this mediated dialectic and investigate it as we use it with a text.

A similar Marxian theory of reading language can be heard in Paulo Freire's work, whose ideas of literacy are often better known to many teachers. For Freire, the word and world are the dialectic. They are consubstantial. He says, "Reading the world precedes reading the word, and the subsequent reading of the word cannot dispense with continually reading the world. Language and reality are dynamically intertwined" (Freire, 1983, p. 5). While Freire's dialectic between word and world starts with the world, thus the process is not a mediation but rather a one way reflection, the two dimensions that make up reading are present and "intertwined."

For Freire, critical reading is a process of what he calls "problematizing" one's own material and existential situation (Freire, 1970/2000, pp. 87–124). If we are being critical in our reading practices, Freire says, it should lead to asking questions about our reality and how it makes us and we make it. Our reading of words leads to rereading the world, and our experiences of the world should help us read words. The kinds of questions Freire urges are

ones that help readers pose problems about their world and the degree to which they control it and it controls them.

Putting aside Freire's insistence on the material world as first and text as second, he still offers valuable ways to craft an antiracist reading practice that assesses itself. Antiracist reading, then, is a practice of reading words and pausing to pose questions about the reader's relation to their material situation, their reality, and conceiving of those conditions as structures and systems, which are both outside and inside of them. Freire implies that the words we use can tell us a lot about who we are and where we come from. His practice, as I think mine does, urges readers to do more reading, find out more information about their world and thus themselves. It asks readers to connect how they make meaning with what the world provides them, and what other meaning-making habits there are. In this reading practice, I want students to consider their world as overlapping structures that make them, make their reading and judgments, and that they make.

From these ideas about language and judgment, I ask students to read not just to understand a text, or even engage with it in some way, but read in order to attend to their own habits of language and judgment that make their reading practice and to consider where those habits come from. If focused in the right ways, this can make students' reading practices antiracist.

If it isn't already clear, I draw much inspiration from Christian and Buddhist contemplative traditions that ask practitioners to slow down their practices, pause frequently in order to accumulate experiences and meaning they likely are moving too quickly past.[1] These traditions assume that each moment, say in a reading of a text, is always already meaning-filled. We just have to be open to experiencing that meaning more fully, or be willing to be filled with it. This idea of reading as pausing and filling is what antiracist reading practices are at their core.

For instance, when I want students to pay attention to their reading practices as always already embodied in themselves and their material conditions, I offer a small practice. At moments of concern or when they find themselves upset, angry, or even excited and joyful during a reading, I ask them to do the following:

(1) Pause for at least ten seconds.
(2) Take three deep, slow breaths.
(3) As you breathe, notice how you feel and where those feelings are located in your body.
(4) Tell yourself: "I am feeling ____, but that feeling is separate from what I'm reading on the page."
(5) Return to your reading.

This practice, which centers on the breath, is the basic template for what I'm about to offer as an antiracist reading practice. It helps readers slow down, pause, notice their reactions to a text, locate those emotions, and separate them from our ideas in order to see both our emotions and ideas more clearly. This is not to suggest that our emotional responses are not important to our judgments; instead it is to help us see when our emotions might be keeping us from understanding the fullness of our habits of language and the ways our emotions are part of our judgments. There is plenty of research and many cultural and spiritual traditions that use the breath to calm down, focus, and cultivate habits that help people do a range of things in mindful ways, ways that are self-compassionate. James Nestor's (2020) recent book offers some of that history and practices that are worth considering in writing classrooms.

Sometimes with the above practice, I include a prompting that helps students notice the places in which they are reading. What is in the room? Are they seated or lying down? Is there noise in the space? Are there others nearby? The bottom line is that antiracist reading is meant to help us be compassionate to ourselves, and notice what we draw on to make judgments and meaning around texts in order to attend to the racism that makes all that and us.

## Why We May Have A Hard Time With Antiracist Reading

Our cultural conditions for reading do not usually agree with how I'm conceiving the practice of antiracist reading, and I find it useful to help students to first recognize this condition in our contemporary lives before we attempt the practice. If students can recognize some common elements in our reading conditions in society, then they may see why it's hard to do what they are being asked to do, why they may resist, and why it isn't a personal fault but part of all of our language conditions. It also can help teachers figure out how much time and labor in reading seems most appropriate when assigning antiracist reading.

The word "antiracist" can often be a trigger for many White students, particularly ones who may have other stakes and politics that make such a word seem like a personal attack. To say that we all participate in White supremacy, that there are structures none of us can avoid that make for conditions of White supremacy and therefore make parts of us, can seem like I'm saying that some students got it easier than others, or that some White students didn't work hard for what they've accomplished. It can also seem like the teacher is forcing their racial politics onto students in a neutral classroom space, a writing class, a class that is just about clear and effective communication. Why must we make reading about race, a student might ask.

I'm not thinking in those terms when I read something, so why are you forcing me to?

The problem is, as Kendi reminds us, there are no neutral, nonracial, or apolitical spaces. Craig L. Wilkins (2007) argues this in his book-long treatment of the racial politics in all architecture and public spaces, showing the ways most public and business spaces are racially White with the racialized biases that go with that. But this racing of material, disciplinary, and figurative spaces is not new. Charles Mills (1997) explains how racing spaces and the bodies that typically inhabit such places functions in a racist Western world historically since the Enlightenment (pp. 41–42). I discuss the racing of classroom spaces at length in my discussion of the ecological places of classroom writing assessment ecologies, and I include disciplinary spaces as well since they have much bearing on the classroom (Inoue, 2015, pp. 158–174).

Politics is about power relationships and differentials, and such differentials are everywhere, even in a writing classroom. Schools have just spent most of their time pretending that classrooms are not racialized or politicized. We often pretend that what we learn in school and how we learn it is not biased. It's just neutral information and methods that only become biased by the way people use that information later. These things are just not true. Politics occur because people are different, come from different places, and interact together. This means we often make different meanings, judge in different ways, and have uneven access to power and affordances that make possible particular kinds of meaning and judgments in particular places. Why would our writing classrooms, disciplines, pedagogies, and the information that we ask students to engage with be exempt from such politics? We, teachers and schools, are not so special as to avoid the political. We are inherently political.

The saying that "history is written by the victors" is often attributed to Winston Churchill, but actually, it's likely a saying that has been around for quite some time. One such earlier version came from a U.S. senator, and it offers a way to see how invested and implicated we all are in the histories and ideas we tell ourselves, or that we've accepted unquestioningly, like writing instruction has been and should be a neutral practice, not political or racialized. This commonplace not only explains why this argument about writing classrooms is so dominant but ironically why we must pause and attend to it, question it. Matthew Phelan (2019) explains:

> In 1891, Missouri Sen. George Graham Vest, a former congressman for the Confederacy who was still at that late date an advocate for the rights of states to secede, used the phrase in a speech, reprinted by the Kansas City Gazette and other papers on the next day, Aug. 21, 1891. "In all revolutions the vanquished are the ones who are guilty of treason, even by the historians," Vest said, "for history is written by the victors and framed according to the prejudices and bias existing on their side." (para. 7)

So who historically have been the victors in the education war, in the disciplinary battles in composition, rhetoric, and the teaching of language? White, elite, monolingual, English-using men. They have historically controlled schools, universities, disciplines, business, banking, law, and all legitimate spaces of language use in society. They created the standards for writing communication with their biases, and the practices that dominante the teaching of reading and what we do with them in classrooms. We cannot avoid the racial politics of our reading practices. They are often all we have. Antiracist reading simply makes salient race in our politics of language and helps us attend to it.

Keep in mind, I draw this conclusion in part from one of the losers in one important racial war in U.S. history. Still, many students may resist conceiving of their reading practices as antiracist reading. In order to accept the kinds of propositions about language, race, and politics I've offered above, many students likely have to first be willing to entertain these ideas for a time, that is to stop fighting them, not to believe them wholeheartedly, but to use them to explore and consider reasonable alternative views of the world around them. It's not easy work, but brave, compassionate, and necessary if we want a world better than the White supremacist one we have.

But there is another problem with doing antiracist reading, and it has to do with the kind of deep attending to words, our world, and ourselves that I'm asking for, something that has little to do with race. Today we are not encouraged to attend carefully and thoughtfully to each other or think about how we come to the meanings we do when we experience language. Reading is usually an invisible act, a set of habits that we do in order to accomplish something else more important, like finishing a chapter for class or offering feedback on a draft to a colleague.

It's like driving a car, but not really thinking about exactly how that car works to get you from one place to another. When the car is working properly, we don't notice anything about the mechanics or physics of the car, because we are too busy trying to get to the store or work or home. But when the car breaks down, or makes noises, or starts to leak oil, we recognize that it functions in a particular way, using particular parts to do so, and those parts and that way have biases. They only work in a certain way. They have limitations and affordances. When our car breaks down, we are given the opportunity, if we can pause long enough, to ask what our car affords us, how it limits us, and how it does these things.

The way we interact, generally speaking, on social media, like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, is a good example of how we are habituated to read in one way, which keeps us from deeply attending to our and others' words, how we come to rehearse habits of language that resist such attending. We post something, collect "likes," and many call this being heard. But what does that act of being heard look and feel like to the listener or reader? How have those words or pictures been attended to exactly? What has the reader actually read or heard and taken from the exchange? What were the last

three things you liked or interacted with on whatever social media platform you use? Can you remember what those interactions were about? Are you sure? If you can't remember the details, or even the posts or tweets, then how can we say we've really attended to those messages, those people?

Now, I realize that social media is not a place where most folks make a habit of trying to read and engage carefully and thoughtfully. So in one sense, my example doesn't play fair with our Facebook and Twitter reading habits. But that is part of my point. Most of our experiences with text on any given day are about skimming quickly, getting the gist, finding the point or action item, and responding as quickly as we can. Taking more time to read an e-mail or even a student paper is often understood as bad, or at least not preferred. We don't usually do what I am suggesting we do. Attending to others' words means the reader pays attention to how their act of reading is an embodied and social act; how that act must always be performed by a particular body, with limitations and affordances; how that body is formed by a history of past conditions that all have limitations and affordances; how the present reading act is always in particular conditions that also have limitations, boundaries, and affordances.

Usually, our goal is to read as much as we can as quickly as we can. I'll wager that if you asked your students about their imagined best reading practices, speed and the number of words consumed in a short period of time would be important to most. But speed and sheer amount of text read are not good indicators of antiracist reading, reading that is critical of the meaning it makes and where the habits of language and judgment come from that helps a person make that meaning.

And of course, we sacrifice quite a bit when we emphasize speed and large amounts of text or ideas, and I'd argue much of what we sacrifice is self-knowledge that can help us be more thoughtful, critical, engaged, and ethical readers in the future. The bottom line is that we don't have a lot of practice at attending deeply to how we make meaning of others and their words, which means we may not know exactly what habits of language we use to make sense of what we see in front of us in language. We just use our language habits in a mostly invisible way. But what if we didn't? What if there was a way to slow down, notice, and pay attention to how we make judgments when we read and consider where those judgments originate in our lives?

So if you cannot tell what antiracist reading requires, let me make it clear. At its most basic level, antiracist reading slows down our reading process by pausing that reading often and asking certain questions in a cascading order that drills deeper into our habits of language and judgment. These habits make up our reading practice, which has biases that afford and limit our judgments. There may be other ways to ask them, which I'll illustrate below, but here's a basic template of the questions:

(1) **Breath**: Pause for at least ten seconds and take three deep, slow breaths.
(2) **Materials**: What do I think I see or hear in this text at this moment? Can I identify it?
(3) **Habits**: What habits of judgment and language am I using to make that meaning? How would I describe them and their affordances and limitations?
(4) **Origins**: Where did I get those habits in my life? What other habits might be reasonably applied here?

Step 1 prompts the reader to pause in order to provide the conditions to be as mindful as possible. Step 2 asks about the personal level of reading, one side of the reading dialectic. It's the easiest because it's likely the most accessible question to answer for most students. It's also focused on the materials in front of the reader, the words and text. Step 3 is the central question that the practice hinges on and it is about the structural that is also personal, the habits that make our reading and languaging practices. But to really inquire about them, students need some theory, or some tools to help them see or hear the habits of language and judgment around them. They often need help with naming the habits. So I'll talk about those in the next two sections. Step 4 asks the student to investigate how they come to have such habits of language and judgment personally. It's focused on the origins of habits and the reasonable possibility of other viable ones. How did something outside them come to be inside them? This third question attempts to bring the individual and the structural together.

## Mind Bugs, Fast Thinking, and How We Trick Ourselves

In order to make our slowing down, pausing, and noticing during the act of antiracist reading meaningful and productive, students need ways to identify and think about their habits of language, or the deep structures of judgment that make up how we use language and form judgments. This will allow for that critical assessment part of the reading. There are lots of ways to think about the habits we acquire and activate to read, but I've found two sets of theories particularly useful. The first comes mostly from experimental psychology. They are a set of common mindbugs or fast thinking. If we can recognize these in our own reading habits, we can understand better how we use our assumptions and biases in our reading, and where those biases come from in our lives. This allows the reader to see their biases on a landscape of other biases, equally valid and flawed.

The second set of theories comes out of a range of disciplines, most notably cultural studies, Critical Race Theory, and Whiteness studies. They are a set of common habits of language that are used so ubiquitously that they will appear to be just standard communication practices, ones that are

naturally good and not political or racially biased at all. But like all habits, they are. This doesn't make them racist or White supremacist inherently. It means they come from particular White racial places in society. But if we use them as universal, singular standards of good communication, then they do end up being White Supremacist, a condition I call White language supremacy (Inoue, 2019b). These habits offer a way to see the racial politics in our habits of language.

To help with the first list of theory tools or habits of language and judgment, let's do a thought experiment. If I said, "Learning standardized English in school is not vital to success in the business world," you might respond by disagreeing directly with that claim. But why exactly are you disagreeing? Because you've seen firsthand how standardized English is directly or indirectly vital to success in business settings? Have you really seen it? And if you have, how do you know that your experiences are a good sample of all experiences in all business settings? That is, can you imagine a world where success is not determined by how one uses a particular kind of English? If so, how might we be living in some version of that world?

In short, why do you think your experience and knowledge are enough to answer this kind of question? As you might hear in my questions, I'm suggesting that we often hear or see what we want to in others' ideas and words, and not always what is exactly on the page or what else could be read. This is a common habit, but why do we do this so often? In part, we do so because we do a lot of fast thinking. Our judgments of many things, especially those that have emotions and other commitments of ours connected to them, are not made from facts. Well, they are always made from facts, but they are just *our* personal facts that tend to be selective. It's a mindbug we all have. The term "mindbug" comes from Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald's (2016) *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. In Chapter 1, the authors discuss visual mindbugs, memory mindbugs, and social mindbugs. Each is a different way our brains trick us or make flawed sense of complex data. It's fast thinking.

We all do this kind of fast thinking all the time, much of the time out of necessity. We don't know enough about everything on which we have to make judgments and decisions, yet we still have decisions to make. The flaw in much of this reasoning, however, is that we usually don't have a lot of information to go on, and what we do have, we tend to overestimate its explanatory or supportive power. Numerous brain studies show that our brains use our initial beliefs and feelings about a topic to create a coherent story to back up our ideas about, say, the importance of learning "proper English in business settings." Psychology researchers have studied various versions of this judgment phenomenon. It's a system that our brains use to make fast judgments, ones that come to us quickly and copiously throughout each day. Often we continue to think too fast when we read. Since our

reading practices are judgment practices, they can easily use habits of fast thinking, especially if our conditions encourage lots of fast reading and not a lot of slowing down and asking questions.

This fast thinking is identified and discussed by Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel Prize winning Psychology professor from Princeton. In *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman describes one judgment system as the "availability heuristic," or a system our brains use to make judgments about any number of things (Kahneman, 2011, pp. 129–131). Here's how it works. Our brains make decisions on the information available to us, or the information we can readily retrieve in our minds that relates to the question or problem at hand, and because these instances are readily available to us, we bolster their strength as proof of our initial ideas—that is, having only them in mind, we assume they are all we need (or enough) to make a decision in the present case.

The availability heuristic reveals how our brains often substitute the question at hand with an easier more accessible question, one we are able to answer. So when reading my thought experiment above, you might read too fast and create the wrong question in your head to evaluate the statement, or decide whether to agree or not with it. That is, instead of answering, "How important is standardized English to success in business settings?" many of us answer a question like, "How important *do I see* standardized English being in business settings?" The second question is more accessible to us, but it is not the same question initially asked. And it doesn't really help you evaluate very well the statement I offered.

Doing this substitution and thinking you have a good answer to a question like this is equivalent to turning on ESPN, watching several hours of sports programming about the NBA, then concluding that women do not play professional basketball. For all you know, women do not, but that's only because you don't have enough information in front of you. Your sample is limited and biased, like most are. There wasn't any coverage of the WNBA league when you watched, or you've never looked for it in the past. The first question about standardized English in business requires a lot more data to answer, as does the women and basketball question, and it is not wise to answer either question based solely on one's own experiences alone since the nature of the questions is broad-reaching and begs for a large amount of data that one person often cannot experience by themselves.

Technically speaking, though, the WNBA example is actually an illustration of what Kahneman identifies as the WYSIATI heuristic, a similar kind of fast thinking that causes similar errors in judgment. It is like the availability heuristic because both mind bugs use limited information to make a decision. The WYSIATI or "What You See Is All There Is" heuristic occurs when you only take into account what you see, thinking mistakenly that what you see in front of you is all there is to consider when making the judgment you are currently trying to make (Kahneman, 2011, pp. 85–88).

So in order for a reader to be more mindful of habits of reading that may be activating the availability or the WYSIATI heuristics, they might pause during important moments of agreement or disagreement in a text and ask versions of the more general questions I offered above:

(1) **Breath**: Pause for at least ten seconds and take three deep, slow breaths.
(2) **Materials**: What precise question, statement, or idea am I really responding to in this moment of tension with this text? Can I underline it in the text?
(3) **Habits**: Am I asking or responding to a different question, one I can answer? What exactly is available to me that lets me answer this question and what are those ideas' limitations and affordances?
(4) **Origins**: Where in my world do I get the ideas that help me make sense or respond in this way? How do those ideas afford and limit my judgments here?

But we have more mindbugs to contend with. Our brains often look for information that confirms our initial hypotheses, that is, our initial beliefs, like those around standardized English and business settings. Some might call our initial beliefs—or the ideas we search for evidence to confirm in our minds—*bias*, thus activating another system of judgment in our brains that can lead to errors in judgment, "confirmation bias" (Gilbert, 1991; Kahneman, 2011, pp. 80–81). This typical judgment phenomenon has also been researched extensively by psychology researchers. Shahram Heshmat (2015) provides this coherent definition:

> Confirmation bias occurs from the direct influence of desire on beliefs. When people would like a certain idea or concept to be true, they end up believing it to be true. They are motivated by wishful thinking. This error leads the individual to stop gathering information when the evidence gathered so far confirms the views or prejudices one would like to be true.

> Once we have formed a view, we embrace information that confirms that view while ignoring, or rejecting, information that casts doubt on it. Confirmation bias suggests that we don't perceive circumstances objectively. We pick out those bits of data that make us feel good because they confirm our prejudices. Thus, we may become prisoners of our assumptions. (paras. 2–3)

So if the first habit of language helps students notice what may be available to them in order to make a judgment, this second habit helps them notice the ways they may be confirming their original biases and not actually considering carefully or entertaining different ideas or world views. Confirmation bias is the way our brains try to support our initial assumptions about things, things like what we are reading at the moment. Pausing at key moments during reading and paying attention to this habit means students need to

notice what details, ideas, and evidence they pick that back up their initial ideas of things and what details, ideas, and evidence they ignore or pass by, which may suggest contrary judgments and conclusions. They need to attend to both the details that seem important and those that seem less so as equally significant in understanding their response to the text or ideas in front of them. These questions might help during that pausing.

(1) **Breath**: Pause for at least ten seconds and take three deep, slow breaths.
(2) **Materials**: What data, evidence, or details in this text are important? Can I underline them?
(3) **Habits**: Why are those data, evidence, or details important to me? What details am I ignoring or finding less important and why (what's not underlined)?
(4) **Origins**: What biases (ideas and values) that I already have are confirmed by the details I considered first? Where did my biases come from in my life? What opposing biases are reasonable in this case and how?

The third habit I want to offer deals with our emotional responses to ideas. We have a lot at stake when it comes to language and ideas, some more than others. We have emotional stake in our initial opinions, and those emotions are important. No matter what someone says, their beliefs about anything are personal because they believe those things. Our emotional stakes in ideas and words, however, can get in the way of hearing other ideas carefully and attentively. Sometimes we call these emotional potholes in discussions or social settings "triggers"—that is, the ideas, words, and images that trigger a strong emotional response in some people and keep them from meaningfully engaging. But it is not usually the trigger that is the problem. It's usually what made the trigger a trigger that is worth paying attention to.

Emotional triggers are actually helpful in antiracist reading. If we can notice our emotional responses to ideas, people, or their language as we read, then we might better understand when our emotions halo onto the judgment we are making at the moment. This is another kind of fast thinking. It's called the "halo effect," and Kahneman discusses it in his book too (2011, pp. 3–4). The halo effect occurs when people take their feelings (good, bad, or otherwise) about a person or idea and use them, usually subconsciously, to make a judgment on a new instance dealing with that person or idea. Someone you like offers an argument and you start by listening in a warm fashion. You are more inclined to agree or not question someone whom you already have good feelings toward, or whom you think is smart.

This may be why many take it personally or get upset with my previous thought experiment. They may have invested a lot of time, energy, and

money into learning a standardized English in order to be successful in the business world. When they hear that standardized English is not a key to such success, it can make them mad or upset. They might feel foolish or duped. No one likes realizing they are wrong. We often get upset and push that emotional response toward those around us, or the person or text that is identifying ideas or positions that are contrary to our beliefs.

We often shoot messengers without realizing it, thinking that we are experiencing emotions because we disagree. We're often less inclined to think that we disagree because we have emotions about the person or ideas in question. And the emotional response in these cases can often keep us from understanding exactly what we are responding to. The haloing of our emotions is very strong in such cases. But it can also be subtle, as when many don't listen carefully to women or to those with a foreign accent. To inquire into the halo effect during reading, one could use these questions.

(1) **Breath**: Pause for at least ten seconds and take three deep, slow breaths.
(2) **Materials**: What details or words in this text seem to trigger an emotional response by me (good or bad)? Can I underline them?
(3) **Habits**: What exactly am I feeling when I read these words, and how do the emotions manifest? Why am I so emotionally invested in my ideas or those that come up when I see these words?
(4) **Origins**: What experiences, biases (ideas and values), or stake do I have that make these ideas so emotion-filled for me? Where did they come from in my life?

## Habits of White Language

The availability and WYSIATI heuristics, confirmation bias, and halo effect are surely habits of language and judgment we all use, but they aren't always racialized or even amount to White language supremacy. But be careful with this statement. In a world made racist already, our biases and initial ideas about things will tend to be racist. That's because structures and systems, like academic disciplines and schools, by default reproduce White supremacy in their DNA. This is even more true for particular habits in language, ones that will seem like just good writing and so apolitical to many students. But they all come from our racist histories of English and the teaching of it. Investigating them will be key to understanding what they do in our reading practices.

The presence of one habit in a text or judgment doesn't always equate to producing White supremacy, but it often can. Usually the difference is in what that instance of language or judgment produces in the places it circulates. Is the outcome of the language or judgment a racially unequal or unfair

distribution of resources, jobs, grades, etc.? Does it produce a racialized hierarchy in some way? If so, then it is White supremacist.

Understanding when White language supremacy is happening is not only in the consequences of a judgment or decision, but in how that judgment or decision is made, how the habits below are used to explain or think through language and other judgments. What ideas, values, competencies, or conditions of individuals or groups are assumed to be universal or accessible to all? Claims of universal fairness often fall into this category. It usually sounds like: "I treat everyone the same," or "I try to be fair by giving everyone the same opportunity to get X or to do Y." But we are all not the same, nor do we come from the same conditions. We all don't get to run the same race, with the same training, or the same equipment. We don't use the same Englishes, not exactly. And these differences are patterned in groups, because our society has been racially and economically segregated into groups.

Equally important to remember is that the intentions of writers, speakers, or institutions do not matter when determining whether something is White supremacist or racist. Because White language supremacy is a systemic and structural set of conditions that have been created historically, it is not an ethical blemish to say that someone is reproducing White language supremacy. When we determine that our judgments or decisions reproduce White language supremacy, we are not making any claims about the morality or goodness of people or institutions. We are identifying the way systems and their biases work in order to take responsibility, move forward, change, and make things better tomorrow.

Taking responsibility is an ethical imperative, something we do because we wish to act compassionately, not because we are guilty. Guilt is a universal condition of us all, which makes it meaningless when trying to make structural change, as we are trying to do with antiracist reading practices. Being to blame for perpetrating some injustice upon others is a judgment that is often understood as a moral failing. Taking responsibility, on the other hand, for our world is what we do because it is our world, and the vast majority of us want to make it better for ourselves, for others, and for those who come after us.

Here are the six habits of White language and judgment that can be offered to students to identify in their antiracist reading practices. Keep in mind that they are habits of language we all use and that get used by everyone, so while we cannot avoid using them, we can investigate how we use them, and how they circulate in texts and readers' practices.

- **Unseen, Naturalized, Universal Orientation to the World** — this is an orientation (or starting point) of one's body in time and space that makes certain things reachable; assumes (or takes as universal) proximities (capabilities to act and do things) that are inherited through one's shared space; an oxymoronic haunting, leaving things unsaid/unstated for the audience to fill in and contains multiple contradictions (or COIK logic, or "clear only if

known") in how it can be understood; a style of embodiment that is invisible to the person or voice, a way of inhabiting spaces that is comfortable (allows the person to "sink into the space" around the body); the space becomes an extension of the White body and its discourse in such a way that it is hard to distinguish where the White body ends and the world begins.

- **Hyperindividualism** — a stance or judgment that primarily values self-determination and autonomy as most important or most valued; self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and self-control are important; individual truth and knowledge come from mainly inside the individual, and personal insight can often be understood as universal insight (we are all the same because we are all the same inside); individual rights and privacy are often most important and construct the common good; the truth is always good to hear, no matter how painful, good, or bad it may be (each individual has the right to know the truth).

- **Stance of False Neutrality, Objectivity, and Apoliticality** — an orientation that assumes or invokes a voice (and body) or its own discourse as neutral and apolitical, nonracial; this is often voiced as a god-trick, a universal vantage or viewpoint by which to know something else in a nonpolitical or purely objective way, a view that is outside the person speaking or expressing the ideas.

- **Individualized, Rational, Controlled Self** — a stance or orientation in which the person is conceived as an individual who is primarily rational, self-conscious, self-controlled, and determined; conscience guides the individual, and sight (ocularity) is the primary way to identify the truth or understanding (seeing is proof); social and cultural factors are external constraints to the individual; meaningful issues and questions always lie within the self; individuals have problems, making solutions individually-based; both success and failure are individual in nature; failure is individual and often seen as weakness or confirmation of inadequacy; control of self is important, as is work and staying busy, or being industrious and productive.

- **Rule-Governed, Contractual Relationships** — there is a focus on the individual in a contractual relationship with other individuals, either formally or tacitly (e.g., assumed social contracts); a stance that focuses on "informed consent"; model relationships tend to negotiate individual needs; individual rights are more important and nonpolitical (good), whereas socially-oriented values and questions are less important and often political (bad) by their nature; there is an importance attached to laws, rules, fairness as sameness (treating everyone exactly the same regardless of context or circumstance), contractual regulations of relationships; little emphasis is given to interconnectedness with others, relatedness, feelings; individuals keep difficulties and problems to themselves.

- **Clarity, Order, and Control** – this is a focus on reason, order, and control; thinking (versus feeling), insight, the rational, hierarchical order (often stated

as binaries of good vs. bad; white vs. black, etc.), objective (versus subjective), rigor, clarity, and consistency are all valued highly; thinking/rationality and knowledge are nonpolitical, unraced, and can be objective; anti-sensuality is valued; words and ideas are disembodied, or extracted from the people and their material and emotional contexts from which they are created or exist; there is a limited value of sensual experiences, considerations of the body, sensations, and feelings; a belief in scientific method, discovery, and knowledge is often primary; deductive logics are preferred; usefulness and pragmatism are important measures of value and success.[2]

When students pause in their reading to ask questions about the six habits of White language, it may be useful to choose 2–3 of them to look for. In fact, pairings are good to do since they tend to reveal more paradoxes and questions. In most cases, the first habit above, an "Unseen, Naturalized, Universal Orientation to the World" is present when White language supremacy is the outcome or condition produced. This is because White racial groups have usually made it a practice of assuming that their conditions and perspectives are the right ones, reachable to all, and preferred. This is the logic of outcomes, singular standards, and prescriptive rubrics for writing assignments and courses. This means that finding this habit and, say, "Clarity, Order, and Control" in a judgment a student makes about a text will suggest White language supremacy, or how the student is already implicated in a White supremacist world through the habits of langauge they participate in from their world.

Again, to help with pausing and asking questions during one's antiracist reading practice, the following might be useful.

(1) **Breath**: Pause for at least ten seconds and take three deep, slow breaths.
(2) **Material**: What details or words in this text am I judging, evaluating, or responding to? Can I underline them?
(3) **Habit**: Which two habits of White language might my response participate in or activate? How can I read my own ideas or response as participating in these two habits?
(4) **Origins**: What experiences or biases (ideas and values) do I have that make my response in this case? Where did my habits come from in my life? Where did I get them, what do they afford me, and how do they limit me?

## A Forward Looking, Not A Conclusion

I hope what I've offered here urges you to consider how to do such work with your students during their acts of reading and judging. In these mindful

moments of attending to ourselves, to our biases and fast thinking, to our habits of language, to the structures and systems around us that make us and that we make, to the small but important ways we make sense of words and our world, we can do antiracist work. But that work can only be accomplished if we can frame our reading practices as a mediating dialectic between our independent selves and the larger socially structured world. This can show us that while we may be determined in some ways to see or understand things in one way, we are not doomed to just see it or understand it in that way alone, nor must we make everyone else see things just like us. Antiracist reading is meant to be a slow, compassionate reading, one that attends to the embodied reader in generous but brave ways.

And if we can read in antiracist ways consistently, perhaps, we might see just how interconnected we all are. We must see that how we read the text in front of us, say E.B. White's "Once More to The Lake," or Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*, or Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim At Tinker Creek*, can reveal just how much we already participate in the same structures and systems that afford decisions like the ones that led to the murder of George Floyd by a White police officer in Minneapolis, or any of the thousands of other Black Americans in the last few years (Haddad, 2020). And if more of us could see how much our habits of language and judgment are already implicated in White language supremacy, see how White supremacy is actually the norm and not the exception, we might find ways out and up, replace those structures with different ones. We might be antiracist more of the time.

## Notes

1. For the Christian tradition of *lectio divina*, or "divine reading," see Paintner (2011); for Buddhist versions of contemplative practices that read or listen to the world and others, see Hanh (1991, 1987); for a range of contemplative practices applied to a range of disciplines in higher education, see Barbezat and Bush (2014); for a theoretical look at mediation and contemplative inquiry, see chapter seven of Zajonc (2009); for another version of a similar kind of deep attentive practice that is meant to address racial microaggressions in everyday life, see Oluo (2019, pp. 175–176).
2. A version of these six habits of White language and judgment are in Inoue (2019a, pp. 399–400). I offer a deeper discussion of habits of Whiteness (or White racial *habitus*) as they relate to classroom writing assessment in Inoue (2015, pp. 47–51). I also discuss Whiteness and White language supremacy in grading in classrooms in Chapter 1 of Inoue (2019c). In each of these places, I offer other literature and research on Whiteness that informs the six habits of White language and judgment. A few that may be initially helpful are Ahmed (2007); Barnett (2000); Brookhiser (1997); Fanon (1986); Frye (1992); Kennedy et al. (2017); Myser (2003).

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