



The Power of Story

by TONYA LESLIE, Ph.D.

Oral conversation is literacy! Being able to tell a compelling story is literacy! Storytelling is a powerful identify-affirming act. When we read the stories of others we see patterns of living. Through the stories of others, children can see how powerful they can be. When children are given the opportunity to author their own stories, they learn that they can be powerful agents of change in their own lives.



LITERACY CHAMPION: DR. TONYA LESLIE

Dr. Tonya Leslie is a children's author, educational consultant, and anti-racist educator. After working in educational publishing for 20 years, she went back to her school-based roots and currently supports school districts in developing and utilizing an equity literacy lens to interrogate their educational practices and processes. Tonya is also the co-owner of [We Need 2 Talk](#), a consulting partnership with Dr. Jessica Hochman.

As a multi-racial team of interdisciplinary educators, We Need 2 Talk provides current, relevant, anti-racist education and coaching support using dialogue and [storytelling](#) as tools to tackle challenging conversations.

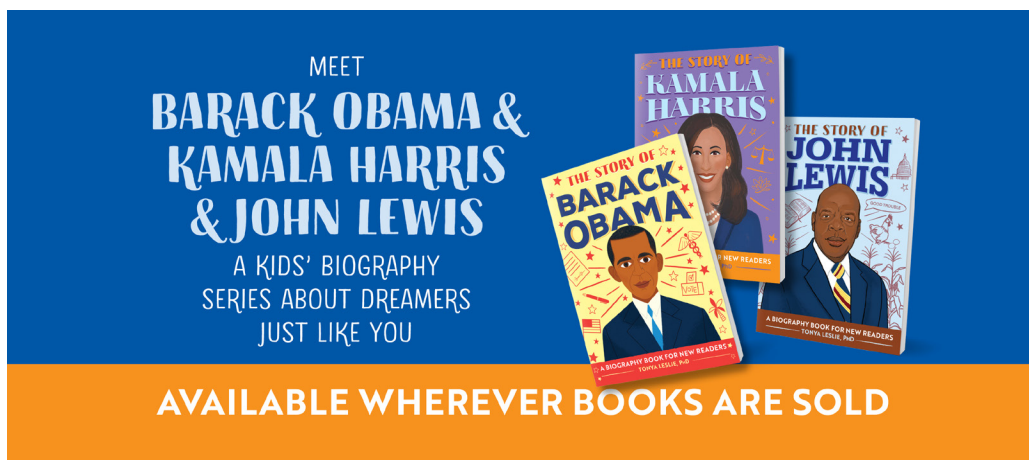
One to Know: Storytelling as a Pathway to Communication

As a reader, writer, and editor, I know that strong storytelling is a pathway to communication—especially through challenging conversations. In a world where issues around racism and sexism are part of our daily lives, it is easy to become numbed into silence. Storytelling often opens dialogue around challenging conversations. Through personal stories, we share an emotional connection. Storytelling promotes perspective-taking which is an important anti-prejudice intervention. Children need to encounter the stories of others as well as develop the skills and the courage to author their own stories.

Share Stories of Others

Recently, I wrote a series of biographies of Black American leaders and heroes. I didn't want these to be flat retellings of historical stories. Instead, I wanted these books to offer children the

opportunity to reflect on their own lives as they read. Sprinkled within each book are reflection questions for children to consider. Through reading these stories, children will consider their own capacity to act heroically and change the world.



What to Do

- **Consider what it means to be an anti-racist educator.** Being anti-racist is an action. It means stepping outside of your comfort zone and interrogating your readiness to do that work.
- **Consider the stories you share with children.** Where are the mirrors and windows in the stories they read? How do the stories children encounter promote thinking about others and themselves?
- **Find Your Voice.** Often, when conversations are challenging, we retreat into silence. Use your voice to speak out against injustice.
- **Do your own research to get in dialogue.** Be responsible for your own learning by checking out books and other resources to help you understand how to act as an ally.
- **Look for diverse stories.** Find stories about different people and different experiences to help children see outside their own worlds.

More to Know and Do

As noted, storytelling is a powerful identity-affirming act. Explore stories from your own cultural and linguistic background. What are the stories you heard growing up? What do these stories say about you and how you may have been influenced toward or away from your own familial roots? How might you use your familial stories to become a more intentional, empathetic, anti-racist educator?

How to Reach Tonya Leslie

Follow Tonya on Twitter @Tonyaleslie3 and look for updates about her work at <https://www.weneed2talk.co/> or www.tonyaleslie.com.