



# The Power of Read Woke

by CICELY LEWIS

*Read Woke means learning about others so that you can treat people with the respect and dignity that they deserve no matter their religion, race, creed, or color.*



## LITERACY CHAMPION: CICELY LEWIS

*School Library Journal* and Scholastic named Cicely Lewis the [2020 School Librarian of the Year](#). Cicely is a school librarian at Meadowcreek High School in Norcross, Georgia and the founder of Read Woke, an initiative encouraging students to read books that challenge a social norm or the status quo, give a voice to the voiceless, have a protagonist from an underrepresented or oppressed group, or provide information about a group that has been disenfranchised. She visits districts nationwide to stress the importance of libraries and certified librarians in every school.

## One to Know: Read Woke

Read Woke is a movement. It is a feeling. It is a style. It is a form of education. It is a call to action; it is our right as lifelong learners. It means arming yourself with knowledge in order to better protect your rights. Knowledge is power and no one can take it away. It means learning about others so that you can treat people with the respect and dignity that they deserve no matter their religion, race, creed, or color.

A Read Woke Book must:

- Challenge a social norm
- Give voice to the voiceless
- Provide information about a group that has been disenfranchised
- Seek to challenge the status quo
- Have a protagonist from an underrepresented or oppressed group

## The Read Woke Challenge

The Read Woke challenge started in 2017 in response to growing concern among students about the shootings of unarmed Black boys, the repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, and the lack of diversity in young adult literature. The goal was to encourage students to read books that “challenge the social norm and give voice to the voiceless,” according to founder, Cicely Lewis. The challenge has since spread to educators and students around the world, who are engaging “woke” books.

“The books Ms. Lewis’s students read through the Read Woke challenge act as windows and mirrors that allow young people to see themselves and the larger world in what they read,” says Emily Kirkpatrick, National Council of Teachers of English executive director. “That’s how you develop lifelong readers.”

## What to Do: Start a Read Work Program

Start a Read Woke program at your school or organization. All are welcome to join! Collect books that reflect the criteria; invite students to suggest their favorite diverse titles. Collections and topics to consider:

- Black Voices
- Asian Voices
- Latinx Voices
- First People Voices
- LGBTQ+ Voices
- Refugee and Immigrant Voices
- Poverty and Homeless Voices
- Social Justice Voices

I write a column for the *School Library Journal* so you can read there my book suggestions and other ideas for helping kids Read Woke. Here are my top ten 2020 Read Woke books:

### My Top 10 Books of 2020/Read Woke

1. *Black Brother, Black Brother* by Jewell Parker Rhodes
2. *Dear Justyce* by Nic Stone
3. *This Is My America* Kim Johnson
4. *Don't Ask Me Where I'm From* by Jennifer De Leon
5. *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi
6. *Genesis Begins Again* by Alicia D. Williams
7. *Clap When You Land* by Elizabeth Acevedo
8. *Dictionary for a Better World: Poems, Quotes, and Anecdotes from A to Z* by Irene Latham and Charles Waters, illustrated by Mehrdokht Amini
9. *I Am Every Good Thing* by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Gordon C. James
10. *You Should See Me in a Crown* by Leah Johnson

To see the rest of my recommendations, go to *School Library Journal* (November 5, 2020): <http://www.slj.com/?detailStory=my-top-20-books-of-2020-read-woke-libraries>—and consider subscribing to the SLJ!

## More to Know and Do

### Find Me in the News and on Social Media

- <https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=Reading-is-my-superpower-Cicely-Lewis-2020-School-Librarian-of-the-Year-Books-libraries>
- <https://www.11alive.com/video/news/education/meadowcreek-high-librarian-encourages-students-to-readwoke/85-7ab5d434-6b8c-4fd5-92e7-e0031dd0bd6c>
- [www.readwoke.com](http://www.readwoke.com)
- Social Media:  
@cicelythegreat  
@readwoke
- Select Read Woke as your non-profit on Amazon Smile
- Purchase a t-shirt from [www.readwoke.com](http://www.readwoke.com)

### Join Us in Supporting a Good Cause!

We are raising money for Read Woke and your contribution will make an impact. Whether you donate \$5 or \$500; every little bit helps. We will use the funding for our annual Read Woke scholarship. 2021 is the inaugural year for the scholarship. We plan to provide \$1,000 scholarships to deserving seniors who complete the Read Woke Challenge and write an essay that explains what reading woke means to them. Thank you for your support.

Donate to Read Woke, Inc, a non-profit organization. Mail checks or money orders to:

Read Woke, Inc.  
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Make checks payable to Read Woke, Inc