



Joy Is Our Methodology

by KASS and CORNELIUS MINOR

“There are pedagogies of joy and love that live deep within the heartbeat of a community. Sometimes they show up in school, and sometimes they do not. I see my role as a former teacher, present parent, and forever learner to surface and center that joy and love with educators, families, and most of all—kids! With books, with art, with inquiry, communities get to redefine and remake school that is radically pro-kid, joyous, and loveful.”

—Kass Minor

“My job as a teacher is not to merely teach the curriculum or even to just teach the students; it is to seek to understand my kids as completely as possible so that I can purposefully bend and remix curriculum to meet them.”

—Cornelius Minor



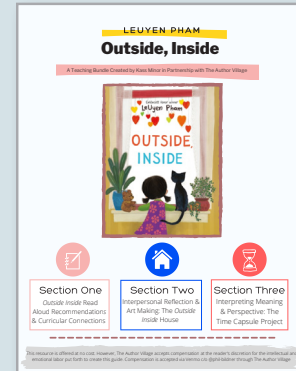
LITERACY CHAMPION: KASS MINOR

Kass Minor is an inclusive educator and community organizer who is deeply involved in local, inquiry-based teacher research and school community development. Alongside partnerships with the University of Chicago, Teachers College Inclusive Classrooms Project, The Author Village, and the New York City Department of Education, since 2004, she has worked as a teacher, staff developer, adjunct professor, speaker, and documentarian. Along with her partner and husband, Cornelius Minor, she established The Minor Collective LLC, a community-based movement designed to foster sustainable change in schools, redefining what it means to develop affirming, welcoming school culture and instructional practice through the lens of racial justice, decolonization, and liberation. Her work has recently been featured in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, KQED Mindshift, *Parents Magazine*, *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*, and NY Times Serial Podcast *Nice White Parents*. These days, you'll find Kass rekindling her inner-child through ongoing experiments in urban gardening with her two daughters, curating numerous at-home libraries (different ones—full of tea, recipes, and yes, books!), and designing jewelry in the company of her fluffy Siberian cat, Boris, and husband, Cornelius, in Brooklyn, New York.

The [Outside, Inside Curriculum](#), co-created by author/illustrator LeUyen Pham and educator Kass Minor, includes rich conversation, and multimodal activities to help caregivers and educators develop a foundational landscape for engaging kids in authentic conversation and reflective practice grounded in and connected to the 2020-21/Global Pandemic teaching and learning experience.

Kids, teachers, and caregivers have few opportunities to talk about how COVID-19 has shaped their lives, and many have become desensitized to its omnipresent force. LeUyen Pham's newest book *Outside, Inside* offers a gentle touchstone for initiating and/or continuing these conversations.

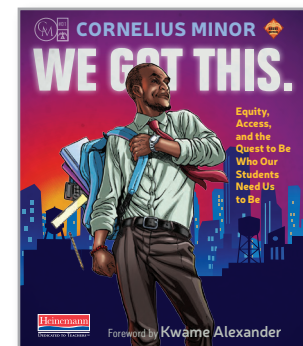
In this resource, LeUyen and Kass demonstrate how this text, paired with thoughtful activities, has the power to generate multiple opportunities for rich and sustained engagement, healthy emotional processing, and strengthened literacy for kids—both at home and in the classroom.



LITERACY CHAMPION: CORNELIUS MINOR

Cornelius Minor is a Brooklyn-based educator. He works with teachers, school leaders, and leaders of community-based organizations to support equitable literacy reform in cities (and sometimes villages) across the globe. His latest book, [We Got This](#), explores

how the work of creating more equitable school spaces is embedded in our everyday choices—specifically in the choice to really listen to kids. He has been featured in *Education Week*, *Brooklyn Magazine*, and *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*. He has partnered with The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, The New York City Department of Education, The International Literacy Association, Scholastic, and Lesley University's Center for Reading Recovery and Literacy Collaborative. *Out of Print*, a documentary featuring Cornelius made its way around the film festival circuit, and he has been a featured speaker at conferences all over the world. Most recently, along with his partner and wife, Kass Minor, he has established The Minor Collective, a community-based movement designed to foster sustainable change in schools. Whether working with educators and kids in Los Angeles, Seattle, or New York City, Cornelius uses his love for technology, hip-hop, and social media to bring communities together. As a teacher, Cornelius draws not only on his years teaching middle school in the Bronx and Brooklyn, but also on time spent skateboarding, shooting hoops, and working with young people.



One to Know: Joy Matters

Kass and Cornelius believe in powerful literacy practice—in books and in curiosity, in being responsive and in being creative, and in reading aloud in large groups and in savoring texts alone in quiet corners. They also know that none of this matters if we do reading in a way that robs kids of or fails to cultivate the joy that is such an essential component of childhood.

The two of them have made a career and a life out of the understanding that a serious approach to literacy can be joyful, and that a rigorous examination of a text does not have to be a lifeless one. In so many schools, when we consider the children who need the most support in reading, those considerations are often made without thinking about the things that generate smiles, cultivate wonder, or inspire laughter.

Kass and Cornelius always ask the question: *What would this classroom feel like if we led with joy as methodology?* For them this is not a mere query. Rather, it is an invitation to subvert and dismantle what does not serve children, reinvent and re-imagine the practices that lack vitality, and to build toward an ongoing reality that remember that reading instruction starts with a child—not with a curricular framework or a district mandate.

What to Do: Talk With—and Listen To—Kids

- **Ask children what they want to read.** Also respect the fact that they might not know. Few adults authentically listen to children, so it is okay to teach kids how to think about what they might like.
 - *If you were not at school what would you be doing?* This question informs subjects that kids will find joyful.
 - *What do you want to know how to do?* This question helps us to think about aspirations that kids might have.
 - *What kinds of people make the best friends to you? Who do you like to hang out with?* This allows us to think about opportunities that we can create for kids to read together. Reading is a social act. This also can teach us what kinds of characters kids might find appealing, or the real-life people that they would enjoy reading about.
- **Do not forget informational texts.** If a kid likes Pokemon, a pokemon manual, guide, or how-to video are all viable text options. All of these are reading.
- **Multimedia counts.** Thumbing through a cookbook to find a cool recipe is reading. Meaning is being made in this act. Similarly, watching the YouTube video of the chef preparing the meal is also reading. Meaning is being made in this act, too. In school we often forget this, and in democracy crippled by media illiteracy, this omission is irresponsible.
- **Create time for kids to look, marvel, and chat about the pictures in texts.** Magazines, catalogs, and websites are good for this. There is “literacy” in banter—even when that banter does not feel “productive.”
- **Make time for kids to revisit favorite texts.**
- **Teach kids that emotion is an appropriate response to a text.** You can laugh when something is funny. This is a sign of comprehension. You can cry when something is sad. All of these responses belong in a classroom. You don’t read to answer questions. You read to feel something.

More to Know and Do: Operationalizing Joy

Examine your personal histories in relationship to joy, reading, and school; so often, the emotional tenor of our personal experiences, for better or for worse, in connection to reading and our schooling, is projected upon our students. Dr. Yolanda Sealy-Ruiz's concept, [Archaeology of the Self](#) is an excellent place to start!

- **Learn more operationalizing joy in a collective spirit by immersing yourself in #ownvoices research that channel community and literacy from a decolonized perspective.** [Braiding Sweetgrass](#), by Robin Wall Kimmerer, and [Emergent Strategy](#), by adrienne maree brown imbue that collective shift, and help along the individual to the more connected, capacity-oriented change-making required for whole communities to experience joy.
- **Read instructional guidance for building literacy with a critical eye!** The internet provides us with an abundance of resources that support both our practical and theoretical understanding of reading development within children; some of it is helpful and some of it is not. It is important for all those working with youth and literacy to be able to identify the difference between the two. Sarah Michaels' commentary, [Déjà Vu All Over Again: What's Wrong With Hart & Risley and a "Linguistic Deficit" Framework in Early Childhood Education?](#) is an excellent mentor text for discernment upon widely accepted "best practice."

How to Reach The Minor Collective

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