# POWER IN OUR VOICES
## FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

RootED


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rooteddenver.org/powerinourvoices

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## OVERVIEW

*Power in Our Voices* showcases students and educators at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Early College in Denver, Colo., and their collective effort to transform content and instruction and centralize Black history at their school and in their school district. Their journey reflects self-determination by and for Black students and reveals what's possible when Black students lead and adults listen and follow.

At roughly 20-minutes long, *Power in Our Voices* can be shown in numerous venues, from classrooms to professional development settings, from community forums to online watch parties, from school-board meetings to the venues where state-level policy is made. This facilitator's guide presumes the viewing room is set up with the audience seated in rows, auditorium-style, for whole-group viewing and discussion. It offers two ideas for facilitative design:

1. Panel discussion, or
2. Turn and talk, with whole-group sharing. *Note: This approach can be easily adapted for settings where the audience is seated at tables.*

Online watch parties can use either set up, depending on whether facilitators use break-out rooms in applications like Zoom or Google Meets to mimic turn-and-talks.

This facilitator's guide offers potential focus areas with inquiry questions for discussion, which facilitators can use, adapt, or simply take inspiration from, based on desired outcomes with their audience. It provides specific steps to help you prepare your event, facilitate well and continually improve.

The guide concludes with appendices that go deeper, sharing some resources used at Dr. Martin Luther King Early Jr. College (DMLK) and also delving into national issues that relate to the film's themes. Facilitators can draw from these appendices for use in screening events as conditions permit; for example, appendices can be used to create inquiry questions with panelists with expertise in relevant areas. Facilitators and hosts also can adapt them as follow-up resources to further engage and empower audience members after the film's screening.

## POTENTIAL FOCUS AREAS FOR DISCUSSION

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**The following passages provide context around themes raised in the film and offer possible inquiry questions to support discussion. Select focus areas and tailor questions for your audience and against your hoped-for outcomes.**

### Black History Is American History

As Kaliah Yizar, a student from DMLK said in the film, "For Black students like me and the people next to me, learning our history empowers us far more than a year-long history unit focused on the same white people we've been forced to learn about since elementary school." Her experience reflects the Eurocentrism of U.S. History textbooks, which means they are focused on white people and white-affirming narratives. Our textbooks are simultaneously a manifestation of institutionalized racism and a tool to perpetuate institutionalized racism, as generation after generation re-learn the same white-focused narratives. (See Appendix B for more information.)

> Who benefits when we teach Black history as American history?
>
> What systems are challenged when we teach Black history as American history?
>
> How does teaching Black history as American history increase teachers' ability to serve all students well?
>
> How does teaching Black history as American history promote positive identity development for all students?
>
> How does teaching Black history as American history increase all students' readiness for participation in our diverse democracy?

### Black Womanhood

In the introduction to their book *A Black Women's History of the United States*, Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross write: "It is our responsibility to tell Black women's histories, to continue to resist the forces that attempt to marginalize Black womanhood, and to help support and inspire Black women wherever they are." (See Appendix A for more information about this book.)

*Power in Our Voices* showcases Black women who are making new history in Denver, as they transform how American history will be taught to generations of students and educators alike.

> As you watched the film, did you notice the predominance of Black women? Why does this matter?
>
> What social forces seek to marginalize Black womanhood—and minimize Black women's leadership?
>
> How is Black women's history American history?
>
> How much do you think you know about Black women's history? Why?
>
> How do the Black women in *Power in Our Voices* lift up Black womanhood?
>
> How do the Black women in *Power in Our Voices* inspire you?

## Nurturing Voice

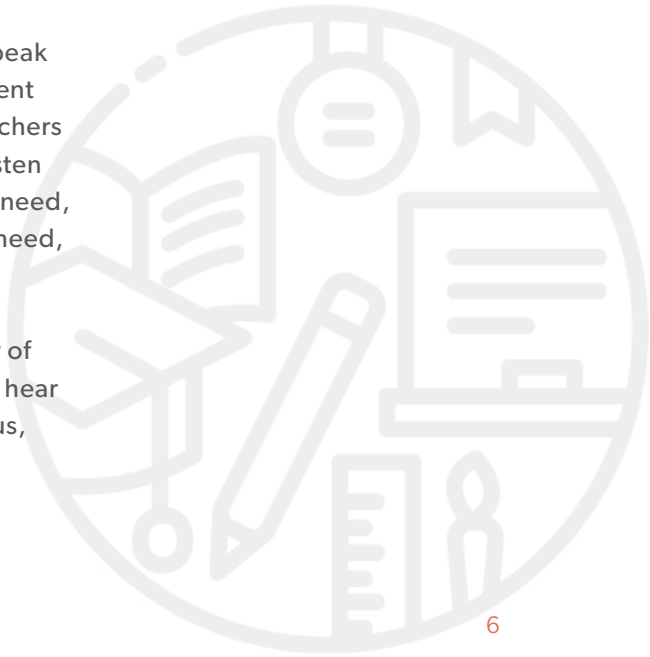
DMLK students exercised their voice with their principal, with their history teachers, with the Denver Board of Education, with the media, and, after the killing of George Floyd, through media of their own design: a new podcast. Reflecting on testifying at a school board meeting, student Jenelle Nangah shared, "We didn't want to mess up. We felt like we had so much on our shoulders. … It literally felt like we were carrying on our ancestors' legacy. … Yeah, it was nerve-wracking, but afterwards it was so joyful."

> For some students in the film, finding their voices was a process, a unique tool to be nurtured along the way. What can get in the way for you, in using your voice to stand up for your beliefs? What can you do to nurture your voice?
>
> The students certainly faced resistance to their voices, including hate mail and death threats, yet they continued to voice their beliefs. What motivates you to move past resistance to your voice?
>
> Students spoke to many benefits of using their voices, for themselves and for others. How does using your voice benefit you? How does it benefit others?

## Hearing vs. Listening

In multiple moments in the film, students and adults speak to the power of listening. Alana Mitchell, a DMLK student summarized this way: "Some advice that I have for teachers that want to support their students are basically just listen to them, and when they're telling you things that they need, you need to work your hardest to get them what they need, because they're asking for it for a reason."

Hearing is defined as "the process, function, or power of perceiving sound." One definition of "listening" is "to hear what someone has said and understand that it is serious, important, or true."



> How did educators at DMLK, teachers and the principal, demonstrate that they listened to Black students?
>
> How do you know when you are being listened to, rather than just being heard?
>
> What can get in the way of listening to Black students? How can adults remove these barriers?

## Teacher Empowerment

Teachers at DMLK felt fully empowered to revise their history curriculum. They didn't wait to make changes with the next high-school curriculum adoption by the school district's central office. They started doing it immediately, in Google docs, from their hotel rooms in Washington, D.C.

> What conditions existed at DMLK that empowered teachers to change curriculum immediately?
>
> Did DMLK's teachers have "permission?" If so, from whom?
>
> What obstacles can teachers face when they want to address problematic content in district-adopted textbooks or curriculum? How can we remove those barriers?

## White Teachers, Black History

Principal Grayson recalls in the film, "[The students] came to me and they said, 'All of our history teachers are white.'" DMLK is not alone: 79.3% of public school teachers in the U.S. are white. Just 7% of public school teachers nationally are Black, and they are leaving the profession at alarming rates. In Denver, the Bailey Report documented numerous reasons why Black educators leave, nearly all of which relate to racism in the school system. As Principal Grayson notes, however, the white teachers at DMLK "get it. They get it."

> What were some experiences and tools that the white history teachers at DMLK leveraged to ensure their curricular changes were culturally responsive and responsible?
>
> Why might some worry about white teachers leading curricular changes to teach Black history as American history? What safeguards might need to be put in place?
>
> How do white teachers need to "show up" in this work? What do you think Principal Grayson meant when she said, "They get it"?

## "We Are Not Satisfied"

After working with history teachers to transform curriculum at their own school, DMLK students saw an opportunity to take a next step: transform curricular content throughout the district. As one student shared, "If you have a system that is flawed, you'll never know that your system is flawed, if you don't actually ask the people in the system to give you feedback." Give feedback, they did, drafting the Know Justice, Know Peace Resolution to address "the lack of racial representation in histories being taught throughout the district."

In his most famous speech, DMLK's namesake, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., paraphrased from the Book of Amos, saying: "We are not satisfied and will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream." DMLK's students made consistent progress and yet kept looking for that next step to create more positive change. The students at DMLK were (and are) not satisfied; they kept (and keep) pushing for progress.

> What is a racial justice issue about which you are passionately "not satisfied"?
>
> Who are the people impacted by that issue, that system? What is their "feedback" on that issue or system? How do you know?
>
> How does the fiery sense of not being satisfied motivate you? How else does it make you feel?
>
> What would it look like if justice were to roll "down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream?" Can we ever be truly satisfied? Should we be?

# DESIGNING YOUR FACILITATION

## DESIGNING YOUR FACILITATION

**We suggest two facilitative approaches to whole-group discussion, when using auditorium-style seating:**

1. **A panel discussion, or**
2. **Turn-and-talk with whole group reflection. As noted previously, turn-and-talk can be adapted for venues where audience members are seated at tables.**

### STEPS

**1. Prepare with representatives of your intended audience.** Even the best facilitators should not work in isolation. Empower representatives from the desired audience to identify hoped-for outcomes with you and to design the program and facilitation approach with you.

**2. Pre-select focus areas for discussion and identify inquiry questions you want to use.** The students and educators in *Power In Our Voices* grapple with a variety of issues in the short film and gift to the film's audience a rich array of possible focus areas. Assuming time is limited, which it usually is, pre-select focus areas for your discussion; do this with some members of your intended audience ahead of time, against the hoped-for outcomes you've identified. Consider:

- **a.** What is the audience's lived experience in relation to the themes in *Power in Our Voices*?
- **b.** What do you know about the audience's readiness for discussions about race and racism? Start with a focus area that sits close to their comfort zone; pick another that pushes beyond that zone.
- **c.** What is the audience's most direct sphere of influence, i.e.student-led spaces, with families, with policy makers, classrooms?

**3. If you are using a panel, select and prepare with panelists.**

- **a.** Select two to four panelists, depending on time available. Ensure your facilitative agenda affords time for all panelist voices.
- **b.** Include representatives of your intended audience as panelists.
- **c.** Select representatives who have lived experience with your intended focus areas.
- **d.** To state the obvious, include Black people as panelists. This film is about Black self-determination.
- **e.** Ensure panelists watch the film in advance and be sure you share focus areas and inquiry questions with them, so they can prepare.
- **f.** Set expectations together about how the panel will be moderated, i.e. given time constraints, how long will panelists have to respond to each question?

**4. If you are using turn-and-talk, we recommend using two facilitators,** which can symbolically invite more voices into the whole-group spaces. Ideally, facilitator pairs will:

**a.** Have worked well together previously.

**b.** Bring different styles and presences into the room.

**c.** Visually represent the film's theme, and the audience's identities.

**5. Design for action.** Each audience member should leave the discussion having made a commitment to take a specific action. Do not skip this step. Identify a method you will use to collect audience member's commitments to action—a Google spreadsheet that audience members can add to in real time (here's a template) or even printed postcards that audience members can fill out in the room and that you can later mail back to them.

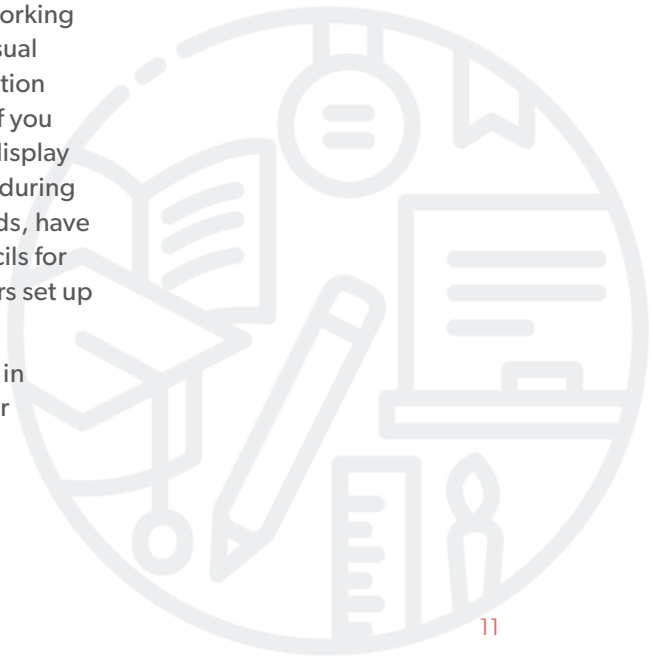
**6. Plan your time in detail, and workshop your facilitator agenda with hosts, tech supports, audience representatives and panelists, if using a panel.** *Power in Our Voices* is roughly 20-minutes long. Backwards design your facilitation plan, based on the time the group will have, whether that's a class period or a two-hour community event. (In classrooms, consider watching the film as homework if your school provides laptops or other tech to students; reserve class time for discussion.)

**a.** A templated example of a panel agenda is here.

**b.** A templated example of a turn-and-talk agenda is here.

**7. Address set-up needs in advance.** If you'll be working in a large room and with a large audience, have audio-visual equipment set up and tested beforehand, such as projection and audio for the film and roving mics for the audience. If you are using turn-and-talk, we recommend you create and display inquiry questions for audience members to refer back to during their turn-and-talks. If you are using handouts or postcards, have those materials ready in advance, including pens or pencils for postcards. If you are using a panel, have a table and chairs set up in the front of the room.

**8. Assign a note-taker** to capture themes that arise in whole-group conversation to support follow up and for learning and reflection by the event's planning team.



**9. Adjust in real-time.** Things will not go exactly as planned. Go with your gut, and lean on panelists or your co-facilitator for in-the-moment support, as needed.

**10. Debrief the event within 72 hours** with your key collaborators, with a learning posture. Consider sending a short, post-event survey to secure audience feedback about their experience immediately after the event. Use a debrief format that works best with your group, whether that is a casual conversation or a more formal protocol, like an After Action Review. Capture what worked well and what you might do differently next time. Please share what you learn with us, so we can improve future versions of this facilitator's guide.

**11. Follow up.** Facilitators and/or hosting organizations should pre-plan how and when they will follow-up with audience members after the screening to support intended action. You asked them to commit to an action, and you promised to follow-up. Make sure you keep your word. If you also promised to connect them with others interested in similar action steps, do that as well.

> "We were all so filled up; we had so many emotions."
>
> *- DMLK STUDENT JENELLE NANGAH*

## Facilitating Critical Conversations About Race

*Power in Our Voices* invites critical conversations about race. According to Learning for Justice, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, a critical conversation is "any discussion about the ways that injustice affects our lives and our society. It's a conversation that explores the relationships between identity and power." Facilitating these conversations requires specific preparation by facilitators, as positive and negative emotions can run high, lived experiences can take on profound meaning in discussions, and some will resist truths new to them.

We strongly encourage facilitators using *Power In Our Voices* to purposefully prepare for facilitation of this critical conversation. One resource that can help is Learning for Justice's Let's Talk, which is designed to support teachers in facilitating critical conversations in classrooms and is applicable in any venue and with any audience.

# APPENDIX

# APPENDIX A: DIG DEEPER INTO THE DMLK BOOKSHELF

The film shows quick glimpses of books at DMLK. Among the resources seen in the film and otherwise used at DMLK:

## DMLK's The Take Book Recommendations

https://www.smore.com/9p6wm

Each of the DMLK students featured in the film lists her favorite titles, and why these are must-reads for students and educators who want to better understand the "power and the beauty that they hold."

## Black History 365 (BH365)

https://www.blackhistory365education.com/

BH365 creates "cutting-edge resources that invite students, educators, and other readers to become critical thinkers, compassionate listeners, fact-based, respectful communicators and action-oriented solutionists." Resources include a textbook and professional development opportunities. Their resources are central to DMLK's approach and also are being leveraged by Denver's school district as it strengthens its U.S. history curriculum. DMLK students serve on the program's student advisory board.

## Know Justice Know Peace: The Take

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCA9dFxJWd-MsAconSkWV9zw

Created and run by DMLK students, this podcast voices the brilliance of Black people and centers the Black experience in issues impacting the DMLK community, the school district, Denver, the nation and the world.

## *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* by Bettina Love

"Teachers, parents, and community leaders must approach education with the imagination, determination, boldness, and urgency of an abolitionist. Following in the tradition of activists like Ella Baker, Bayard Rustin, and Fannie Lou Hamer, *We Want to Do More Than Survive* introduces an alternative to traditional modes of educational reform and expands our ideas of civic engagement and intersectional justice."

> Buy from the Black-owned Tattered Cover bookstore.
>
> Numerous free resources can be found at the Abolitionist Teaching Network, which the author co-founded.

### *A Black Women's History of the United States*

by Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross

"In centering Black women's stories, two award-winning historians seek both to empower African American women and to show their allies that Black women's unique ability to make their own communities while combating centuries of oppression is an essential component in our continued resistance to systemic racism and sexism. Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross offer an examination and celebration of Black womanhood, beginning with the first African women who arrived in what became the United States to African American women of today."

> Buy from the Black-owned Tattered Cover bookstore.
>
> A free discussion guide is available from the publisher here.

### *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*

by Michelle Alexander

"*In The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander tirelessly researches both the legal history of America's Jim Crow past and the current legal policies that contribute to the mass incarceration of Black people. The text adds significantly to scholarship that contextualizes rates of incarceration among Blacks and critiques of social and economic inequality."

> Buy from the Black-owned Tattered Cover bookstore.
>
> Free organizing and teaching guides are available here.

## APPENDIX B: DIG DEEPER INTO THE TEXTBOOK INDUSTRY

Growing up, I never really learned Black history, and I really didn't know what slavery was until I got near fifth grade. My teacher would just teach me about slavery during Black History Month, and then they would teach me the main components of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, and that's really all they would teach us. And, after Black History Month ended, unfortunately, so did talking about [being] Black."

*- DMLK STUDENT DAHNI AUSTIN.*

**A truth:** Two states — Texas and California — drive the content of nearly all U.S. History textbooks, and selection of that content is highly politicized.

**Another truth:** In responding to those political pressures, neither of the two U.S. History textbook companies that dominate the market comprehensively cover Black history as American history in their textbooks. That means, when school districts seek to adopt new curriculum, they often cannot locate a textbook that fully teaches the history of Black people and, moreover, most often encounter material that is highly Eurocentric (focused on white people.)

***Possible focus areas and inquiry questions:***

**To address challenges with textbooks, school districts or schools sometimes supplement textbooks with additional content.**

What are the benefits of supplementing textbooks?

What are the downsides of Black history being addressed through supplemental content?

How might we minimize those downsides?

What are potential barriers to supplementing the content of textbooks? How might we overcome them?

What supports do educators need to effectively supplement textbook content?

How can students be involved in the selection of supplements?

How can Black people, whose history will be told, be involved in the selection of supplements?

**Other times, school districts and schools choose to teach Black history courses as separate offerings from U.S. history courses.**

What are the downsides of Black history being addressed through separate course offerings?

How might we minimize those downsides?

What are potential benefits of Black history being addressed through a stand-alone course offering?

How do we maximize these benefits?

In these situations, what expectations might we create for collaboration between educators teaching Black history and U.S. history?

**Yet other times, school districts or schools create their own U.S. history curriculum from scratch.**

What are the benefits of designing a curriculum from scratch?

What are potential barriers or pitfalls to designing curriculum from scratch? How might we overcome them?

What supports do educators in schools or in a district's central office need to create curriculum from scratch?

How can students be involved in the design?

How can Black people, whose history will be told, be involved in the design?

**What would it look like to push back against the two big companies that produce most U.S. history textbooks?**

What do we need to learn about the industry and what drives it?

What organizations already are working on this issue? With whom could we collaborate?

How can we organize locally to take a step towards national impact?

### Break Out of the "Big Two" Box

Independent textbook developers provide critical alternatives to textbooks created by the two large textbook companies.

One to consider: Black History 365's textbook documents "the unique stories of Black persons, groups, and cultures in North America, beginning in Ancient Africa continuing to modern events and movements. This interactive history/social science textbook can be used independently or as supplemental text and includes interactive instructor resources that will engage all learners. The gateway to connecting history to daily life, this transcendent approach to American history allows students of all ethnicities to engage in meaningful conversations with teachers, peers, and their families… through the lens of Black History."

**Learn more about DMLK's approach to using this resource.**

## APPENDIX C: DIG DEEPER INTO THE "CRITICAL RACE THEORY" CONTROVERSY

When filming began for *Power in Our Voices*, movements had emerged in 28 states to ban "critical race theory" (CRT) in public schools. CRT is an academic framework developed by legal scholars that examines how policies and the law perpetuate institutionalized racism. The efforts to ban CRT are not actually about this discrete area of legal theory, however. They are about banning the teaching of inclusive history, including the full history of Black people and the actual history of white people.

This is not the first time politicians have banned content and instruction about people of color in public schools. In this way, history is repeating itself, and, to be completely clear: these bans require "educators to lie to students through omission, euphemism, and sanitized accounts of the past and present; these bills are anti-education laws as surely as those that once made it illegal for enslaved people to learn to read. They are an attempt to hide this nation's racist past to more freely pursue a racist future."

In many ways, the DMLK community has made sure—through the local Board of Education's passage of its Know Justice, Know Peace Resolution — that educators in Denver will teach the truth, a fuller version of the truth than they ever have. Still, activists who oppose teaching full and inclusive history have begun showing up at school-board meetings, calling for a bans on teaching about CRT and racism and opposing tenets of the Know Justice, Know Peace Resolution.

***Possible focus areas and inquiry questions:***

Designing, implementing and protecting changes to Denver's curricula is a long-game, one tied to the larger national construct.

As Dahni Austin said in her testimony to the Denver Board of Education, "We want to know more, and you should want to know more, too."

> How can we counteract the emerging voices in our community who do not want to know more—and do not want true history taught in our schools?
>
> In Denver, the school board is elected, and its members change. How can we ensure future school board members keep commitments to teach true history in our schools?

What do we need to know about the national landscape to understand and effectively counteract what is emerging locally?

How might we, in Dr. King's words, "remain awake through this revolution" and sustain and expand our "arena of social action"?

When DMLK students launched their podcast, they pointed to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as an example of youth empowerment in the Civil Rights Movement. Stokley Carmichael who led SNCC, and later changed his name to Kwame Ture, once wrote, "One does not fight to influence change and then leave the change to someone else to bring about."

Who is charged with bringing about the change to curricula in Denver?

How are Black people, whose histories are being told, empowered in changing the curriculum?

How are students directly empowered in changing the curriculum?

How are educators directly empowered in changing the curriculum?

How do we know the work is getting done?

How do we know the work is getting done well?

How do we know the work will be used in classrooms?

How do we know the work will be used well in classrooms?

**MUST READ**

Hear what one Denver educator has to say about the CRT controversy and proactive steps schools should take.

## END NOTE: REJECTING WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

Toward the end of the film, one DMLK student shares her hope for what lies beyond: "I hope that one day in our society people will be able to live without fear, and there won't be any fear related to their skin color or related to their disabilities or to anything they can't control." Students in the film also speak to mental health issues, and the Know Justice, Know Peace Resolution itself speaks to "Black, Indigenous, and Latino communities."

Advancing shared interest and resistance with people from various groups who experience oppression is rejection of white supremacy culture, which tells us we must make false either/or choices due to resource or other scarcity and fight with each other. White supremacy culture gets people of color to fight with each other—and encourages people from other oppressed groups to fight with people of color—so that no one is focused on undoing racism and oppression.

White supremacy culture wants us to believe that we can either influence positive change for Black people or Indigenous people. That is a lie. We absolutely can do both—and more.

In Denver, we will, thanks to the students at DMLK.

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