

BLACK HISTORY MONTH
“Why I Teach My Children”
Dr. Paul B. Winkler
Retired Educator (50 years)

I have seen and read about the results of bias, bigotry and prejudice in the form of genocide – so I, a Caucasian, teach my children about black history to eliminate stereotyping, scapegoating and intolerance. Through education there is the power to reduce bias and prejudice. Of course, I also teach my children about the wonderful world in which we live because of the contributions of African Americans who invented, discovered, wrote, painted, protected and made our lives better. Examples include the inventor of the door knob, a liberator of Buchenwald, the inventor of the golf tee, Langston Hughes the writer, Marian Anderson the vocalist, inventors of the elevator and gas range, and of course the list can go on and on.

I teach my children because I believe in Martin Luther King’s words in his - I Have A Dream speech, “Judge each individual by their character and deeds, not by the color of their skin.”

I teach my children so that the story of Tim and David, two kindergarteners, has a better ending.

Tim and David upon entering kindergarten on the first day begin to play with the trucks in the classroom. They play together, with the trucks, whenever they get the chance. After months of the parents hearing the names of Tim and David, a play date is arranged. David’s mother upon opening the door for Tim and his mom meet the African American family her son David has spoken of so often. David and Tim never saw color, they only saw trucks. By third grade though they are not playing with trucks, they hardly play or hang out together. By 5th grade they are sitting at separate tables in the cafeteria and by high school they sit in different sections at the basketball games. At graduation, Tim and David nod to each other with that remembrance of how much they liked each other.

I believe that the song in the movie South Pacific “You Have to be Carefully Taught” is a clue to what happened to Tim and David. You have to be carefully taught who to fear, who to be afraid of and who to trust before you are 5 or 6 or 7 or 8. This is the battle we must win, “to teach our students to appreciate, respect and care about one another.

I teach my children and all who will listen of a lesson I have learned from a wise individual. While I feel that I understand, care, and have empathy for people who are victims of prejudice, I am reminded that I can never really feel what they feel when an African American tries to hail a cab, walk in a jewelry store or is pulled over in their car. I can never completely understand, for my face is not black.

So I implore all whose work deals with policies and decisions that effect students, parents, staff and community, to look around the table at the decision makers and make sure that the group represents the people being affected by the decisions.

So I teach about black history so that my heirs will live in a safer, better world then we have today.