



Kwanzaa and Me: A Teacher's Story

Vivian Gussin Paley

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"All these white schools I've been sent to are racist," Sonya says. "I'd have done better in a black school. I was an outsider here." These are hard words for Vivian Paley, whose own kindergarten was one of Sonya's schools, the integrated classroom so lovingly and hopefully depicted by Paley in *White Teacher*. Confronted with the grown-up Sonya, now on her way to a black college, and with a chorus of voices questioning the fairness and effectiveness of integrated education, Paley sets out to discover the truth about the multicultural classroom from those who participate in it. This is an odyssey undertaken on the wings of conversation and storytelling in which every voice adds new meaning to the idea of belonging, *really* belonging, to a school culture. Here are black teachers and minority parents, immigrant families, a Native American educator, and the children themselves, whose stories mingle with the author's to create a candid picture of the successes and failures of the integrated classroom. As Paley travels the country listening to these stories, we see what lies behind recent moves toward self-segregation: an ongoing frustration with racism as well as an abiding need for a nurturing community. And yet, among these diverse voices, we hear again and again the shared dream of a classroom where no family heritage is obscured and every child's story enriches the life of the schoolhouse.

"It's all about dialogue, isn't it?" asks Lorraine, a black third-grade teacher whose story becomes a central motif. And indeed, it is the dialogue that prevails in this warmly provocative and deeply engaging book, as parents and teachers learn how they must talk to each other, and to their children, if every child is to secure a sense of self in the schoolroom, no matter what the predominant ethnic background. Vivian Paley offers these discoveries to readers as a starting point for their own journeys toward community and kinship in today's schools and tomorrow's culture.

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