



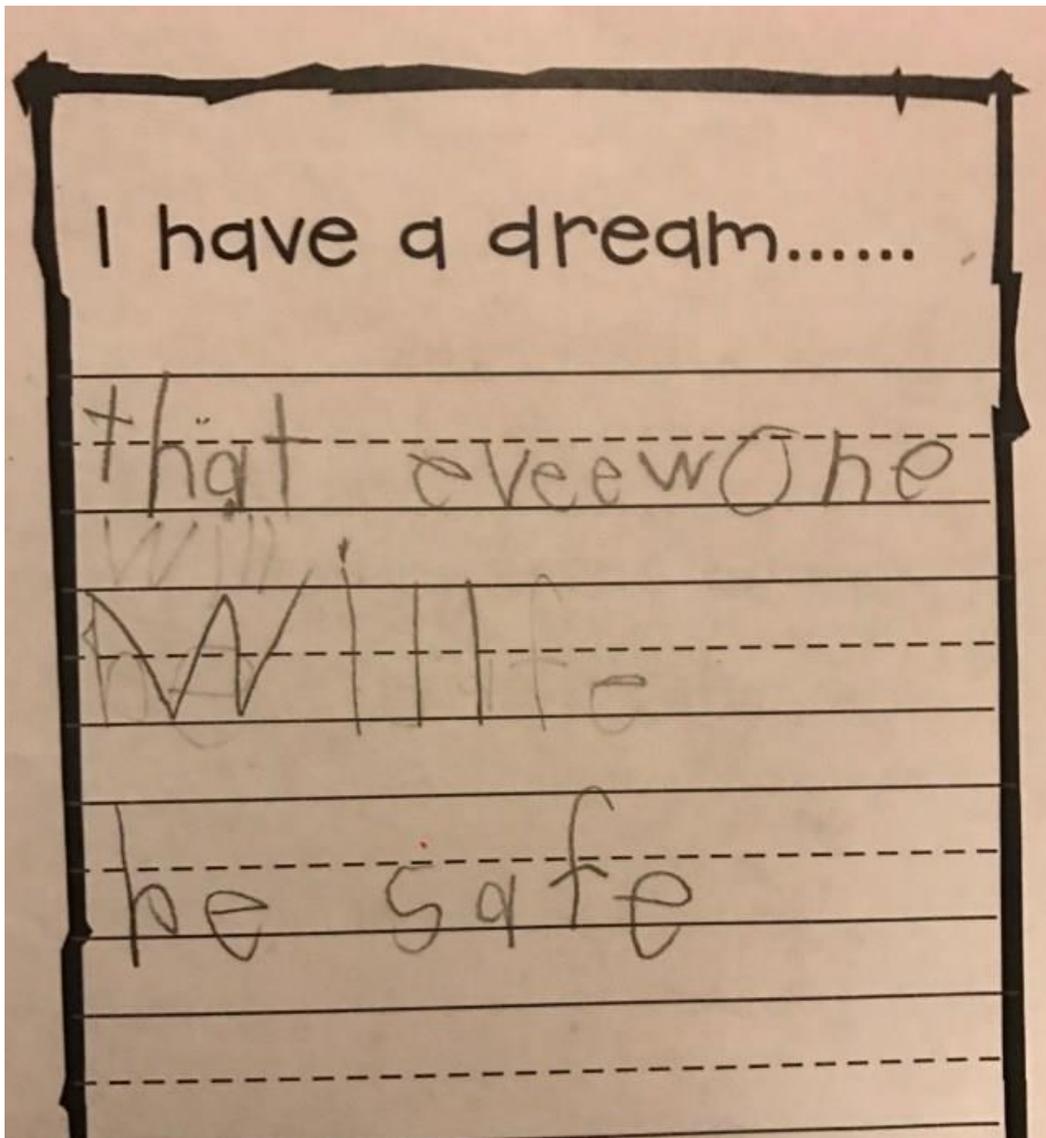
My Son's Teacher Told Him that Dr. King Did Not See Color

Posted on January 20, 2020 by Educator Barnes

When I was a kid, I experienced education at school and education at home. In our living room were two large bookshelves. On the shelves were books my parents purchased to

expand our learning. Many of these books focused on black people and black history. When I became a parent, I quickly understood why my parents felt the need to do this. Not only did I follow in their footsteps and supplemented the education my children received at school, but I also addressed misinformation they received. This began in kindergarten.

My twin sons were in separate classes in kindergarten. When January rolled around, the kindergarten teachers began including Dr. King in the curriculum. My sons learned that everyone was not treated the same. They were also asked to reflect upon what dream they wanted. One of my sons wrote, "I have a dream that everyone will be safe."



Kindergarten assignment – January 27, 2017

Also, during January 2017, the entire kindergarten went to The Children's Museum of Indianapolis. After I took the group I was chaperoning to the floor, "[The Power of Children](#)," I asked them what they had learned in school that month. Some students shared what they had learned about Dr. King. I had

my group write a reflection about how they could be like the children featured in the exhibit and make a difference. One of my sons wrote, "help people."



Educator Barnes' son – January 20, 2017

Overall, I was feeling good about what my children were learning until my son came home and told me what he had learned one day.

I asked, "Tell me one thing you learned today?" while I was getting ingredients out of the cabinet to start making dinner. One of my sons said, "Dr. King was colorblind." I closed the cabinet door and said, "What did you say?" He replied again, "Dr. King was colorblind." Then I said, "What else did your teacher say?" My son went on to explain that his class listened to a song about Dr. King, and he heard that Dr. King was colorblind. I then emailed the teacher and asked when I could meet with her.

We met later that week, and she showed me the song called, "A Man Named King." It is sung to the tune of "Michael Row the Boat Ashore." Verse two of the song was the one thing my son remembered when I asked him what he learned earlier that week.

Now, Martin's eyes were colorblind, Alleluia.

For he loved people of every kind, Alleluia.

He had a dream for you and me, Alleluia.

He knew that all men must be free, Alleluia.

I told the teacher my husband and I found the verse problematic. I told her that it was because Dr. King saw color that he was fighting for civil rights. I'm not sure she understood why this was problematic, and I don't know if she stopped using this song, but I'm glad I spoke up about why my family and other black families might have an issue with the song. When a teacher teaches that a great civil rights leader like Dr. King does not see color, how do I know if that teacher really sees and understands my black child?

If Dr. King only appears in the school curriculum in January and black people only appear in the curriculum in February, then there is a strong possibility the teacher does not fully understand the importance of black history; black history might not be taught correctly. Being culturally responsive means students see themselves in the curriculum throughout the year and not when a certain day or heritage month rolls around.

I'm asking for teachers to do better especially the teachers who are teaching my children. Later that school year, my husband and I took our sons to Washington D.C. during spring break to see the Dr. King monument. Every child might not have parents that can provide those additional experiences or supplement education at home like my parents did when I was a kid, so it is imperative that teachers get it right.

I'm not afraid to have a conversation about the curriculum if needed, but I also want to get to a place when I don't have to have those conversations. I want to be part of the solution, so the next year when my sons were in first grade and I was asked to recommend some books featuring black people, I did. Guess what...it wasn't even February.

As we reflect upon Dr. King's legacy, we must remember he is more than a day. He is more than a person to cover during Black History Month and on his birthday. His principles and beliefs should be of focus year-round. Parents will really know if this is the case if children learn about their heritage and culture and by how often their culture is incorporated into lessons throughout the school year.