PHOENIXVILLE, PA—April 29, 2011—Since the election of an African-American president, many people in our country believe we are a post-racial society, “colorblind” on the issue of race. If that’s true, then why are so many urban schools, often with populations of students of color as high as 96%, failing miserably (as pointed out in the critically acclaimed documentary Waiting for “Superman”) while in dominantly white suburban schools less than an hour away, students earn significantly higher standardized test scores and are more likely to graduate with better opportunities for success? And why does research show that racially and ethnically mixed neighborhoods have lower property values than mostly white neighborhoods?

Marianne Modica, an assistant professor of Early Childhood Education at Valley Forge Christian College and a PhD student in Childhood Studies at Rutgers University, has crafted a young adult novel to help foster discussion about the subtle ways racism exists in today’s society. In her novel entitled The R Word, Modica tells the story of Rachel, a sheltered Italian-American teen who begins to think deeply about race for the first time and about what it means to be white. The R Word is the story of her painful discovery and stubborn metamorphosis as she confronts contemporary racism.

The R Word is endorsed by educators as an excellent tool to inspire productive dialogue. Dr. Debra Brown, MSW, M.Div, D.Min, says, “The R Word is a poignant story of a girl’s self discovery and race relations. It is a story designed for younger audiences, yet timeless in its message of the need for reconciliation. Marianne Modica weaves a mosaic fabric that is authentic, and can foster discussions in the classroom, youth groups and family settings. My twelve-year-old daughter and I read this book and it opened a portal to topics on interracial dating, self awareness and family relations. I highly recommend this book.” After reading the novel, Karen VanCott, a middle school language arts educator, responded, “Modica's vivid portrayal of the struggles of young adolescents as they try to find out who they are and how they fit into this confusing world is spellbinding. With its teen-friendly style of writing, plot development, and character relationships, The R Word compels readers to keep on turning the pages to find out what will happen next!”

Modica believes race is an issue we still need to discuss. She concludes the book’s afterword with this assertion: “James Baldwin once said, ‘Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.’ I know that our country has made great progress along the bumpy road to racial equity since the days of the Civil Rights Movement. That progress would not have been possible if people hadn’t been willing to face the ugly reality of racism head-on. But, as I’ve tried to show [in The R Word], we’re not there yet. As Rachel discovered, the effects of past racist attitudes and policies live on in a variety of ways. Because many of us think we’re not supposed to talk about race any more, racism is much harder to see now than it used to be, and things that are hard to see are even harder to change.”

the R word
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