

FIGURE 4.1 Family Letter From Kara Pranikoff Regarding the Derek Chauvin Trial

April 22, 2021

Dear Families,

We gathered in school yesterday and, as is often the case, a time to talk about *World Events* was listed on our schedule. As the students came in and started their morning routine of unpacking and getting ready for the day a few students gathered close. They came in with their own information having witnessed their parents attentive to the news, like the rest of the country, waiting for the verdict in the trial of Derek Chauvin. They understood that our classroom was a place where we would be talking about the events that the larger community was processing.

Our classroom discussion took the same shape as many others which have unfolded this year. We worked from the information that the students already know. We clarify facts. We grapple with questions. We connect to other pieces of learning we've had across our time together.

In this instance, all the students remembered the protests which erupted in response to the murder of George Floyd. They recalled conversations in their first grade classrooms about what had happened and, for many, their first memories of the Black Lives Matter Movement which has been a running part of our classroom conversations this year. As is always the case, they asked some large questions about the underlying issues that the Chauvin case unearths: racism, prejudice, excessive police force, steps we can take towards a more equitable future.

Here are some of the comments and questions that students shared across both cohorts:

- Why didn't people help George Floyd?
- This is not the only person with Black skin to be killed by police.
- How long will he be in jail?
- What can we do instead of jail?
- When did Racism start?

- It's not really happy. There are a lot of emotions.
- No one should be killed.
- Police do not often get in trouble.
- Why didn't the other police officers speak up?
- There was a video so no one could lie about what happened.
- Will it get better?

These conversations are the bedrock of making change. The only way to shift the cycle of systemic racism in our country is through education and open discussion. In fact, as the conversation closed, a few students asked if they could write about what was on their minds or make signs to declare their thoughts.

I was reminded of these actions of our second graders in the evening as I read Dr. Esau McCaulley's powerful opinion piece in the *New York Times*—"My children and the students committed to my care have to live in this world and be frustrated by it, but they do not have to accept it as unchangeable. They do not have to give way to apathy. They are free to weep and mourn as long as they need to do so, but they can also resist. They can plan, organize, protest and march." (see <https://nyti.ms/3v51hMm>)

These conversations in school, in your homes, throughout our community are never easy, but they do leave me hopeful. Raising children who have clarity about our country's history and a vision for how we can do better is our greatest hope. If you are looking for some additional resources to guide your own thinking, there are some excellent resources embedded in this article from the Minnesota Public Radio (see <https://bit.ly/3JCL8lh>).

As always, please reach out with any questions. It has been a year full of difficult conversations. A year like none other. I am continually grateful to teach in a school and a community who is working toward systemic change.

In solidarity,

Kara
