

Building Good Working Relationships with Emerging BIPOC Writers

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MagsWest

March 1, 2019

In breakout groups, we will be discussing several scenarios in which your group will role-play as a writer, editor, instructor, etc. who will make personal and professional choices regarding an emerging BIPOC writer. We will use these scenarios to examine the status quo, our biases and our role in enacting change. Some questions to guide your discussion:

- *How did this situation arise? What preceded it?*
- *What's at stake for this writer's sense of identity, mental health and how they will navigate the literary ecosystem?*
- *Who can help? What needs to change? How can that change happen?*
- *Which scenarios are most challenging? Are there any that you yourself have experienced or witnessed?*

A

You're an editor and have worked with a BIPOC writer to publish an essay with their critical perspective on literary prizes in Canada. It argues that few writers of colour have been historically recognized for their work, and that there is a tendency towards tokenizing BIPOC writers as a means to promote values of diversity and inclusivity that do not address the inequalities and injustices experienced by BIPOC individuals.

The piece is widely read and shared, with mostly positive reactions, but a writer publishes a response on how BIPOC writers should be more proactive and should not sound the "victim alarm", and that prizes should be given on the basis of literary merit. How do you, as an editor, respond?

B

You're a creative writing instructor and one of your students asks where they can find a writing community and like-minded writers. They are the only BIPOC student in the class whose work and points of view have at times made certain students feel uncomfortable.

You sense that what this student wants is to find other BIPOC writers and mentors. They are also a mature student who works full-time and has a limited ability and budget to take creative writing classes and retreats. What might you suggest to this student?

C

You're taking a publishing class which has a mix of students from different backgrounds, professional experiences, etc. Many of the students attend evening networking events and go out to a local bar after class. You notice that one Muslim student never attends these evening events as he/she doesn't consume alcohol, and as a result, are missing out on the conversations. What might you do in this situation?

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D

You're serving as a guest editor and you have an honorarium to solicit and edit pieces for one issue of a creative writing journal, however writers will not be paid for their work. You receive an unsolicited piece that has a unique voice but you end up rejecting it. You do make some suggestions on how the piece could be improved.

Shortly afterwards, the writer sends in a new version, thanking you and revealing that they are a writer of colour who has struggled with finding venues for their work and a sympathetic editor. The piece could be ready for publication with a little more revision. You wonder whether or not to accept it given that the writer will not be paid that you have already maxed out your time as an editor. How might you support this writer both in the short and long-term?

E

You join an arts organization as an outreach/marketing coordinator. The organization programs a festival each year and you notice that while the existing audience and subscribers are very loyal and generous in their donations, they are more conservative in their tastes. Their numbers are also decreasing every year. Very few BIPOC artists are invited, and very few under the age of 35. Since you're not involved in programming, you wonder about how to not alienate the existing audience while finding new attendees in other communities.

BONUS ROUND

After making your suggestions to the arts organization board, you receive supportive responses but very few changes to the programming that year. Still, you're able to increase ticket sales and attendance due to your ingenuity and existing networks.

Your contract ends and you leave the organization. Several months later, you run into a member of the board, who thanks you warmly for your suggestions and informs you that many of them have since been implemented. However, you and your role have never been acknowledged. What might you do in this situation?