

# AISHA KIANI

Interview: Brigid Rae  
Photographs: Jade Pattenden



## HI, I'M AISHA

**Pronouns: She/Her**

*I am an educator, entrepreneur, activist, actor, writer, mother and the founder of I Dream Library™.*

**Brigid Rae**  
Aisha Kiani

### ***Introduce yourself and what you do:***

I am an educator, entrepreneur, activist, actor, writer, mother and the founder of i Dream Library™. i Dream Library™ offers intersectional 2sLGBTQQIA+ BIPOC centred literary resources for K-12 public education, designed by the members of the same communities we serve to empower. We are based on the unceded ancestral lands of the x<sup>w</sup>məθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səílwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) nations.

### ***Favorite compliment you've received about yourself:***

Honestly I can't remember, but I really like it when someone says nice things about my nose, my confidence and my intellect.

### ***Why literature? And why is it so important?***

Making QTBIPOC centred stories accessible to children in the classroom and curriculum is critical in ending systemic racism. i Dream Library™ uses literature as an entry point to connect all students to a more inclusive



In the past, Black children were restricted from reading, writing, and attending school. When they were allowed to attend school, the curriculum was used to assimilate them to adopt white colonial values in place of their own. The same educational directive was in place for indigenous children forced to attend residential schools.

Today, literature is still public education's most widely used vehicle for expressing cultural values and early intellectual assessment. Our society is taking steps in reconciling the past, however, Black and indigenous children continue to experience the systemic impact of their historic erasure from educational spaces.



***Decolonizing a classroom is more than just a checklist. What does it mean to decolonize and what are the benefits of educational institutions decolonizing classrooms and curriculums?***

To effectively decolonize the education system would mean simultaneously decolonizing the judicial system, policing, healthcare, and all levels of government from civic to federal, publishing, art, science and tech. Literally, everything that informs, tests, and assesses the child's worldview.

I think that taking historic accountability through centring a human sustainability model to our curriculum, district, school and union HR policies, along with diverse representation and reconciliation in the classroom are easily applicable moves in that direction.

The benefit is achieving sustainable human rights for systematically oppressed and neglected people. To break it down: Black, trans, queer, indigenous, migrant, asylum-seeking, non-english speaking, enby, gender fluid, neurodiverse, disabled, homeless, impoverished, sick, substance-using, elderly, female, children will all matter.

***Children's early experiences help shape how they see themselves and others in the world. How does equitable representation impact BIPOC, two-spirit, queer, and gender non-conforming children, both now and in the future?***

They see themselves as valuable, as real, as humans. They engage in their classrooms, communities, relationships and the world with pride and confidence. There is a foundational support for long term mental wellness. They see their future as possible and protected.

***How do you design the curriculum supports and library resources you provide through i Dream Library?***

Currently, I collaborate with British Columbia-based QTBIPOC educators, artists and activists and my son Rakim to design book lists and resources. I use a proprietary literary assessment tool I designed called the RADAR™ when selecting books to feature on the website, in booklists, or lesson plans.



***What needs to be done by both settler parents and educators outside of exposing children to these resources?***

1. A commitment to recognizing conscious and unconscious biases.
2. Learning about the role you play and how you benefit from systemic oppression.
3. Taking personal accountability, practicing reconciliation, and prioritizing reparations.

***What barriers do you face when working within and against a colonized education system?***

i Dream Library™ began as a challenge to the status quo of QTBIPOC children and families navigating institutionalized racism, queerphobia, sexism and ableism.

Rakim's first 3 years of school was an experience of daily microaggressions and incidents of overt racism that reminded me of my own experience 25 years earlier. When I saw his education team grade his disinterest in bias literacy assessment tools as an intellectual development issue, I knew it was time to support educators in empowering Rakim.

The biggest barrier in working within a colonized education system is curricular erasure of BIPOC identities and histories beyond stories of suffering generations of colonial violence.

I choose not to work against the system, instead of connecting where my work is wanted. The design of i Dream Library is accessibility and versatility in how the resources are used. Whether it starts with an educator who wants to select a story for their reading group or a district or province wanting to purchase custom resources to make a broader curriculum change. The goal is to get past the barriers and create a positive impact on a child in their learning environment. For that goal to be championed by everyone who engages with this project, not by me alone.

***How do you stay authentic to yourself and others?***

I allow myself to take up space with the complexities, history, mistakes and intersections of my existence all in attendance. From there I can recognize the value that other individuals bring to spaces, align and build connections.





Using our latest collections campaign as a mode, we interviewed and photographed 6 people here within our Vancouver community. These voices are loud, these voices and bodies are bold, these bodies and voices are tired, they're grieving, they're healing, they're celebrating, they're resilient, and they're a conduit for change, each on their own trajectory to see a change and shift in power.

Each person that spoke with us selected a charity to support. Betty has selected [i Dream Library](#). If you are able and choose to make a contribution (big or small), email us your receipt to [hello@wolfcircus.com](mailto:hello@wolfcircus.com) and receive a 20% off discount code between October 1-6.

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