

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

*Poetry*

Safe Space

by Carol Smith



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## Safe Space

In this English 10 classroom, racism is not welcomed.  
So, it sneaks in and hides.  
It enters beneath rock band t-shirts and tattered Levi's  
or stashed in Jansport backpacks.  
It crouches under desks like a concealed cell phone  
ready for activation.

Some days, it leans against the pale blue cinderblock wall  
with the quiet back-row listeners.  
Other times, it sits up straight, eyes on the whiteboard,  
with the eager front-row hand-raisers.  
Sometimes, it peeks at the self-isolated Black kids staring  
out the window at nothing.

Under the glare of linear fluorescent tubes,  
it can be hard to detect.  
Especially if it flattens itself to lie between lines  
of five-paragraph essays in three-ring binders,  
or when it slithers up onto a bookshelf and wedges  
between Achebe and Coates.

Often, it lies in wait within my teacher-mouth,  
ready to burst forth as an  
Anglicized stutter of an unrecognized name.  
When that happens, it echoes  
off the linoleum floor and ricochets off laminated posters  
of Angelou and Morrison.

**Carol Smith**, Ed.D, is an MFA candidate at Arcadia University, who has taught in public schools and universities for 30 years. Her poetry reflects upon personal, social, and political experiences, including the tensions inherent to racism, antiracism, and social injustice. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Last Stanza*, *In Parentheses*, and *Mobius*. Carol lives in Southern New Jersey, where she currently teaches college composition. She can be reached at [c.a.smith.author@gmail.com](mailto:c.a.smith.author@gmail.com).



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