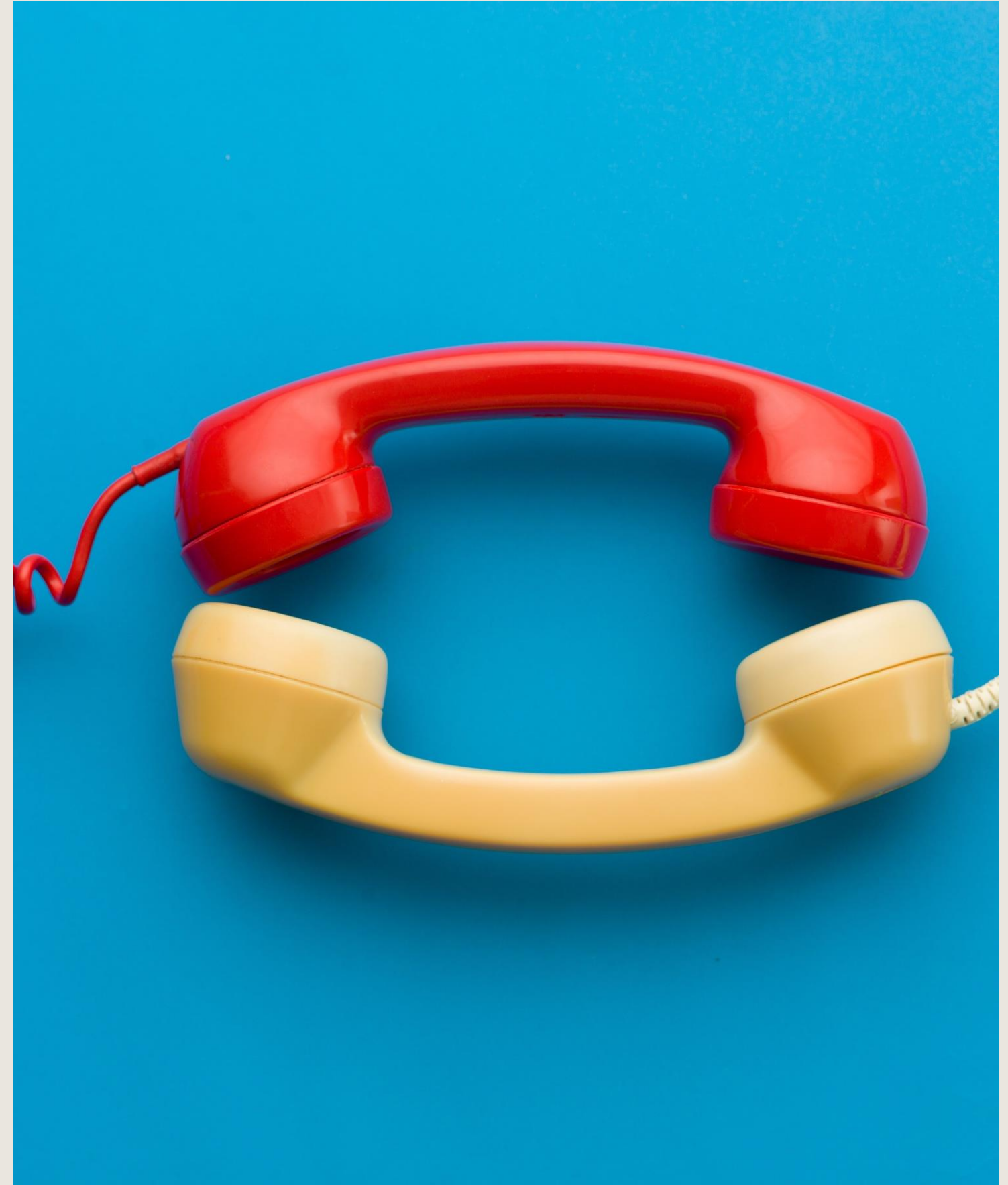


# Writing the *world* not the *stereotype*

A deep dive into inclusive writing

with Ángela Álvarez Vélez

**Welcome to  
the  
conversation**



# What to expect

This is not a cheat sheet

It's something way better



# Who am I and what am I doing here?

My name Ángela Álvarez Vélez

I'm a Colombian journalist, writer, educator and podcaster

In English I write under the name Angela Sierra





# What does DIVERSE even mean?



# Debunking the “diverse character” myth

You can't have diverse  
CHARACTERS

You can only ever have a  
diverse CAST of characters



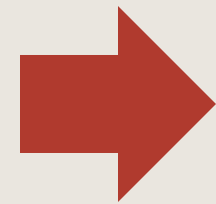
# What makes us “us”

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender identity and expression
- Sexual orientation
- Ability and Disability
- Neurodivergence
- Religion or spiritual background
- Adoption, migration, and citizenship status
- Educational access
- Family structure, marital or parental status
- Body size, health, mental health
- Communication style, geography, life experience
- Economic background and class

**DIFFERENCE**

**is a**

**RANGE**



**REPRESENTATION**

**is a**

**REFLECTION**

**DIVERSITY**

**is a**

**PATTERN**





**Highlighting *differences* to  
achieve *representation* and  
create *diversity*.**

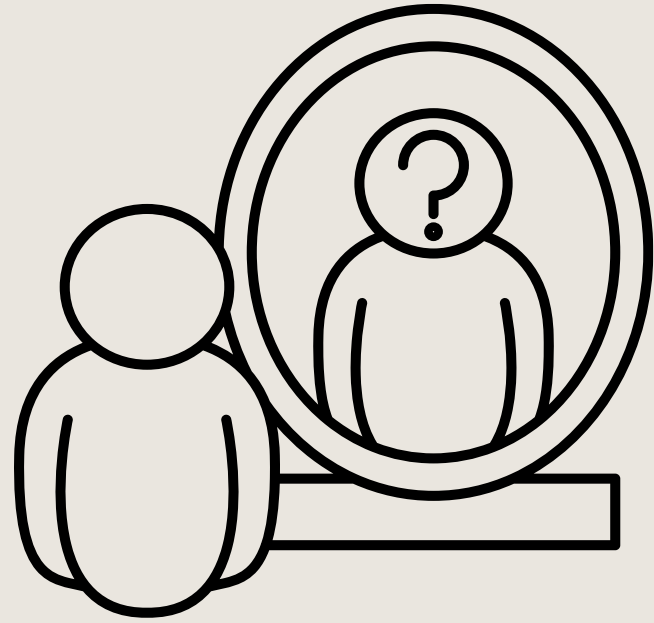
# Build a diverse world that makes sense



No Latinos in There's Something About Mary?  
That's a **choice**.



No Latinos in Schindler's List?  
That's **context**.



# HOW DIFFERENCE MAKES STORY SENSE

Does this character's difference affect how they interpret events?

Does it shape how others treat them?

Is it present in the emotional core of their arc?

**Nearly 29% of people aged 18–35 have refused to watch a film because it featured an offensive or outdated stereotype\***

\*According to a 2022 UK-based study commissioned by M&M as part of its global FUNd initiative

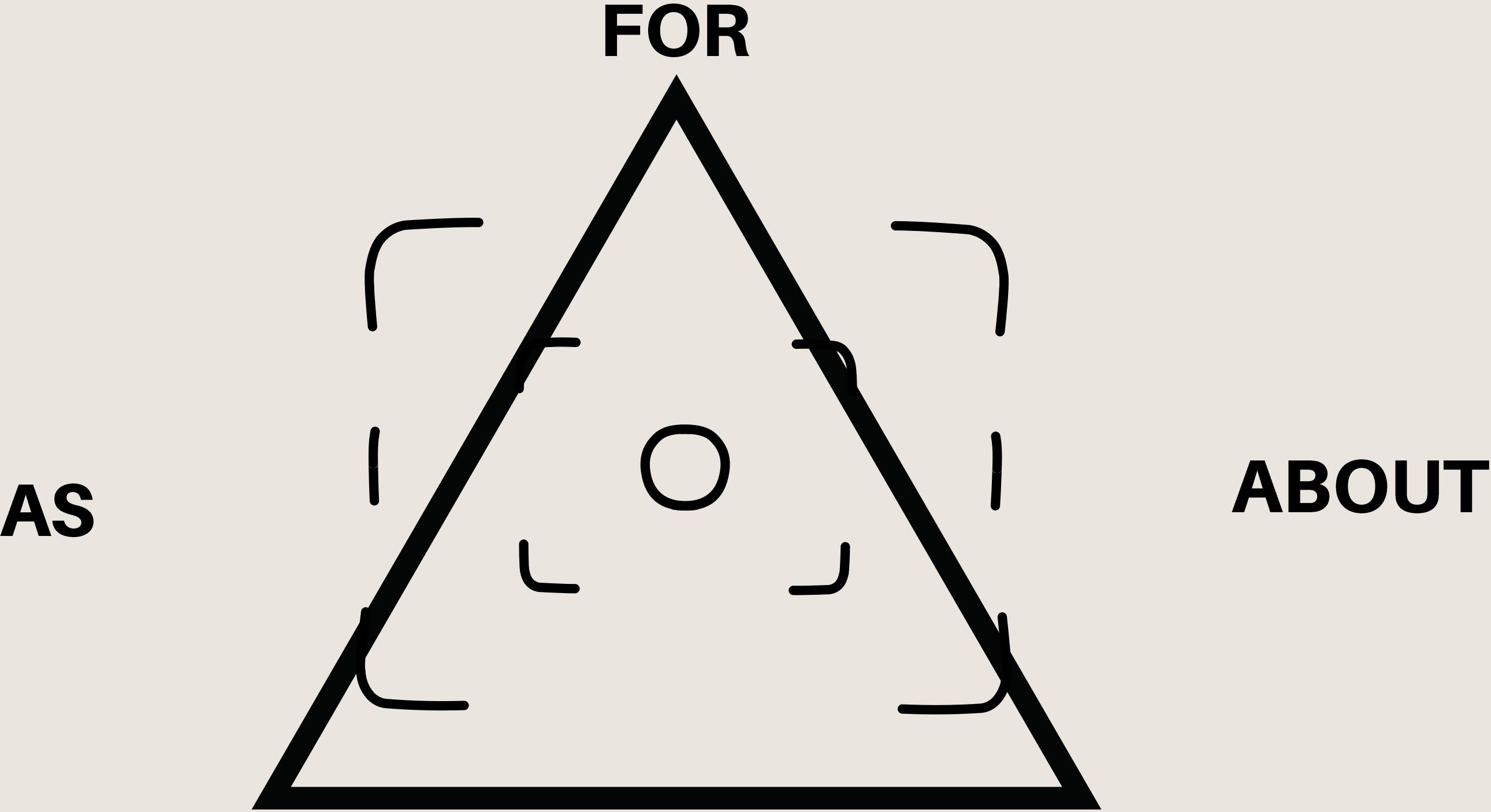
#### **Overused Tropes:**

- Women as overly sexualized or too sensitive
- Foreigners who can't speak English (for laughs)
- Mentally ill characters as violent or unstable
- Black/Latino people as gang members
- Sassy Black women, overprotective Asian parents
- Disabled characters who are frail or helpless

#### **Overdue Portrayals:**

- Neurodivergent people living normal lives
- Disabled roles played or written by disabled people
- Positive portrayals of minorities in leadership, romance, and action roles
- Stay-at-home dads
- Black characters in period dramas
- Neurodivergent detectives without a magical brain

TOOL #1  
STORY LENS





# WRITING FOR

- Who am I imagining as the reader?
- Is that reader inside or outside the culture I'm depicting?
- Where am I in relation to them?
- If someone from this culture read my story, would they feel seen?



# WRITING FOR

- INTENTION
- PURPOSE
- IMPACT



- ***Portrait of a Thief* by Grace D. Li**
- ***The Man Who Could Move Clouds* by Ingrid Rojas Contreras.**



- ***American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins.**
- **The film *Music* by Sia.**

# WRITING ABOUT

- Who am I writing about, and why?
- Am I writing from the outside honestly and transparently?
- Have I done deep, specific, respectful research?
- Does this character exist as more than a metaphor, foil, or plot device?
- If this character were removed or changed, would it change the story at its core?
- Have I spoken to people from this community or read work by them?

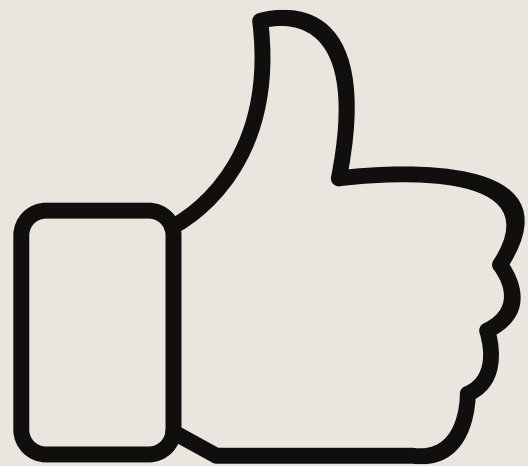


# WRITING ABOUT

---

- DISTANCE
- CURIOSITY
- RESPECT





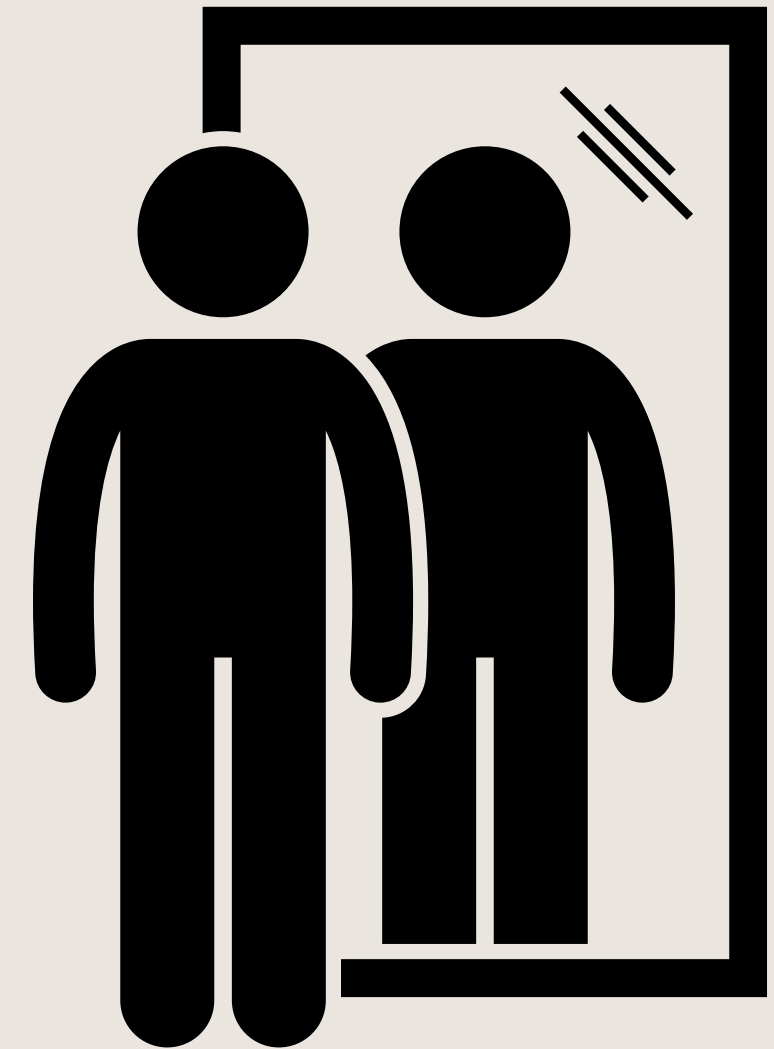
- ***The River Has Teeth* by Erica Waters**
- ***The Valley of Forgetting* by Jennie Erin Smith**



- ***The Fisher King, The Proposal, Iron Man, Dr. House.***

# WRITING AS

- Who am I becoming in this story—and why?
- Am I close enough to this experience to do it justice?
- What emotional truths do I need to embody?
- Have I done deep, layered, humility-driven research?
- What is at stake—for the character, and for me?
- Am I holding this character's humanity with reverence?



# WRITING

## AS

- INTIMACY
- RISK
- EMBODIMENT



- ***Cemetery Boys***  
by Aiden Thomas
- ***Fourth Wing*** by  
Rebecca Yarros



- **Dustin Hoffman in**  
***Rain Man***
- **Ben Affleck in**  
***Daredevil***

# Use this lens when:

- Choosing your POV characters
- Choosing your audience or marketing category
- Researching for worldbuilding
- You want to catch bias before it's baked in





TOOL #2

# Narrative Impact Matrix



Misrepresented

Underrepresented

Vulnerable

# ONE FACTOR= GREEN ZONE

- Misrepresented but not underrepresented or vulnerable
- Underrepresented but not misrepresented or vulnerable
- Vulnerable but not misrepresented or underrepresented



# WHO IS IN THE GREEN ZONE

- Redheads
- Geniuses
- Stepparents or stepsiblings
- People with glasses
- Bald people
- Vegetarians or vegans
- People with niche jobs (librarians, taxidermists, birdwatchers)
- Royals
- Left-handed people

# TWO FACTORS= ORANGE ZONE

- Misrepresented + underrepresented
- Underrepresented + vulnerable
- Vulnerable + misrepresented



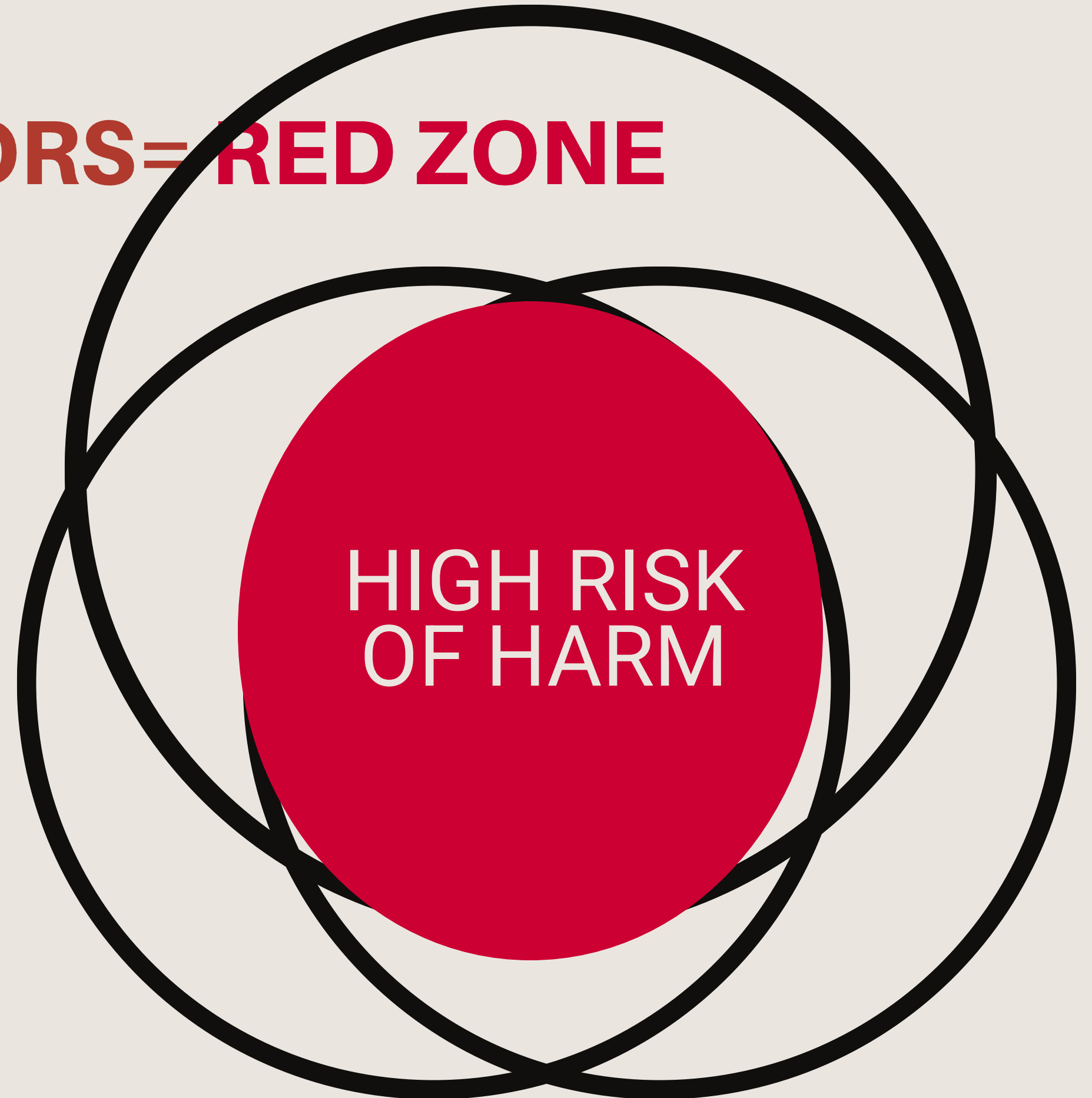
# WHO IS IN THE ORANGE ZONE

- Fat protagonists
- Deaf or hard-of-hearing characters
- Neurodivergent people
- People from small rural communities
- Black protagonists in leadership roles
- LGBTQ+ characters in fantasy or sci-fi



# THREE FACTORS= RED ZONE

- Misrepresented
- Underrepresented
- Vulnerable

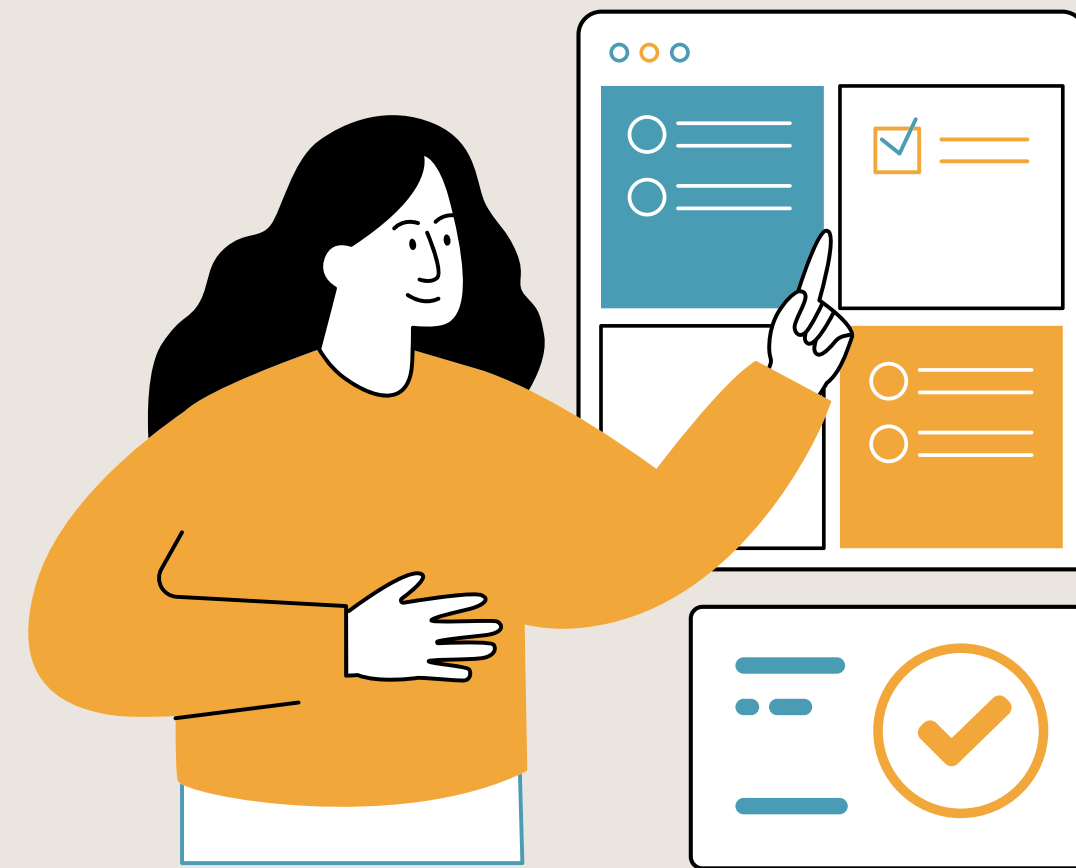


# WHO IS IN THE RED ZONE

- Indigenous people
- Nonverbal autistic people
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Trans women of color
- Muslim and Jewish female characters in Western fiction
- Disabled characters (esp. with visible or multiple disabilities)
- Victims of Sexual abuse, sex traffic and sex workers

# Use this matrix when:

- Choosing a narrator
- Deciding whose pain is shown
- Picking whose eyes we see the world through
- Deciding whose voice gets the last word

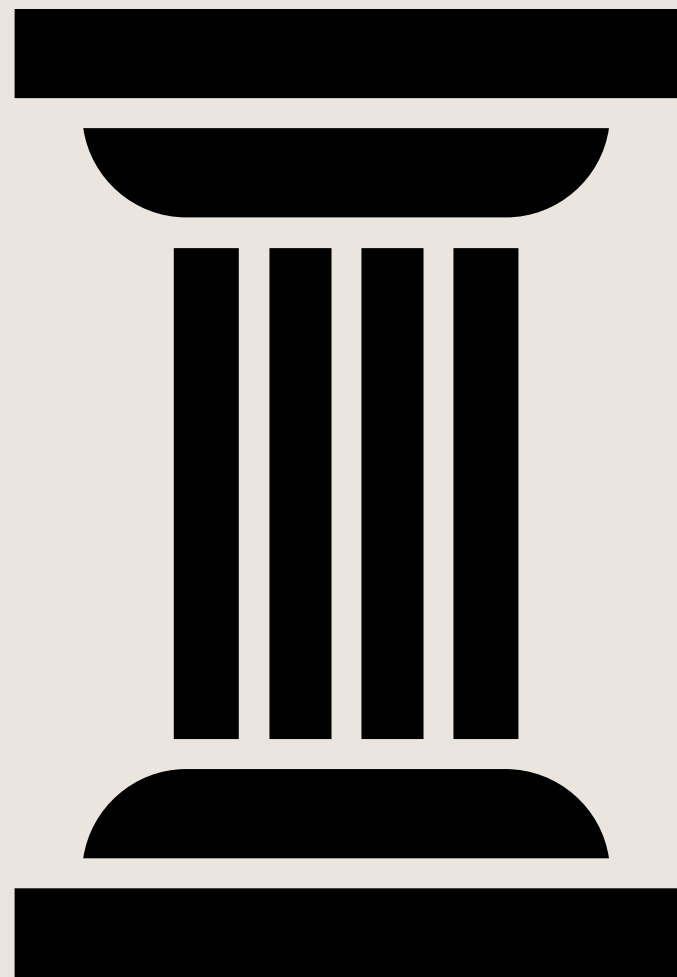


No isn't rejection  
**It's redirection**

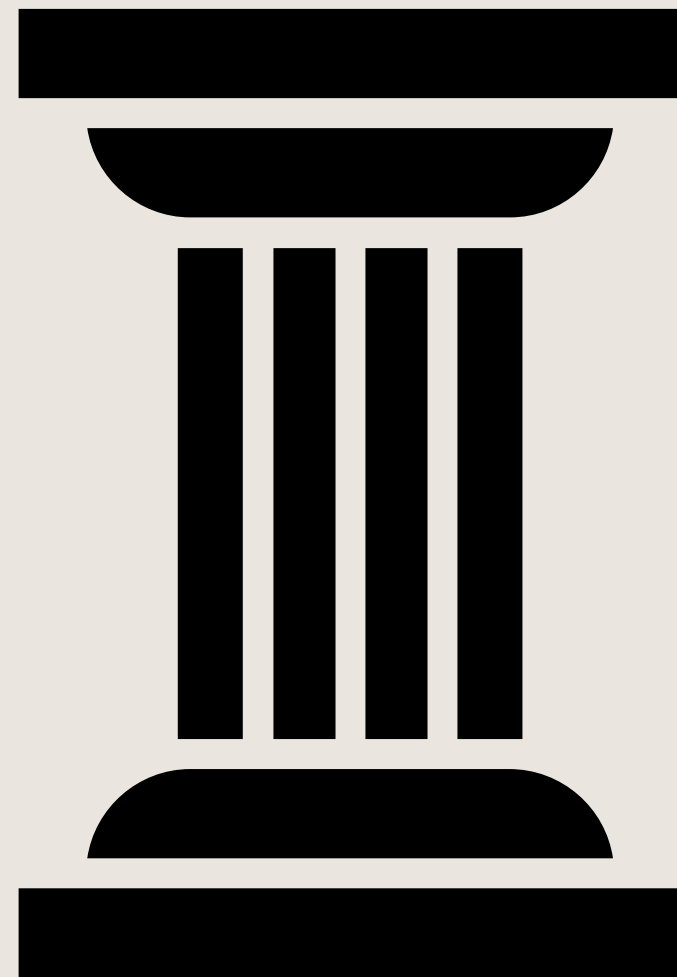
TOOL #3

# The Four Pillars of Responsible Representation

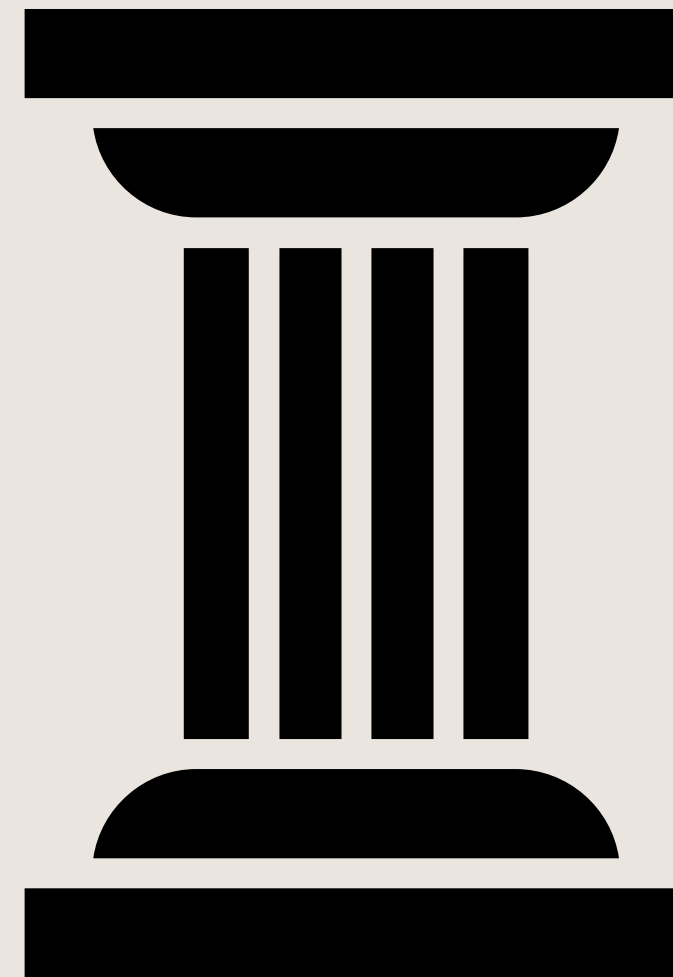
Specificity



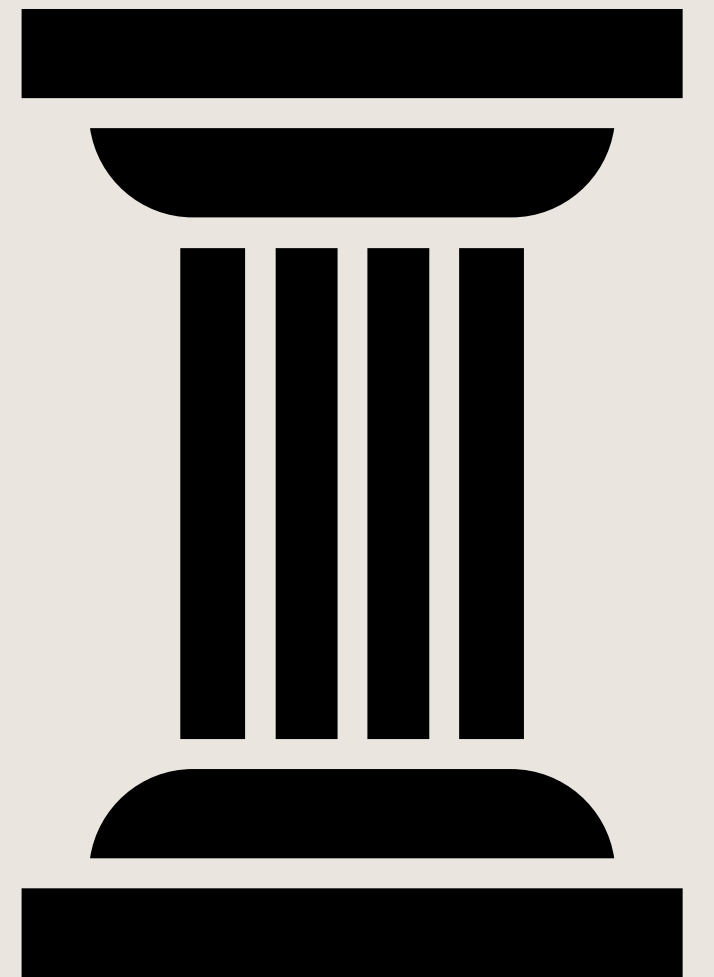
Consistency



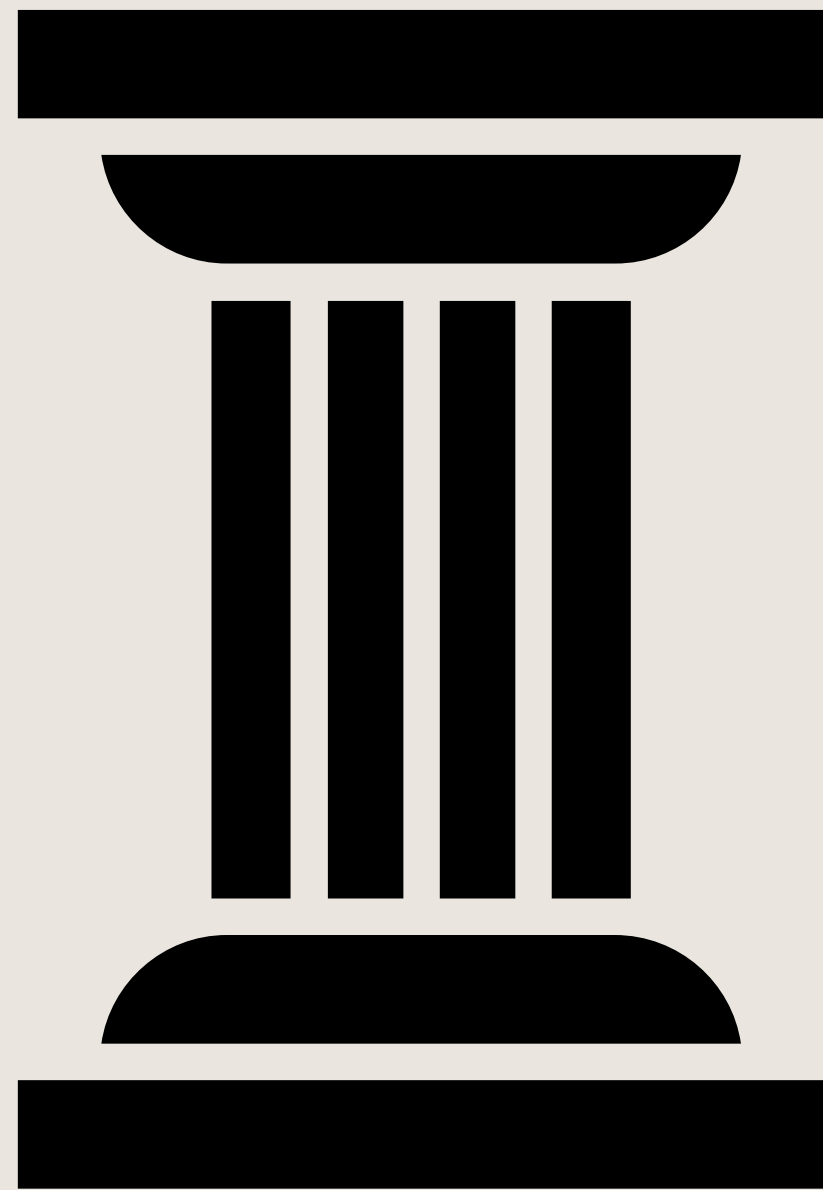
Intention



Accountability



# #1

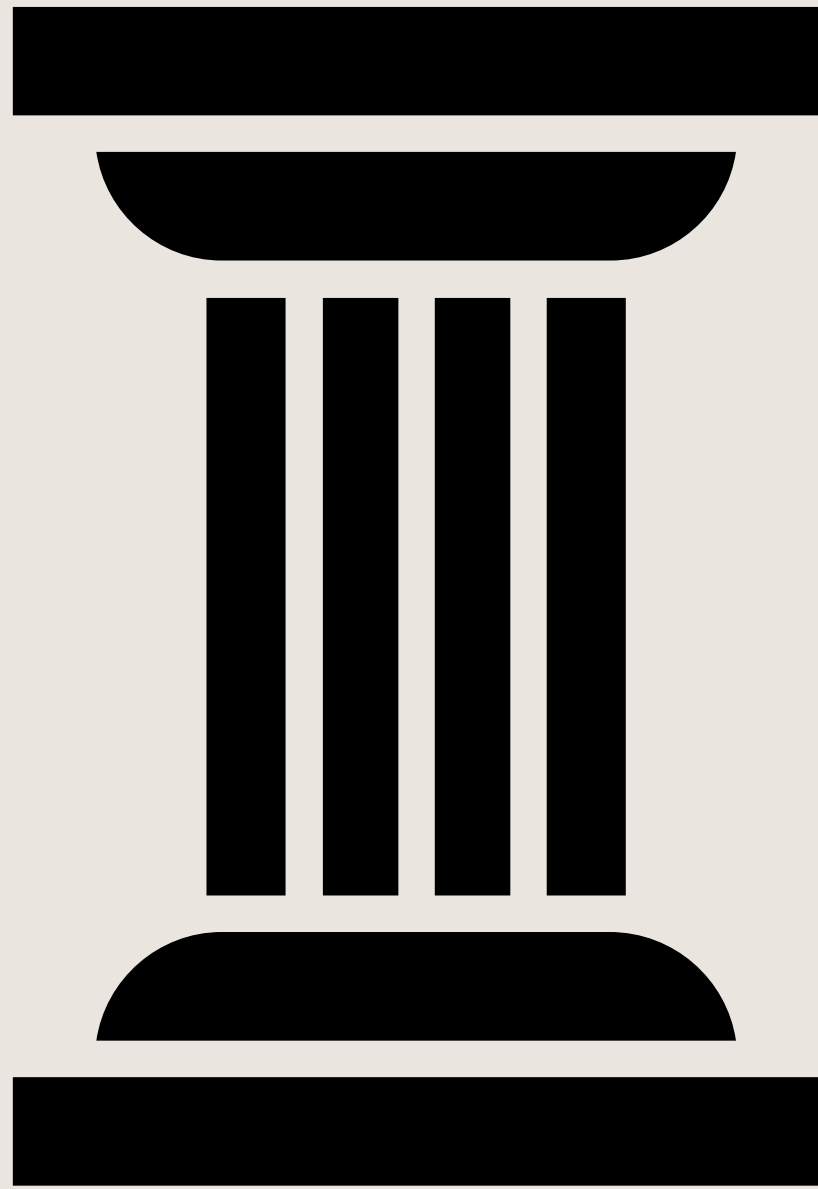


# Be Specific

Specificity doesn't shrink a story. It gives it depth. It makes it real.



# #2

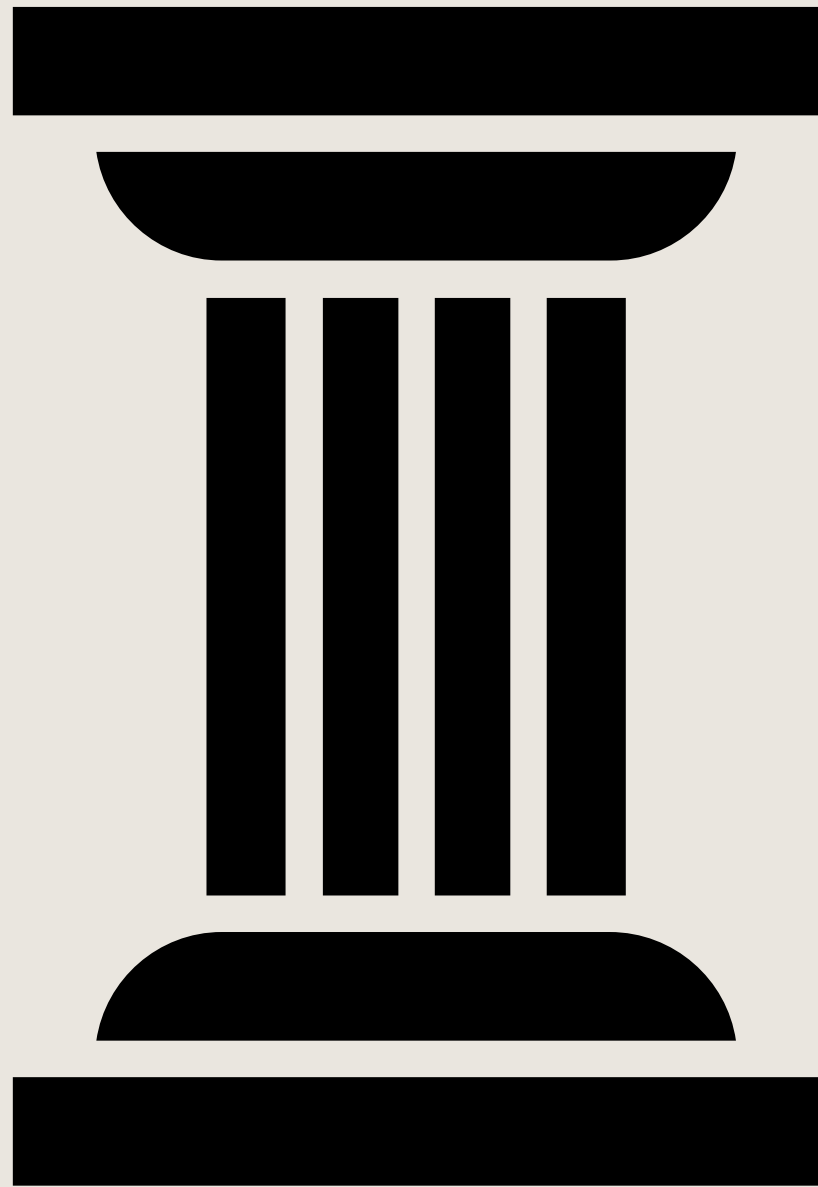


## Be

# Intentional

Representation without  
purpose is decoration.

# #3

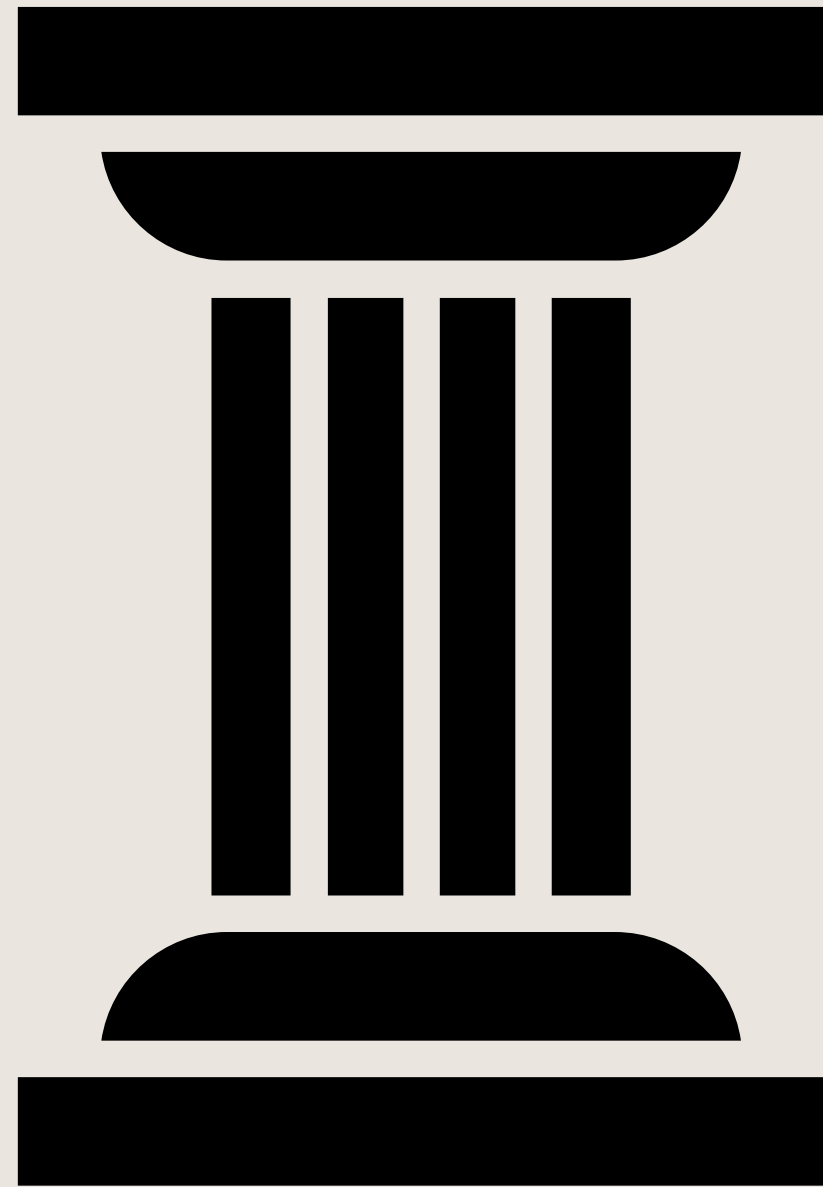


## Be

# Consistent

Identity isn't seasoning. It's  
the broth.

# #4

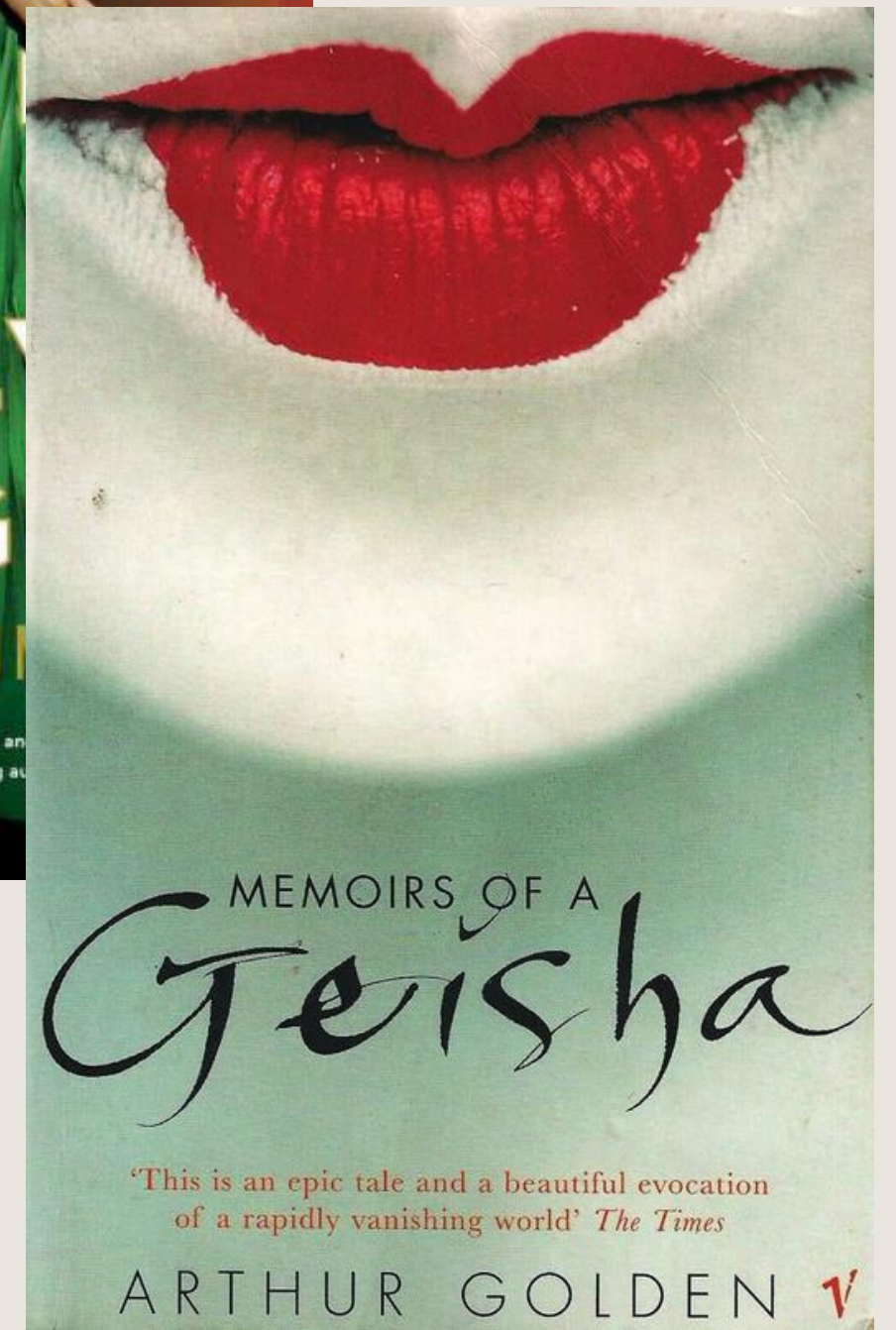
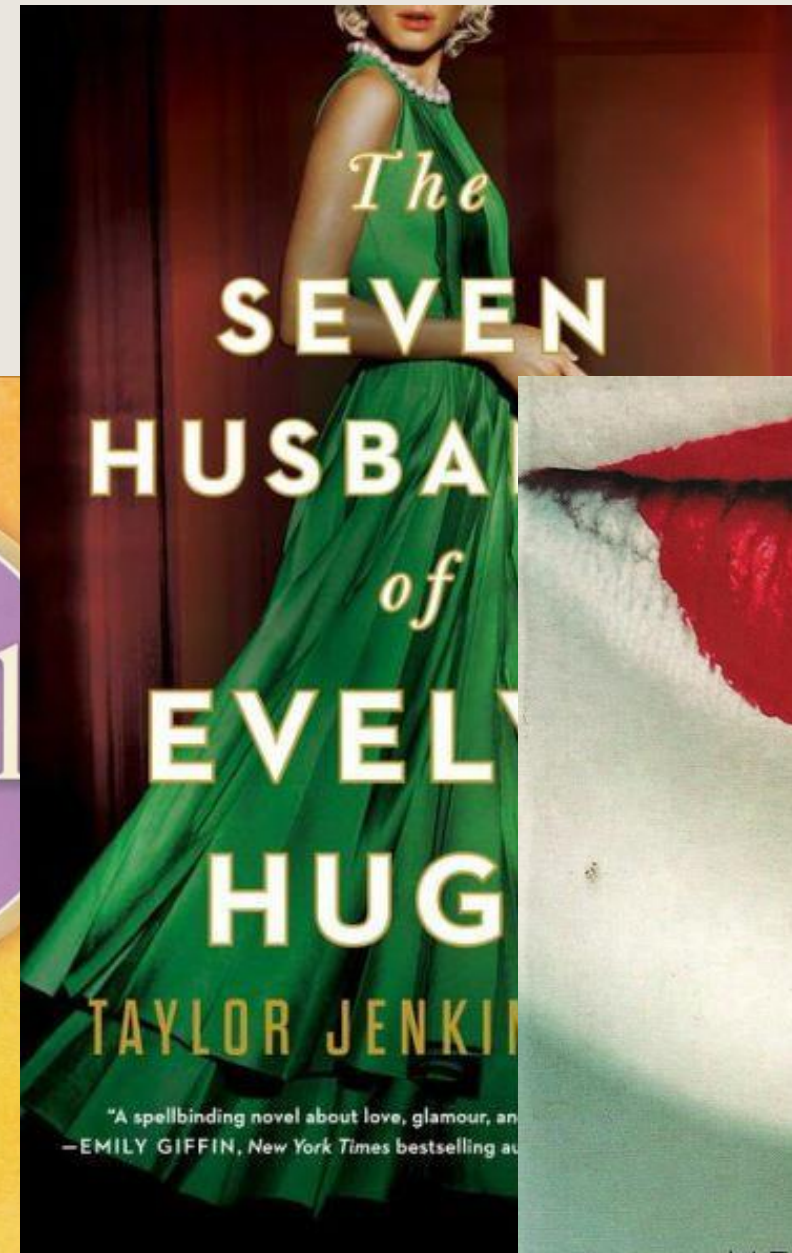
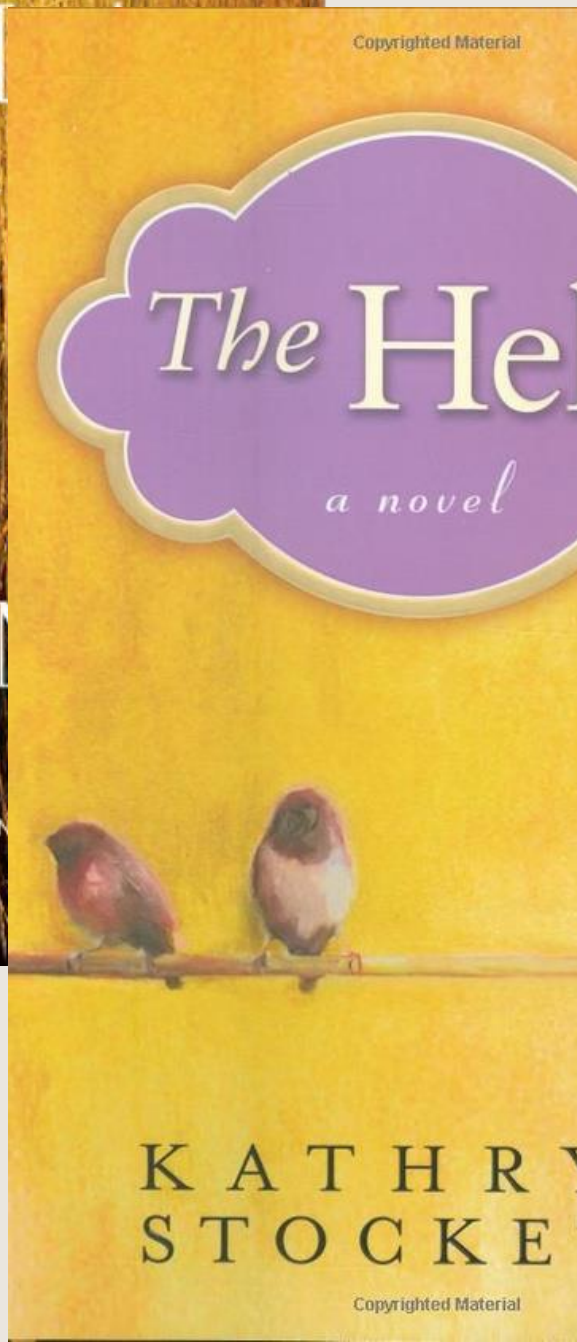
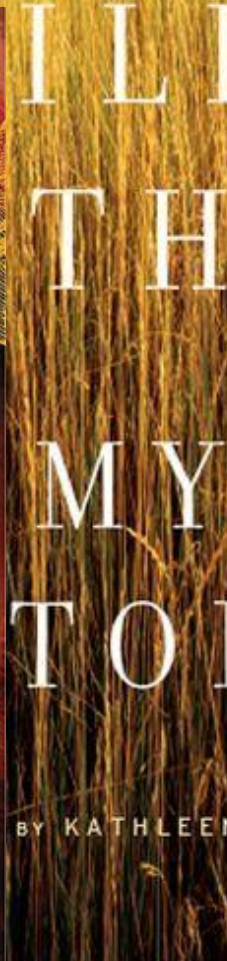
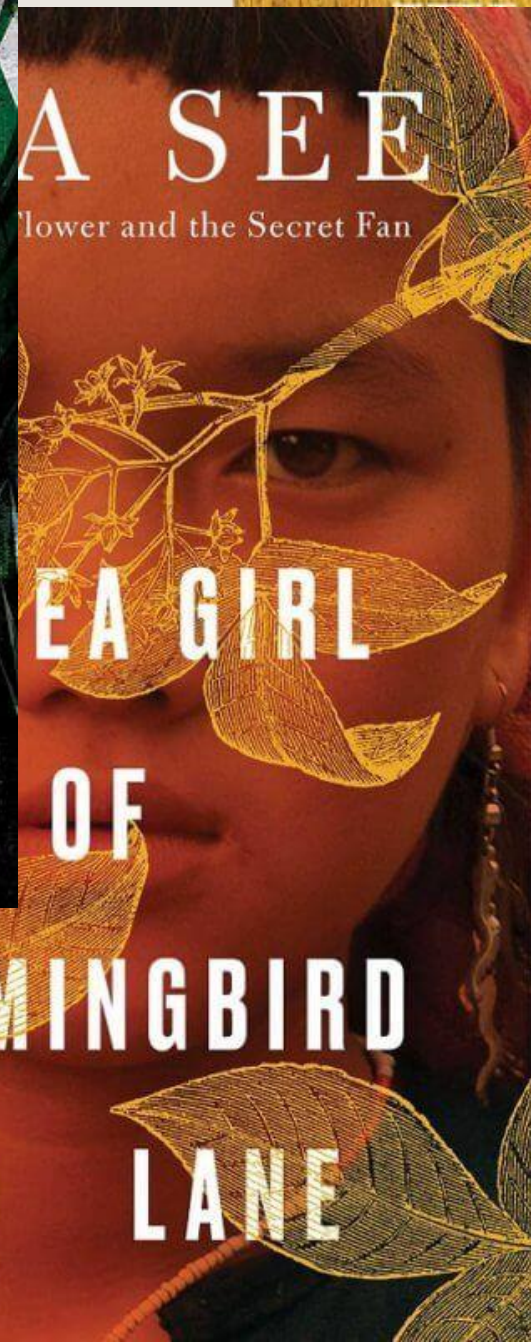
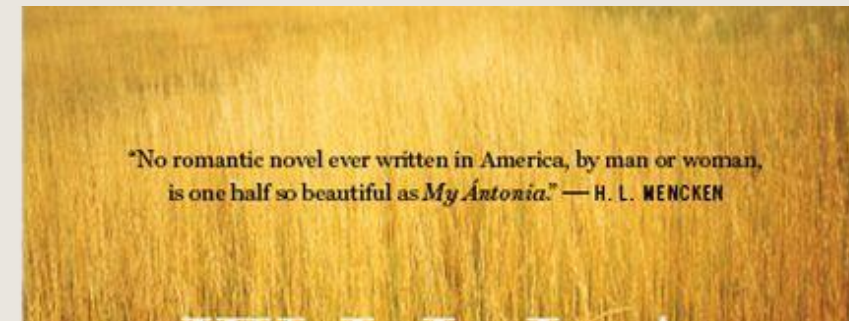
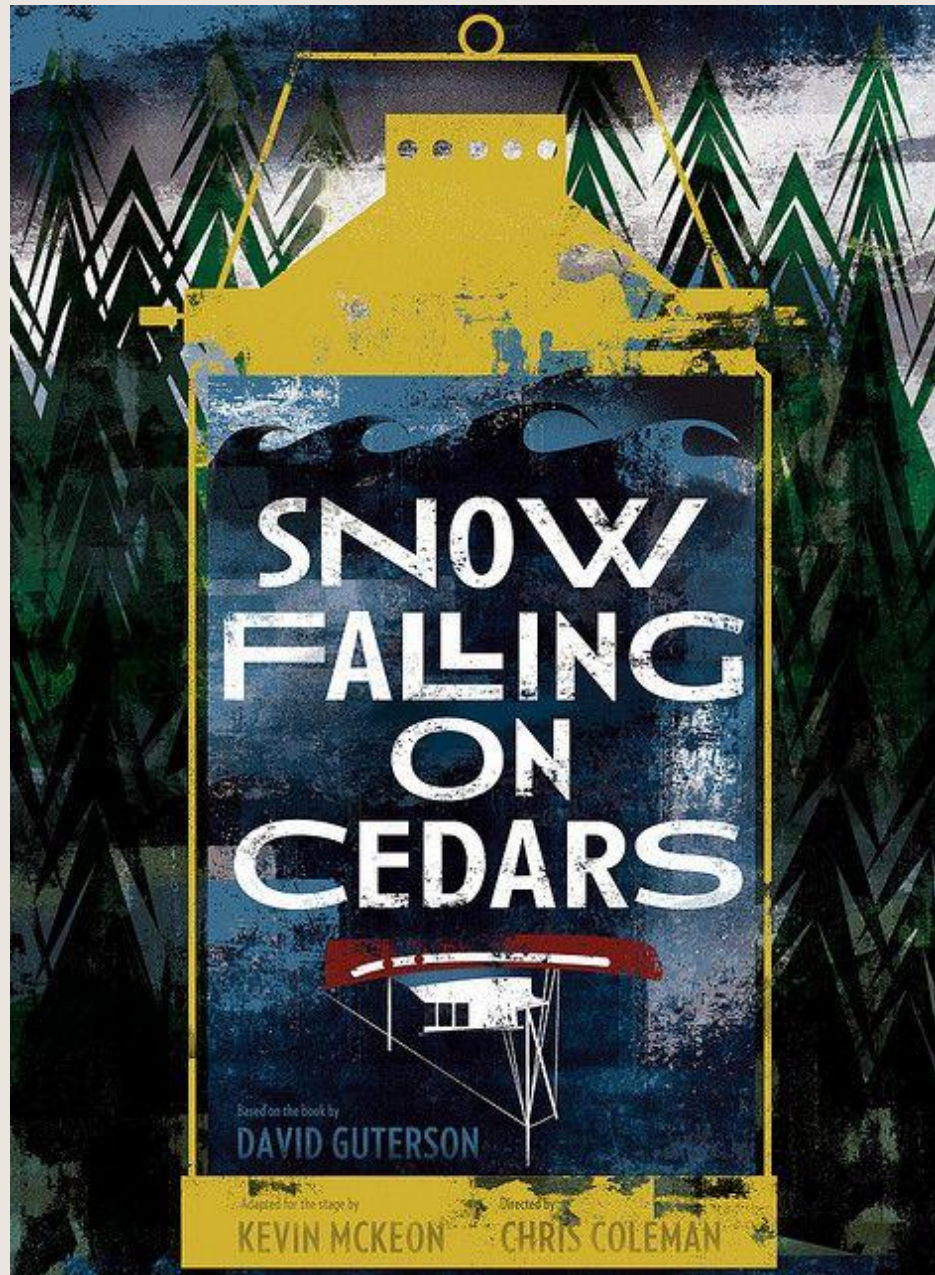


# Be Accountable

You don't have to get it perfect.  
You do have to stay in the  
room.



# But what about...







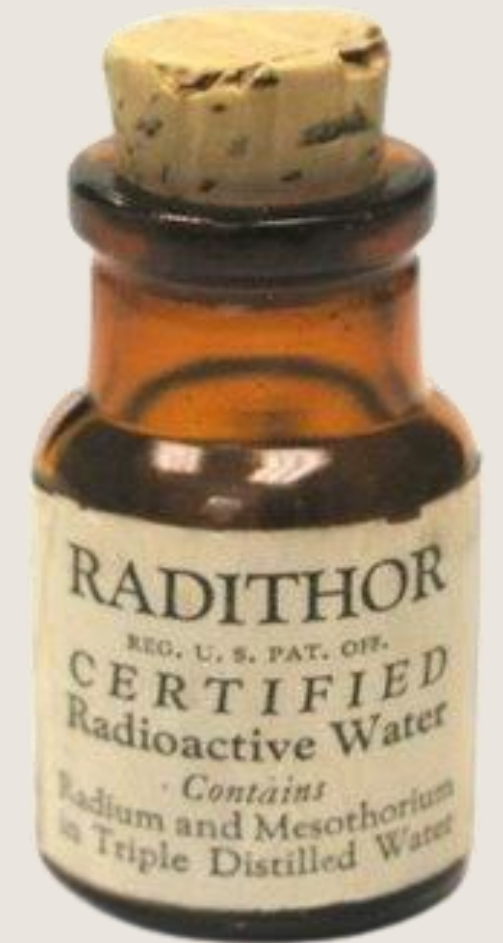
**Over 72% of publishing decision-makers identify as white.**

**Only about 5–7% of authors published in 2022 were Black, Hispanic, or Asian.**

**The imbalance is real.**



We know better  
It's time to do better  
**It's time to be better**



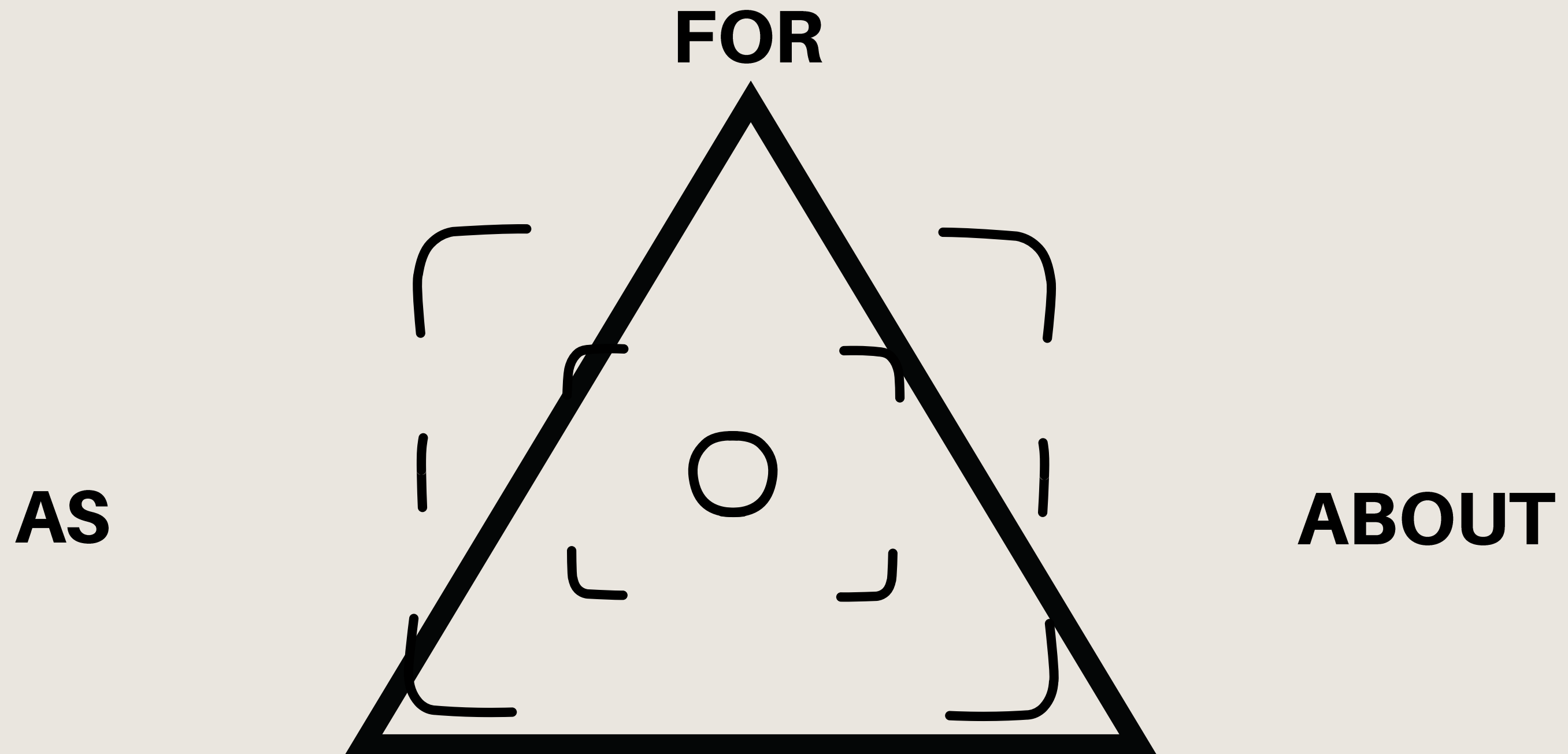
# Story Self-Check

- Who gets forgiven, and who does the forgiving?
- Whose pain moves the plot, and who gets to heal?
- Who gets to fumble and grow, and who has to be the bigger person to avoid harm?
- Whose flaws are framed as quirks, and who gets punished for theirs?
- Who gets a backstory, and who just gets written off as “that’s how they are”?
- Who gave me permission to tell this story, and did I honor their trust?
- Who benefits from me telling it, and what do I give back?

**RECAP:**



# TOOL #1 STORY LENS



TOOL #2

# Narrative Impact Matrix



Misrepresented

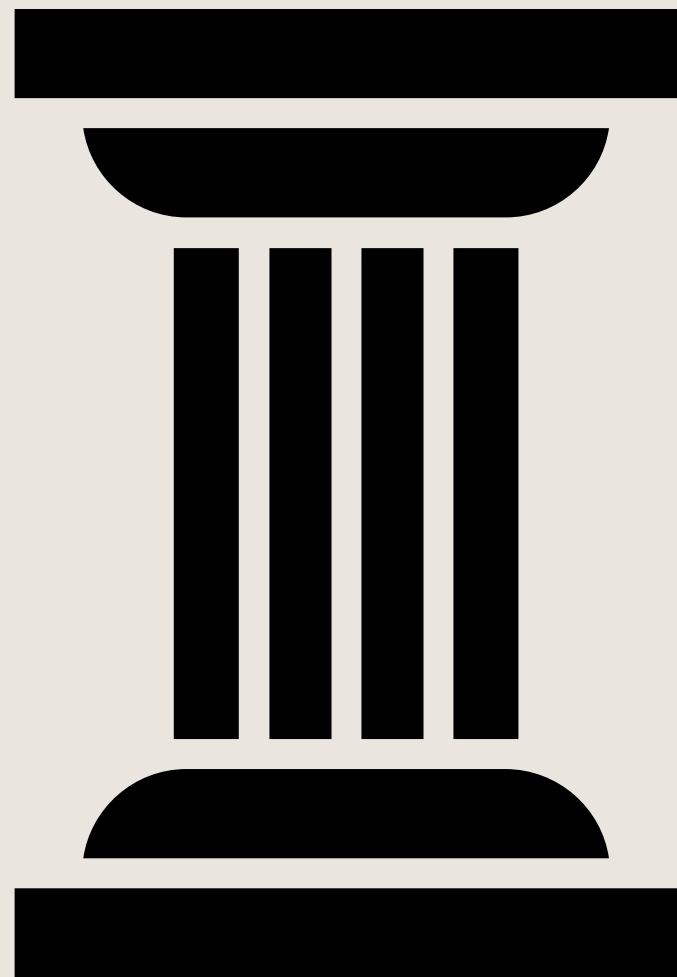
Underrepresented

Vulnerable

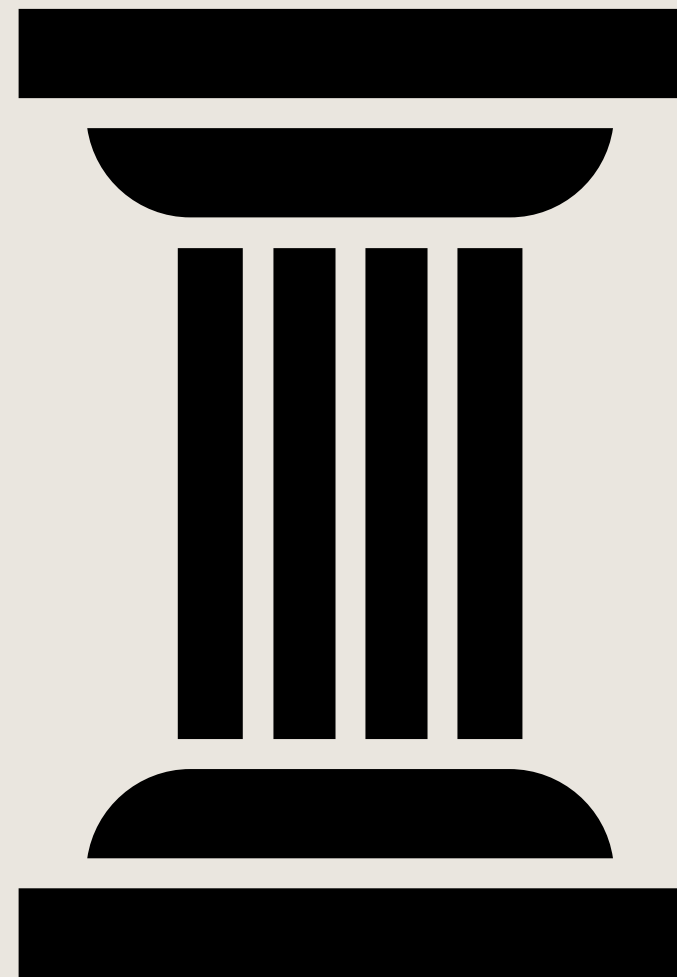
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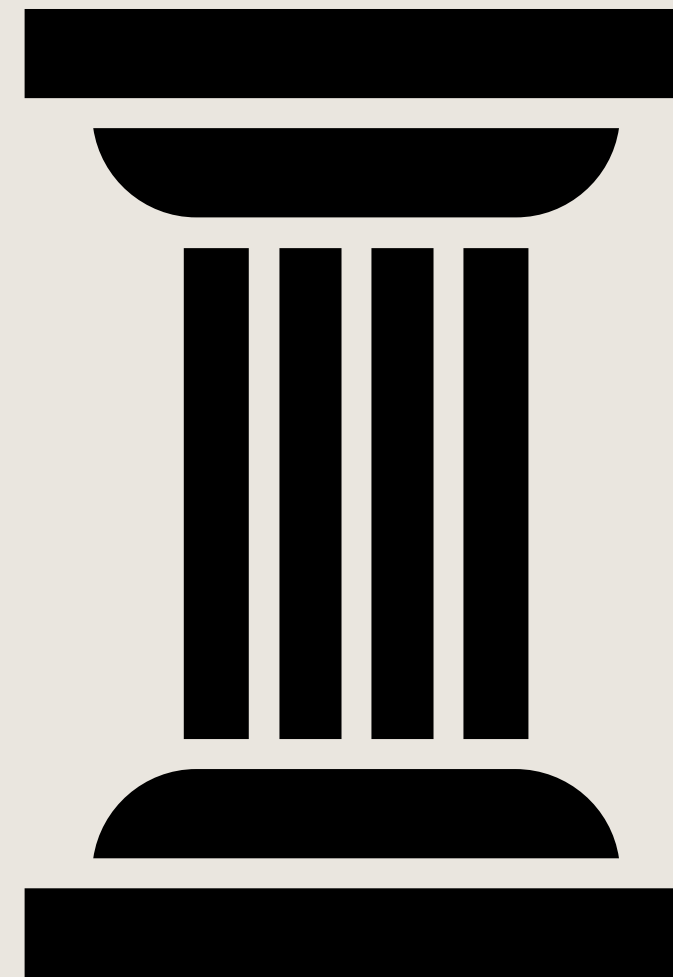
Specificity



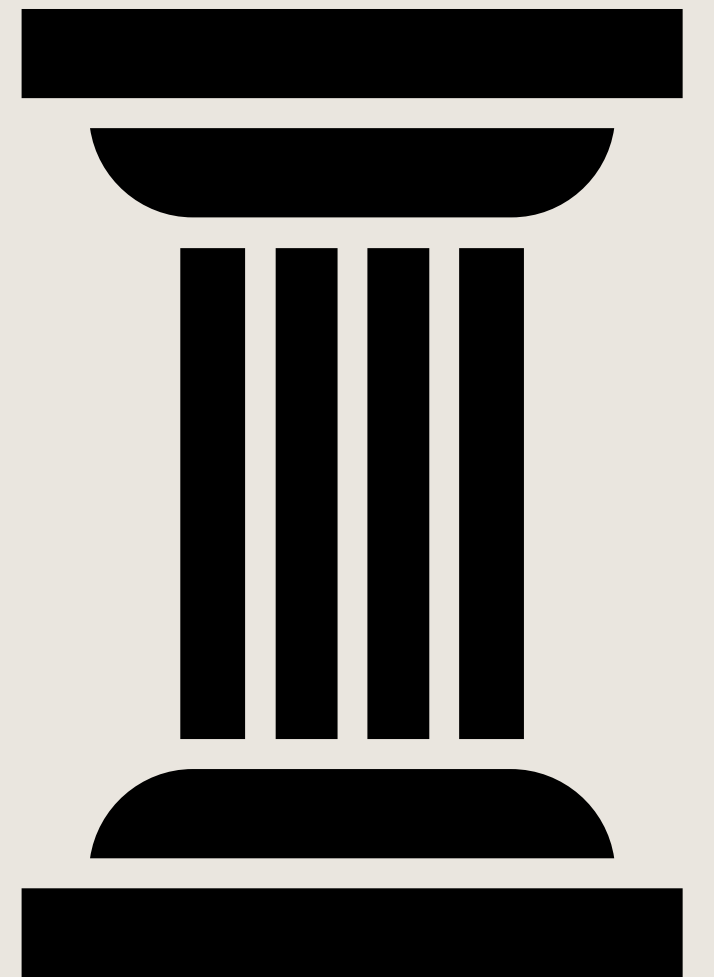
Consistency



Intention



Accountability



# Resources page:

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/pw-select/article/94546-ask-an-expert-sensitivity-reading-and-diversity.html>

<https://www.sfwf.org/2024/04/02/what-is-sensitivity-reading/>

<https://www.diversebooks.org/>

<https://publishingperspectives.com/2024/02/diversity-in-us-publishing-the-new-lee-low-report/>

<https://www.writingdiversely.com>

<https://fireflycreativewriting.com/>

<https://www.wickedinkpublishing.com/sensitivity-reading>

<https://www.drake.edu/sjmc/about/diversity/inclusive-writing/>

<https://languageplease.org/inclusivity-reader-directory/>

<https://sandswa.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>

<https://www.theopennotebook.com/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-resources/>

**Because stories shape the  
world we live in.**

**And we are here to leave  
behind a better world, with  
better stories than the ones we  
inherited.**

**thank you**

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