FINDING THE LIGHT: LEARNING TO SEEK OUT STUDENT STRENGTHS TO GUIDE BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT
My project is grounded by a quote from Amanda Gorman’s poem The Hill We Climb:

“For there is always light,
if only we’re brave enough to see it.
If only we’re brave enough to be it.”

The alternative format allows me to visually show the complexity of different layers of student identity that I can uncover as I get to know my students better. I also use the layers to ask questions that elicit reflection on ways I can improve my approach to behavior management in the future and work to disrupt the structural racism present in a system that disproportionately affects black and brown boys.

I designed my project to be best viewed when held up to a window or other light source to see the layers add together when illuminated from behind. This means that the viewer must actively seek out the light in the space where they are interacting with my project just as I plan to seek out the light in all of my students. The metaphor extends to the variability in student actions from day to day. Some days might have bright sunlight where it is easy to find a natural source of light, but other days might be darker, and it will take greater effort to find a light source which may have to come from myself as the teacher.

Each layer represents different aspects of behavior management that I must keep in mind while teaching in order to best support students of color in my classroom. The first layer shows just the school-wide behavior management system that teachers are expected to follow with actions leading to consequences in this method. The second layer adds awareness of implicit bias and how my thoughts and decisions can influence the outcome for students based on their race. The third layer reminds me how important it is to build relationships in the classroom by really getting to know my students and grow mutual respect for one another. The final layer is a call to provide a counternarrative for my students of color that helps them realize their true worth and feel proud of their identity. It is in this last layer that I move the focus to repairing harm through restorative justice instead of imposing consequences, which I see as a better method for taking responsibility for actions and finding a way forward.

I intentionally designed my project to also reveal a new piece of a poster on the top part of the box as each layer is moved down to the lower part of the box. As the layers progress, the words “Black is beautiful” and photos of influential black people are uncovered. The poster provides an example of one of the ways I plan to adjust my personal narrative regarding race, validate and affirm students of color in my classroom, and build confidence in their ability to succeed.