Critical Engagements with Award Winning Picturebooks: My Journey in Creating a More Equitable Classroom Library

Carrie Elizabeth Crowe
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

Part of the Education Commons

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Critical Engagements With Award-Winning Picturebooks: My Journey in Creating a More Equitable Classroom Library

Carrie Elizabeth Crowe

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Paul H. Ricks, Chair
Terrell A. Young
Ramona Maile Cutri

Department of Teacher Education
Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2023 Carrie Elizabeth Crowe
All Rights Reserved
ABSTRACT

Critical Engagements With Award-Winning Picturebooks: My Journey in Creating a More Equitable Classroom Library

Carrie Elizabeth Crowe
Department of Teacher Education, BYU
Master of Arts

Research consistently shows that students from historically marginalized populations have difficulty accessing texts that represent the realities of their lives. Concerned that such might be the case for my students, I conducted an inventory of my classroom library and sought out award-winning texts that could make my library more diverse and inclusive. I then analyzed these award-winning texts using Bishop’s (1992) categories of multicultural literature in order to better understand the picturebooks’ underlying messages and ideologies. My examinations showed that the majority of the texts fit into the same category (culturally specific), though I was able to identify award-winning texts that were culturally generic and culturally neutral as well. Additionally, each category yielded salient themes—ranging from acceptance of one’s complex identities to America’s racialized and politicized tensions—and activist educators will wish to carefully consider said themes as they select texts and engage in critical conversations with young readers.

Keywords: classroom libraries, picturebooks, representation, diversity, inclusion
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and admiration to Dr. Paul H. Ricks and his patience and generosity of his time and expertise as my mentor and advisor. Learning from him has been an experience unmatched. Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Terrell A. Young and Dr. Ramona Maile Cutri for their feedback and advisement. Special thanks to my unofficial committee of colleagues and friends Jill Hostetter and Melody Pulu for your encouragement. Thank you to my sister Christy Hughes, for being just as invested in the books I read, and the experiences reading them. My deepest gratitude I give to my parents. Thank you, mom and dad, for being my biggest cheerleaders, and reminding me I can do great things. And to my son Atticus, I hope because of my work, your experience with the books you read will be eye opening and thrilling to see yourself within the pages. You are my reason for this, and you are my reason for everything. Te amo.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE .......................................................................................................................... i
ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................ ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................................................................... iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ......................................................................................................... iv
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................. vi
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................ vii
CHAPTER 1: Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1
Statement of the Problem .................................................................................................... 3
Statement of the Purpose .................................................................................................... 4
CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature ..................................................................................... 5
Representation in Children’s Literature ............................................................................ 5
Diverse Classroom Libraries ............................................................................................ 7
Award-Winning Literature ............................................................................................... 9
Summary ............................................................................................................................ 13
CHAPTER 3: Method ........................................................................................................... 14
Classroom Library Inventory ........................................................................................... 14
Cultural Categories ........................................................................................................... 16
Critical Examinations ....................................................................................................... 19
CHAPTER 4: Results ........................................................................................................... 22
Culturally Generic Texts .................................................................................................... 22
Culturally Neutral Texts .................................................................................................... 29
Culturally Specific Texts .................................................................................................... 34
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pick Yourself up by the Bootstraps</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of Helpers</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches of Communication</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America: A Place of Tension</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: Discussion</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections of Research</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILDREN’S LITERATURE REFERENCES</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX: Lee &amp; Low Classroom Library Questionnaire</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td><em>Children’s Book Award Focus</em></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td><em>Children’s Picturebooks and Their Cultural Category</em></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Julián is a Mermaid</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Dancing Hands</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>We are Little Feminists: Families</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Just Ask</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Dreamers</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Rescue &amp; Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>When Aidan Became a Brother</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Shanyaak’utlaax: Salmon Boy</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>¡Vamos! Let’s Go Eat</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>The Undefeated</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Bowwow Powwow</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I remember the sound of excitement in Adia’s voice, her face beaming with a smile from ear to ear. “Ms. Crowe, I love the book you gave me. She’s like me!” Adia, a student in my class, turned the cover of the book toward me, displaying a picture of Sonia Sotomayor. This was my “Freedom Writers” movie moment as a teacher. I had made a student feel seen by giving her a book with someone who looked like her. It was not until years later that I realized how little thought I had actually given to placing that book in Adia’s hands. I gave it to her simply because Adia was Latina, and Sonia Sotomayor, featured prominently on the cover, was too. Now, with more experience as a teacher, I wish the moment I shared with Adia had been more intentional on my part. I wish that I had deliberately given Adia a mirror text (Bishop, 1990), or one in which she could see herself in the pages of a book.

My thoughts and feelings about this experience have since deepened, and I have become more aware of the ways my other former students’ experiences might have paralleled Adia’s. For example, I wonder if they could see themselves mirrored in texts? Did they ever feel seen, heard, or represented? And what about my students now? These questions ultimately led me to ask how I can improve the literary experiences of my students in my classroom. I do not want them to receive just one single story (Adichie, 2009) about historically marginalized people. I also do not want them to grow up believing that there is only one way to think, speak, look, act, and be. Thinking about my students and their possible experiences, I can see how my thoughts and feelings are influenced by my own experiences as a woman of color, as well as by the books my teachers had in their classroom libraries for a child like me. I was always one of very few children of color in my classes. I remember my teachers generally had traditional fairy tales, Dr.
Seuss books, and other texts written mainly by white male authors. Such texts dominated the classroom libraries that I had access to growing up.

However, I also remember that my teachers would display books about Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges, and Martin Luther King Jr. during the month of February, but these books went right back into the boxes they came from when the month ended. The awkwardness felt when these books were displayed or spotlighted—and then promptly put away—seemed to say to me, “You are different and you are important right now, but go back to being the white side of you after this month is over.” That is at least how I interpreted things as a young, biracial girl living in a predominantly white community, attending a predominantly white school, and living in a home with white parents, who, despite their best efforts, did not always know how to keep me from feeling isolated and alone.

I did not grow up with a library full of books about children who looked like me or lived like me. My parents are both formally educated people, and they did their best with what they had and knew how to do at the time. But as I have been able to talk with them about my experiences, they now recognize how much more they could have and even should have done for their two biracial daughters. They recognize the potential harm in only having access to certain kinds of texts (Adichie, 2009; Bishop, 1990; Garces-Bacsal, 2022; Henderson et al., 2020), and they wish they had done more to bring books of historically marginalized people into our home.

I believe my parents did their best. I also believe my teachers who had an influence on me during my formative years as a child, who were adults that I respected, were trying their hardest. Even so, as a woman of color, as a teacher, and as one who wishes to advocate for positive change, I realize that it is a responsibility of the teacher to facilitate opportunities for students to both be seen for who they are and who they might become.
Once upon a time, I was a biracial girl who did not see herself often in the books in her home or classroom. These days, I am a teacher who feels a connection with my students, and I want them to feel seen, heard, and understood. Furthermore, I am a mother to a multiracial son named Atticus, who comes from a single parent home with a dad who is not as involved as some of the other dads he sees around him. For my son, I do not want him to feel that same awkwardness and isolation that I felt as a girl. For my students, I do not want them to feel that same awkwardness and isolation when it comes to their transactions (Rosenblatt, 1993) with texts in which there are (or are not) historically marginalized people represented in their teacher’s classroom library. I want them all to feel and see that they are recognized for the diversity of their lives. I want them to know that they have at least one adult in a position of (relative) power that supports them no matter what their perceived marginalized parts might be.

**Statement of the Problem**

As shown in longitudinal studies beginning in 1985 to the present conducted by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC), there is not enough representation from and about communities of color. Put another way, there is both a lack of BIPOC authorship and a lack of stories featuring characters from BIPOC backgrounds. Moreover, if race and ethnicity—which have been discussed in critical literary circles since the 1960s (e.g., Larrick, 1965)—need significant improvement, it stands to reason that we also have a long way to go when it comes to more equitable representation of other marginalized groups (e.g., ability, gender, sexual orientation, class).

As an educator, I often wonder about the degree to which I have a diverse classroom library. Does my classroom library hold “single story” (Adichie, 2009) narratives, or does it blossom with an array of narratives that represent diverse stories that need to be told? Do I give
space primarily to the most well-known awards (i.e., Newbery and Caldecott), or do I also have
texts that represent narratives from lesser known, more culturally specific spaces? With those
wonderings, I recognized the need to take a look into my own classroom library and evaluate its
texts, noting the spaces and places where I need to include more diverse stories.

**Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of my study is to first and foremost provide my students with a more
equitable classroom library (Crisp et al., 2016). Additionally, I hope to provide other educators
with an accessible blueprint of how they can analyze their own classroom libraries by using
critical multicultural lenses (Bishop, 1992; Botelho & Rudman, 2009). While certain awards
such as the Newberry and Caldecott remain important entry points for exposing readers to
literarily and visually rich texts (Yokota, 2011), I want to examine award-winning texts that
come more from the margins. As such, I plan to seek out other children’s book awards (e.g.,
Stonewall, Batchelder, American Indian Youth, Coretta Scott King, Schneider), to bring in the
stories and experiences of the marginalized, written by and for the marginalized. I hope that by
including and examining these texts my research will allow for more robust reading experiences
for my students that may ultimately expand the mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors
(Bishop, 1990) they encounter and access in my classroom.

The following research questions guided my study:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of my classroom library?

2. Which award-winning texts can enhance my library from a critical multicultural
   perspective?

3. How do the books in my classroom library attend to issues of diversity and
   representation?
CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The underrepresentation of marginalized populations in children’s literature is neither a new issue nor one situated squarely in the past. From the work of Nancy Larrick (1965) half a century ago to more recent scholarship (e.g., Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2018), research has consistently shown a need for improvement in this area. In this review of the literature, I first examine the need for increased representation of people from historically marginalized groups. I then discuss the scholarship on inventorying classroom libraries and critically engaging with award-winning texts.

Representation in Children’s Literature

In a seminal study conducted by Larrick (1965) looking at over 5000 trade books published between 1960 and 1964, she discovered that only 349, or 7%, of those books included characters that were Black. Furthermore, of those represented in the texts, many of them perpetuated racialized stereotypes even in award-winning literature selected by librarians. Larrick noted, for example, that in a particular text librarians seemed not to be “bothered by four pages showing Negro children with great buniony feet, coal black skin and bulging eyes (in the distance a dilapidated cabin with a black, gun-toting, barefoot adult)” (pp. 64–65). Larrick’s study unveiled the need for both an overall increase in representation and the interrogation of the racist texts being published at the time. Thus, it was not enough to have books that represented those of marginalized lives; it was also crucial that there were books of quality that filled libraries in order to create distance from those books that perpetuate negative stereotypes of marginalized groups.
With Larrick’s (1965) seminal research, one would perhaps expect to see changes in the ways children of color were represented in children’s texts, but in scholarship published nearly 20 years later, Sims (1983) found that similar issues still persisted. She noted that despite a minimal rise in the number of texts published which featured Black characters, children’s literature nevertheless “remain[ed] largely white in terms of characters, the authors and the audiences for whom the books [were] written” (p. 650). For Sims, the lack of representation and the abundance of racialized stereotypes sent the message that “for black children, the absence of positive images in children’s books was a clear signal that they themselves had little worth in the society that these books reflected” (p. 651).

One can look at the work of Larrick (1965) and Sims (1983) and might assume the lack of diversity and perpetuated stereotypes are issues of the past. However, more contemporary scholarship shows that this is hardly the case. For example, in 2014, Horning noted an overabundance of white representation and a lack of Black characters. She examined over 1500 books published in 2013 and found that “just 124 of those (10.5 percent) featured a person of color” (p. 2).

We must remember that the lack of representation in children’s literature is not only confined to race and ethnicity. For example, Singh (1998) noted an imbalance in literature for young readers in which males were almost twice as likely to be represented when compared to females. Furthermore, Jones (2008) found an underrepresentation of the working class and poor families in children’s literature. Somewhat unsurprisingly, Sapp (2010) noted similar disparities in the representation of LGBTQ+ populations, and Prater et al. (2006) found that those with disabilities were both often underrepresented and tokenistically portrayed while centering the experiences of characters without disabilities.
As stated previously, the underrepresentation of marginalized populations in children’s literature is nothing new. Even so, in recent times there has been a recognizable shift in the types of stories being told and by whom, which may in large part be due to movements such as #WeNeedDiverseBooks. This particular movement resulted from unfortunate circumstances at the 2014 Book Expo America in which 30 authors were chosen to be an all-star line-up. The glaring problem of this all-star line-up was that “all of the authors were white, and mostly male” (Young et al., 2020, p. 77). This unconscious slight birthed #WeNeedDiverseBooks, a nonprofit organization whose primary goal is “to produce and promote literature that reflects the lives of all young people” (We Need Diverse Books, 2017). This movement has undoubtedly played a role in the noticeable shift that has occurred in children’s publishing, as there are more texts portraying the diversity of this world than ever before (CCBC, 2018).

**Diverse Classroom Libraries**

Based on students’ need to see themselves and others represented in texts for young readers, scholars and practitioners have begun to examine classroom libraries to advocate for positive change and diversity of representation. This scholarship often provides educators with practical templates such as those created by Lee and Low (2017) so that they can create libraries that are more equitable and diverse. In the following section, I briefly outline key studies from the last decade that have examined classroom libraries and how they represent and attend to the specific needs of diverse groups of learners.

In a study conducted by Catapano et al. (2009), researchers focused on working with new teachers and helping them set up their classroom libraries as part of their literacy programs. They recognized the amount of thought required in establishing a classroom library, as well as the impact high-quality classroom libraries can have on students. Teacher candidates were surveyed
by their mentors and other faculty members who asked both where teacher candidates would obtain books for their classroom libraries and what types of books would be a part of their classroom libraries. Those involved in the study used a simple rating checklist (excellent, adequate, not adequate) to rate classroom libraries by various categories of their mentor teachers. Catapano et al. (2009) found that the majority of the classrooms that were rated by the simple checklist did have a range of a variety of texts. However, they also found that new teachers were still in need of support with the development, managing, and use of classroom libraries. Thus, many new teachers need support on how to set up a classroom, and this is fundamental because it can impact what books are found in classroom libraries for students from historically marginalized populations.

Crisp et al. (2016) examined classroom libraries and the issues of representation and diversity found in them. The research was conducted in hopes of finding and creating solutions for teachers who wished to organize their classroom libraries with diverse books. The research was conducted in 21 preschools with the majority of the teachers identifying as African-American, with most classrooms having fewer than 50 books at any given time and minimal rotation of books in their classroom libraries. The team coded books according to certain categories: religion, social class, dis/abilities, developmental differences, chronic illness, sexual identity, gender, parallel cultures, language, and genre.

Crisp et al. (2016) found that all of the coded categories lacked presence in classroom libraries, indicating an overall lack of diversity. They therefore suggested that educators and librarians could inventory their libraries according to the findings of this study in order to reflectively reconsider the texts on their shelves. They further suggested that educators ask themselves the following questions: “What is included in my classroom library when I think
about depictions of gender? How does my library look when I think about racial diversity? Who has a voice and representation here? Who does not?” (p. 39).

More recently, Henderson et al. (2020) completed an analysis of three classroom libraries and examined the diversity of literature available to young students. They inventoried the libraries using the self-evaluation from Catapano et al. (2009) and Lee and Low’s (2017) classroom library inventory to determine how the collection of books reflected the students’ lives and identities—racially, culturally, and linguistically. Henderson et al. (2020) found that the classroom libraries did not reflect the demographics of the students and their lived experiences, which is unfortunate, as “[a]n absence of texts reflecting the intersectionality of students’ identities and lives can have a lasting negative impact” (p. 754).

**Award-Winning Literature**

Educators often turn to award-winning literature because of the perception that if it is award-winning, it must be of quality (Yokota, 2011). However, while award-winning books can be an important step in getting quality diverse texts in the hands of young readers, it is a dangerous assumption that because there is some literary merit to a book there is also quality in the representation of characters and cultures within the text. As Young et al. (2020) state:

> Awards help considerably to raise awareness about the books being published for young readers. Of course, readers are wise not to put too much faith in award-winning books. Winning an award does not necessarily mean a book will provide a good reading experience, but it does provide a starting place when choosing books. (p. 270)

While award-winning texts provide an important starting place, it has been argued that children’s literature, like texts for older readers, must be taken seriously by parents and educators (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997). Those who share texts with young readers can and therefore should carefully
examine texts through various critical lenses (e.g., critical, multicultural, postcolonial, feminist) in order to better understand their unique affordances, limitations, ideologies, etc. (Beach et al., 2009).

In 1986, Taxel discussed the controversies surrounding award-winning literature in an article entitled “The Black Experience in Children’s Fiction: Controversies Surrounding Award Winning Books.” Taxel’s content analysis of three Newbery-winning novels showed that while all three hit the mark for their literary merit (i.e., plot, character, setting and style), only one of the three novels met literary standards for the Newbery Award without perpetuating stereotypical inaccuracies of characters and cultures for people of color. Taxel noted that two of these award-winning novels “present a distorted and inaccurate view of black culture and history” (p. 245). While the focus of the Newbery is literary merit, is it just as important or possibly more so that there is merit within the representation of characters of color in these award-winning books. That said, award-winning literature tends to go unquestioned by many educators, as they often assume such texts to be of high quality across all levels.

More recent scholarship has continued to demonstrate the need for critical examinations of award-winning texts. For example, conducting a content analysis of 72 children’s picture books that included Latino characters and topics familiar to Latino children, and following the framework of the Horn Book Guide criteria, Gomm et al. (2017) described the need of culturally specific colorful illustrations with the inclusion of Latino children. They also found that texts ought to represent situations that realistically connect to readers, as well as words and phrases in Spanish and characters that are true to life. Similarly, Ryan and Wilmarth (2013) applied critical lenses (i.e., queer theory) to examine well-known award-winning children’s books. They concluded that by using award-winning texts which many educators already have on their
shelves, young readers can be encouraged to think about books and the connection of constructed norms found in their lives and how a queer lens can add different perspectives to those norms.

The work of Leininger et al. (2010) focused on the accuracy of the portrayals of characters with disabilities in Newbery Award-winning texts. Through content analysis and the framework of the 13 disability categories of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Leininger et al. examined 131 Newbery books and found that the majority of the characters with disabilities were male and white. And, while disabilities such as specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairment and other health impairments are the disabilities most serviced in schools, they found that “representation of characters with disabilities in Newbery books is not proportionate to the current school population of children and adolescents with disabilities” (p. 587). In another study, Taber and Woloshyn (2011) analyzed the Governor-General award-winning Canadian children’s literature, noting the need for both gender inclusivity and representation of those with exceptionalities in children’s books. They concluded that educators must therefore make readers aware of the hegemonic ideas of gender and those with exceptionalities.

In more recent years, Johnson et al. (2019) edited a compilation of chapters written by scholars who focused specifically on illustrated texts and examined them through various critical lenses. As I thought through how I might examine the picturebooks on my shelves, this edited work was an invaluable resource that helped me to see how my study could contribute to the work that others produced. For example, in reviewing the work of Mathis (2019), I was able to see how children’s texts could support readers’ sense of identity and agency, which are aspects of representation I hadn’t previously considered. Mathis notes that social situations and interactions play part in how children see themselves and others when interacting with each
other. She states, “closely aligned with purposeful play is the role of story and ultimately children’s literature” (p. 65). Thus, the stories that children read can impact the way they learn and then choose to interact and hold to beliefs about others, so educators must carefully consider the “realistic and imaginary situations” (p. 96) students engage with as they read because of the impact they could have on students’ identity and agency.

Cueto et al. (2019) focused on addressing the stigmatization of people living with psychological conditions and how illustrators can steer away from stereotypical images of those with psychological disabilities within children’s books. For example, Eeyore, a friend of Winnie the Pooh in the *Winnie the Pooh* series, is known for his low demeanor, glum facial features, slumped shoulders, and seeing the glass half empty attitude. As such, readers can see his characteristics “hint at the diagnostic possibility of depression” (p. 136). Another example found within children’s book illustrations is the use of the “pervasive dark cloud” (p. 136). Cueto et al. (2019) argue that such depictions may perpetuate a uniform image of sadness and depression rather than opening spaces for nuanced metaphors for such emotional states.

In the same edited work, Kim and Short (2019) discuss their study of picturebooks as embodiments of ideologies that can lead to certain types of discourses. For example, in examining the Caldecott Medal winner, *Smoky Night* (1994), by Eve Bunting, these scholars focused on how linguistic features can create different types of discourses around critical topics, such as riots and police intervention. Kim and Short conclude that no matter the social event and the engagement of the social groups analyzing or critically interpreting a text, they are ultimately producing their individual discourses based on personal social situations and personal positions.
Summary

The issues of diversity and representation, including the lack of stories representing historically marginalized populations, are not simply issues of the past. From Larrick (1965) to Catapano et al. (2009), from Taxel (1986) to Botelho and Rudman (2009), as well as many others, scholars have consistently found the lack of representation within the world of children’s literature to be a concern. Additionally, while there has been a call to include more diverse literature by systematically assessing classroom libraries (Crisp et al., 2016), it is still somewhat unclear which texts might enhance said libraries and why. It is my belief that award-winning texts representing historically marginalized populations are likely an important starting point. However, because of my haphazard inclusion of such texts in the past, I want to critically analyze award-winning books in order to better understand how they can attend to the needs of my students.
CHAPTER 3

Method

In this chapter I discuss the methods of inquiry I used to examine award-winning picturebooks through critical multicultural lenses (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). I first describe how and why I conducted an inventory of my classroom library. Next, I provide a step-by-step account of how I grouped picturebooks according to Bishop’s (1992) categories of culturally generic, culturally neutral, and culturally specific texts. I then conclude by describing key tenets of critical multicultural analysis (CMA) and show how they guided my examinations of award-winning texts for young readers.

Classroom Library Inventory

As stated previously, I wanted to have a culturally diverse and relevant classroom library accessible to my students. I therefore began my study by taking an inventory of my classroom library to find the gaps of representation (Crisp et al., 2016) within my children’s picturebooks. I used Lee and Low’s (2017) Classroom Library Inventory as a guide for looking at my classroom library. (See Appendix A)

Once I decided on the categories that I would use for my classroom inventory, I was able to start taking inventory of my classroom library of over 300 picturebooks. In order to establish validity and maintain consistency in the analysis of my inventory, I first analyzed ten picturebooks with my committee chair and another committee member. Together, we examined the books and discussed their strengths and weakness as far as representation was concerned. I then worked with a fellow elementary teacher in finishing my classroom inventory, and here, too, we categorized ten texts together, just as I had done with my committee members, in order to maintain the same validity and consistency.
In my classroom inventory, the most obvious findings were of what I lacked. I heavily lacked books that represented the LGBTQ+ community, socioeconomic statuses other than middle class; based on the indicators of income and occupation, languages other than English, (dis)abilities, female protagonists, ethnicities other than white, and the genres of poetry, historical fiction, biography, and realistic fiction. The majority of my picturebooks were in the categories of non-human/anthropomorphic, white, male, nonfiction/informational, and fantasy. Again, not all of my books fell into the above categories, but the majority of my picturebooks did, and that was enough to make me question my practices and purposes of my classroom library.

My next step was turning to book awards that could enhance my classroom library by better representing the demographics of my classroom, school, and surrounding community. When it came to deciding on which book award winners to analyze, I decided to not include Newbery and Caldecott winners in my analysis, seeing how they tend to be widely examined and they do not specifically target diverse stories (Yokota, 2011). I therefore sought out texts that won the following awards presented by the American Library Association (ALA): Mildred L. Batchelder, Stonewall Book Award, Pura Belpré Award, The Coretta Scott King Book Award, Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, Schneider Family Book Award, and American Indian Youth Literature Award. (See Table 1 for summaries of award criteria)
Table 1

*Children’s Book Award Focus*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AWARD</th>
<th>FOCUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian Youth Literature Award</td>
<td>Writing and illustrations by and about American Indians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature</td>
<td>Books about Asian/Pacific Americans and their heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildred L. Batchelder</td>
<td>Books originating in a country other than the United States and in a language other than English and subsequently translated into English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Coretta Scott King Book Award</td>
<td>Books that demonstrate and appreciation of African American culture and universal human values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schneider Family Book Award</td>
<td>Books that embody an artistic expression of the disability experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonewall Book Award</td>
<td>Books relating to the LGBTQ+ experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pura Belpré Award</td>
<td>Presented to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* These are children’s book awards and the focus of the award. The awards used within my research stems from my classroom demographic and the curation of my classroom library. These are just some of the awards affiliated with the American Library Association.

**Cultural Categories**

Bishop provided a framework (1992) that outlines three main categories for the analysis of diverse literature: culturally specific, culturally generic, and culturally neutral. Culturally specific literature “illuminates the experience growing up a member of a particular, non-white cultural group...often delineates character, setting and theme in part by detailing the specifics of daily living that will be recognizable to members of the group” (p. 44). Culturally generic
literature features “characters who are members of so-called minority groups, but they contain few, if any, specific details that might serve to define those characters culturally” (p. 45). Culturally neutral is sometimes defined as literature that is “universal” or “features people of color, but are fundamentally about something else” (p. 46).

Based on the funding I received from my university, I collected 19 award-winning picturebooks published between 2018 and 2021. I chose picturebooks to purchase that reflected best the identities of the students in my classroom, and what was lacking in my classroom library. I also chose the most recent four years of award winners because I wanted a data set that would be manageable for me to conduct my analysis. I then met with members of my committee on a number of occasions in order to identify which cultural category each text belonged to. We went back and forth reading sections of the texts, both silently and aloud, and as we did, we discussed why we thought particular texts might fit into one of Bishop’s (1992) three categories. We ultimately identified two picturebooks as being culturally neutral, two picturebooks as culturally generic, and 12 picturebooks as culturally specific. We also identified three picturebooks which did not fit into any of the three of the cultural categories, and we therefore categorized them as outliers: The Stuff of Stars (Bauer, 2018), The Fox on the Swing (Daciutè, 2018) and Cry, Heart, But Never Break (Ringtved, 2021). (See Table 2 for a list of award-winning texts and their cultural categories.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CULTURAL CATEGORIES</th>
<th>PICTUREBOOKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave by Sonya Sotomayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We Are Little Feminists: Families by Archaa Shrivastav</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic</td>
<td>Dancing Hands: How Teresa Carreño Played the Piano for President Lincoln by Margarita Engle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julián Is a Mermaid by Jessica Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>Bowwow Powwow by Brenda J. Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drawn Together by Minh Lê</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dreamers by Yuyi Morales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I Talk Like a River by Jordan Scott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paper Son: The Inspiring Story of Tyrus Wong by Julie Leung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queen of Physics: How Wu Chien Shiung Helped Unlock the Secrets of the Atom by Teresa Robeson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rescue and Jessica: A Life Changing Friendship by Jessica Kensky and Patrick Downes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Aretha Franklin, The Queen of Soul by Carole Boston Weatherford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shanyakk’utlaxx: Salmon Boy by Johnny Marks, Hans Chester, David Katzeek, Nors Dauenhauer and Richard Daunenhauer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Undefeated by Kwame Alexander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>¡Vamos! Let’s Go Eat by Raúl the Third</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When Aidan Became a Brother by Kyle Lukoff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Examinations

When one considers the analysis of texts using a multicultural lens, culture is often confined to the boxes of race and/or ethnicity, when in actuality culture can, and does, span beyond these realms (Shannon, 2011). CMA, a type of critical content analysis through multicultural lenses, requires a broader consideration of one’s position of power based on not just race/ethnicity, but also gender, ability, sexuality, language, etc. and how these parts of one’s identity operate within society. Botelho and Rudman (2009) state:

A critical multicultural analysis of children’s literature interrupts the social myth that we live in a classless, equitable and just society, and that everyone has access to the “American Dream” ...This dominant ideology circulates in children’s books (xiv).

Botelho and Rudman (2009) further state, “A critical multicultural analysis examines how literature represents power and how the reader can connect those messages with issues of social change and justice” (p. 9). Thus, different from other critical theories (e.g., critical race, queer, feminist) that focus on one major part of a person’s culture, CMA allows for the multifaceted aspects that affect one’s identity to hold equal weight. Botelho and Rudman (2009) make it clear that CMA “creates spaces for children to connect texts to their life experiences, other texts (literary and non-literary), and the world” (p.11), which is what I desire for my students.

CMA requires that critical readers ask a series of broad questions that can support examinations of children’s texts. For example, readers can ask themselves:

- What or whose view of the world, or kinds of behaviors are presented as normal by the text?
- What assumptions does the text make about age, gender, [class], and culture?
• Who is silenced/heard here?

• What moral or political position does a reading support? (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 4)

Those who examine texts using CMA consider how picturebooks “offer windows into society” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 2). To that end, all readers of picturebooks, young and old alike, can become researchers of picturebooks. Even so, I was initially somewhat overwhelmed by positioning myself as a knower and a researcher, though I also recognized that my specific lived experiences uniquely positioned me to analyze these texts and I wanted to push myself beyond my comfort levels in an effort to encourage others to do the same.

I began my first steps of critical analysis by identifying anything and everything that I noticed about the books. I took notice of visual elements (colors, lines, media, style, centered, background placement, expression, features of characters, etc.), text (font, size, bolded words, etc.), symbolism (colors, clothing, animals, etc.), language (emotion, spoken language, word choice, etc.), characters (gender, race/ethnicity, positionality, focus, etc.), setting, and events. As I conducted these readings, I took bulleted notes and saved them in a Google document. I also recorded my introductory findings on sticky notes, placing them on the actual pages of the texts, which allowed me to physically lay out and organize my thoughts.

After these initial readings, I then conducted a second level of analysis according to the specific book awards to find potential commonalities and unique features. However, before analyzing all 19 picturebooks in this manner, I met with members of my committee whose expertise lie within the field of children’s literature, and together we analyzed a few of the texts. Feeling confident that I could now analyze the remainder of the books on my own, I repeated the process with each text. This took a number of weeks, so each week I met with my committee
chair to discuss my findings. As with the first round, I recorded my second-level findings on a
Google document, and I also added sticky notes on the texts themselves to remind myself of
textual examples I might highlight in the final write-up of my thesis.

Ultimately, my analysis yielded a number of themes that I will discuss in greater depth in
the next chapter. From the two texts that I identified as being culturally generic, a theme of “Am
I Enough?” surfaced in a variety of ways. From the two texts that I identified as being culturally
neutral, I created themes of connection and acceptance. Last but not least, I created four key
themes for the culturally specific texts which I termed as follows: Pick Yourself Up by the
Bootstraps, The Impact of Helpers, Approaches of Communication, and America: A Place of
Tension.
CHAPTER 4

Results

As stated in the previous chapter, I ultimately categorized eleven texts as culturally specific, two texts as culturally generic, and two texts as culturally neutral. Even though there were relatively few culturally generic and culturally neutral texts compared to those I identified as being culturally specific, they still had connecting elements and features. However, because of the smaller data sets, I understood that I needed to be careful not to overgeneralize or make definitive statements about the themes found across these picturebooks. In what follows, I first discuss the themes I found in the texts I identified as being culturally generic and neutral. I then conclude with a discussion of the four themes I created from my analysis of the culturally specific texts.

Culturally Generic Texts

The main theme across the two picturebooks of the generic cultural category was a central question that the characters asked: “Am I Enough?” The protagonists in both texts grappled with an element of wondering if they were enough within the realms of who they were or what they were pursuing. As is typical of illustrated texts for young readers, the picturebooks related these messages in large part through their illustrations rather than through the written text (Serafini, 2014). In what follows, I provide key examples from the picturebooks of how the overarching theme of “Am I enough?” was depicted in two culturally generic texts.

Julián Is a Mermaid (Love, 2018) is about a boy named Julián who unpacks what gender norms mean to him and those around him. He explores his own gendered identity and individuality one afternoon that begins with him dressed as a typical boy according to societal
norms. He then shifts toward the exploration of areas some would characterize as being more feminine—makeup, flowers in the hair, dresses, and soft body movements and mannerisms.

Early on in the text, illustrations help readers understand that Julián wonders who/how he identifies and whether or not his world will be a safe space for him. For example, on the first spread, Julián’s facial expressions invoke a sense of naïve curiosity as he looks at the patrons (grown women) on the subway dressed as mermaids. Their bright pink, bright red, and deep blue hair flows down their backs. Additionally, bold, seashell-shaped earrings dangle from their ears, with the seafoam-green of the dresses flowing over their soft curves. On spread 4, Julián is in full mermaid imagination mode. A soft pink and neon orange tail has replaced his legs, and the facial expression of Julián is calm, happy, and curious. However, as mentioned previously, Julián is grappling with his identity, wondering if he is enough.

Julián returns home with his abuela and brings his imagination into reality by removing his clothing, pulling the fern leaves and bright pink and purple florals out of the vase creating the feel of long locks of hair. On spread 9, the curtain from the window with a knot at the end creates a delicate mermaid tail, and then abuela walks in. The distance between the two characters and crossed arms of abuela give an overall icy feeling to the scene. Abuela then turns her back to Julián, no words said, and exits the room. Julián has both arms wrapped around him, as if to console himself. He holds up his limp and lifeless tail, his face looking down at it with wide eyes, possibly wondering if he had ashamed abuela. The splashes of pink that seem to make a consistent show on every spread with Julián, which in my readings bring a lightness and femininity to the page, are diminished. The reader can observe a shift in color from bright, soft shades to a shade of brown, bringing a flatness and emptiness to the page. Julián looks at himself in the mirror, only half of his face he reflects in the mirror. Brows are raised, eyes are wide,
possibly on the verge of tears, and a low, sunken head reflects back to Julián. His reflection shows that he is thinking, processing, and wondering, “Am I enough?” Eventually, the discovery of self is aided by his abuela, who, at the end of the story, takes Julián to a parade where others like him, male and female, adults and children, show their expressions of individuality and the disregard for societal gender norms. (See Figure 1)

**Figure 1**

*Julián is a Mermaid*

![Image of a beach parade with people in various costumes.]


Similarly, the tension between characters and the theme of “Am I enough?” is found in the autobiographical text *Dancing Hands* (Engle, 2019). Teresa Carreño fled from Venezuela to the United States around the time of the American Civil War. She was a talented pianist who found herself traveling the world with her father performing for many, her biggest performance
being for President Abraham Lincoln. Despite her talent and the many performances given, Teresa questioned if she would be able to play and bring satisfaction to the Lincoln family.

In this text, the theme of “Am I enough?” unfolds as readers are shown how the main character moves from places and spaces of perceived safety and confidence to different arenas of uncertainty and doubt. For example, on spread 2, the colors are bright, with images of colorful florals and bold green leaves. The keys of Teresa’s piano transform into birds with the freedom to fly, thereby offering readers a visual metaphor for how Teresa’s piano playing is magical. On spread 3, words like, “joy,” “happy,” “peaceful,” “magnificent”, “shimmered” give the idea that Teresa loved playing the piano and it brought her joy, she was indeed enough. (See Figure 2)
However, Teresa’s confidence shifts when she and her family flee their home of Venezuela at the outbreak of war. Dark muted colors, in comparison to the opening illustrations, and words like “war,” “blazed,” “wild,” and “angry” (spread 4) give the reader a sense of the tragic circumstances that unsettle Teresa’s notions about her worth and security. Teresa continues to have opportunities to play the piano and perform when her family start a new life in the United States. However, she is never fully at a place of security and contentment in her talent.
and in who she is. That shifts the day she has opportunity to play for the president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln, which rekindles her sense of worth.

*Julián Is a Mermaid* (Love, 2018) and *Dancing Hands* (Engle, 2019) arguably contain high levels of literary and visual merit, thereby deserving their awards and recognition. However, as I transacted with the texts, carrying on with my analyses, I found myself reflecting back on my experiences as a biracial girl in the public school system. With my various lived experiences coming back to me, two questions kept coming to my mind: Why are these picturebooks so important? Why might they matter to people like me and my students?

In *Julián Is a Mermaid* (Love, 2018), I can’t help but see my own son represented by way of physical characteristics in the book. I can also see a number of students who I have crossed paths with. They are represented by their unique skin tones, hair textures, facial features, languages, desires for acceptance and inclusion, etc. More specifically, while still remaining culturally generic, this book allows for the diverse representations of the Latinx male in a more traditionally feminine role, which historically has been largely absent in children’s literature (García, 2019). Julián pushes the boundaries of identity, gender, femininity and masculinity in cultural spaces that historically have been oppressive to these ideas (Connell, 1995). Ultimately, this book matters, at least to me, because Julián is able to explore and consider his gendered identity as his grandmother opens and aids his journey of self-discovery.

Teresa’s journey of self-discovery allows for a young, strong, female character of color to navigate her own journey of learning and healing. She flees her homeland, a place of chaos, to a new land that also yields less than pristine circumstances. However, because Teresa has the support and direction of her father, as well as a strong work ethic and a talent for music, she is
able to bring partial healing to a figure of status (i.e., President Lincoln), as well as healing to herself as she navigates the historically marginalized spaces of her life.

Referring to culturally generic texts, Bishop (1992) noted that part of their appeal is how they can present nearly universal themes and experiences that feature characters from historically marginalized populations. As such, readers from a wide range of audiences can connect to their messages and see themselves mirrored in the stories they depict. Additionally, they can help “to counter subtle stereotyping” (p. 49) that distances diverse characters from their peers from majority cultures. To that end, I found these texts to be important additions to my classroom library, and I hope they will allow for increased representation of the marginalized. From my perspective, these texts can open spaces for my students, my son, and even my past self, to see historically marginalized narratives in new, positive ways.

That said, I was concerned that of the 19 texts analyzed, there were only two that fit into the category of culturally generic. This was concerning because it could be understood that those from marginalized populations who fit into uplifting, positive, nearly universal spaces are not necessarily of the norm. I couldn’t help but ask: What message does this comparatively small number of texts give to the diverse readers of my classroom, to my son, and even to me? Does it tell us that stories of success—having experiences like our majority culture counterparts—are not all that normal? Perhaps this was somewhat to be expected, as literary awards given to authors and illustrators of diverse cultural groups or that have diverse representation in the texts themselves might tend to depict culturally specific stories. Even so, as a person of color who wants to create understanding and empathy with my students and for my son, I also wish there were more award-winning texts that bridged and highlighted universal experiences that show how we are all more alike than we are different.
Culturally Neutral Texts

I found two overarching themes in my examinations of the culturally neutral texts. First, the picturebooks depicted spaces of positivity, safety, and connection. The texts also showed the author’s understanding and acceptance of one’s fluid and multifaceted identities. In what follows, I provide examples of the ways these themes manifested in the two award-winning texts.

*We Are Little Feminists: Families* (Shrivastav, 2020) provides readers with a look into the types of families that can be seen in society today. From traditional families (i.e., those comprised of heterosexual parents of the same races with their biological children) to families rarely seen in texts for young readers (i.e., mixed race, LGBTQ+, parents with their non-biological children), this board book for young readers highlights the author’s perceptions of modern-day families.

The author undoubtedly wanted to depict connection, safety, and positivity within both traditional and non-traditional family structures. Each spread features diverse characters smiling and enjoying being in the company of their loved ones. Additionally, strategic uses of bright rainbow colors and soft lines guide readers toward feelings of comfort and safety (Bang, 2016). The author also opted to prominently frame characters’ faces throughout in various close-up images, which leads to feelings of connection and understanding because of readers’ familiarity with making sense of and paying attention to facial expressions of those around them. Thus, while there are specific skin tones, eye colors, face shapes, etc., there is also a sense of universality because the wide range of features allows individual readers to connect with something and someone they can recognize. (See Figure 3)
The reader also notices that there is some form of connection happening on every spread of the book. The varying connections are parent to child, parent to parent, child to child, child to grandparent, etc. Additionally, the connections are joyful, approachable, and communal. In short, though some might argue otherwise, there’s something in this text for everyone. Whether readers self-identify as progressive or traditional (if they are even aware that such distinctions exist), it seems nearly impossible to argue that the author doesn’t want readers to see themselves and others in the pages of the text.

Just Ask (Sotomayor, 2019) highlights connection through the ways the author and illustrator depict various characters being accepted by others and feeling completely safe and
understood in their surroundings of nature. For example, spread 4 displays a vibrant blue bird in mid-flight as if to demonstrate the freedom the bird has to move as it pleases. Following diagonal lines that pull readers’ eyes downward (Bang, 2016), readers see an image of a child that might in some ways be confined to a wheelchair, perhaps creating the notion that the bird has more freedom than the boy does. However, a few spreads later, the reader understands how a wheelchair is not necessarily limiting. On spread 9, though not centered and the main focus of the page, you can see the same child in a wheelchair taking the lead. They give others directions and lead them to a spot where it appears they will plant a tree, and one friend in particular appears to need to take large strides in order to keep up with character in the wheelchair. The wheelchair, therefore, has not limited the child in being seen as a leader. Moreover, with the assistance of the chair, the character does not merely keep up with others, but is able to surpass them. (See Figure 4)
This notion that nature and ability seem to be in conversation with each other continues across multiple spreads of the text. For example, on spread 6, a character named Vijay, who is deaf, communicates “using my face and hands” (n. p.), and a tree that grows next to him as if to display its own arms and hands to make growth. Also, on spread 8, Tiana and Jordan, who both have autism, find their peace and calm as they are perched on the image of a rainbow. Other examples continue from spread to spread giving the idea that like nature, we bloom and bring uniqueness and beauty regardless of our specific circumstances.
Bishop (1992) created the category of culturally neutral texts while analyzing literature that depicted the young Black male experience. In that era, the terms multicultural literature and multiethnic literature were essentially synonymous, though such is no longer seen to be the case (Dahlen, 2020). Even so, I found that Bishop’s (1992) description of the culturally neutral category nevertheless remained relevant as I examined texts that not only represented an experience of one, but the experiences of many.

I only identified two picturebooks from my award winners that were culturally neutral. While this was initially somewhat disappointing, I felt that there might have been a silver lining of sorts. Locating two award-winning texts of this type meant that there were indeed picturebooks that might appeal to and lend themselves toward a diverse body of readers. This wider net is widely accessible to both those of historically marginalized groups and those of majority cultures because all of us can find portions of the texts that speak to the just-like-me aspects of our respective lives.

However, I still find it concerning that there were only two picturebooks of the 19 that I examined that fit into the neutral category. This is concerning for me as a mother, an educator, and woman of color because I want higher numbers (and therefore more choices) of award-winning texts that those from the majority and those from the historical margins can see themselves in together. I want my son and my students to have access to and connections with the shared experiences depicted in culturally neutral texts. I suppose two is better than none, though, and as will be shown in my next section, this slightly disheartening finding also helps to highlight some of the strengths from the body of texts I identified as being culturally specific.
Culturally Specific Texts

The four themes I identified in the culturally specific texts are as follows: Picking Yourself Up by the Bootstraps, The Impact of Helpers, Various Approaches of Communication, and America as a Place of Tension. In my qualitative analysis, I assigned meaning to these texts based on my subjective interpretations and examinations (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Not every theme manifested in each text; however, I did identify multiple examples across the different texts, which I discuss in more depth below.

Pick Yourself up by the Bootstraps

Depictions of characters picking themselves by the bootstraps (i.e., overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds through sheer grit) was the most common theme across the culturally specific picturebooks. I initially saw such depictions as essentially saying the same thing—that we must work hard to overcome the difficulties of our lives. However, as I continued to analyze the texts, I found that this narrative manifested in nuanced ways and provided new perspectives that I believe educators will want to consider.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul (Weatherford, 2020) depicts the life of legendary singer-songwriter and activist Aretha Franklin. The timeline of Aretha’s life reflects the hardship of having come from a broken home with her parents separating as a young girl. Her father, Clarence, was a pastor who she witnessed work side by side with pivotal Civil Rights activists, fighting for the equality of Black Americans. Witnessing the work of her father impacted her own activism during the civil rights movement where she raised funds for activism and performed free concerts.

Later in the text, readers learn of the many accolades, awards, and recognition Aretha gained for her music and her voice. Weatherford (2020) states that such acclaim did not come
without the experience of sorrow, pain, and overcoming the hardships of her familial life. Additionally, readers are reminded of the systemic hardships of Aretha’s era like being female and a Black American during a visibly and lawfully segregated time.

For example, on spread 7, illustrator Frank Morrison shows a young Aretha singing at a podium, presumably in her father’s church where he was a preacher. Readers can see that she takes pride and feels confident in her ability to sing publicly. However, on the same spread, we read that it, “was her wise father” who saw the potential of her future, perhaps unveiling the patriarchy, even within an otherwise minoritized population. On spread 6, a similar message is relayed with the images showing only Black men at the table of leadership fighting for their communities. (See Figure 5)
Figure 5

*R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul*


*Paper Son: The Inspiring Story of Tyrus Wong, Immigrant and Artist* (Leung & Sasaki, 2019) follows the story of a gifted illustrator. He left his homeland of China with his father to immigrate to the United States for greater possibilities at the age of 9. Later, as a young adult, he had the opportunity to work as an illustrator, which had been his dream. However, this opportunity did not come without hardship and making the best out of the challenges faced.

The challenges of immigrating to a new country as a 9-year-old boy were intense. For example, on spread 11, readers learn that Wong had to live with the knowledge of leaving his mother behind in China, knowing he might not see her again. Wong also had to take on a new
identity upon immigrating to the United States. He had to memorize facts and details of the persona Tyrus Wong, no longer living his birth given name and identity of Wong Geng Yeo.

Additionally, Leung and Sasaki’s (2019) text shows how Wong was separated from his father on arrival to the United States and placed in barracks with strangers for weeks until it was time for his interrogation to stay in the United States and rejoin his father (spread 5). Despite this and other challenges, the book as a whole follows a rags-to-riches narrative, as Wong immigrates to the US with a new identity, is fired from Disney unjustly, and constantly paints for years before his work is acknowledged. The last few spreads depict Wong eventually finding success as an artist having ultimately gained recognition for his artwork on “ceramics, silk scarves, murals, and menus. Tyrus always found new ways to leave his mark” (spread 14).

*Dreamers* (Morales, 2018) is an autobiographical text that depicts how the author and her infant son transition when they enter the United States as undocumented immigrants. From the first few spreads, readers note the difficulties the characters face making sense of an unfamiliar language and culture that wasn’t always very inviting. For example, on spread 4, phrases like, “Say something,” “WHAT?” and “Speak English,” show the language barrier between the characters and their new home, as well as the lack of patience and discrimination they experienced. Elsewhere, on spread 5, readers see Morales’ bathing her child in a public fountain. In the illustration, readers see the back of a police officer in a blue uniform, with arms stiff, his head directed downward as he looks at the bathers in the fountain. The police officer is enhanced on the page in comparison to the mother and baby, as if to place dominance and authority in the police officer’s favor (Bang, 2016). (See Figure 6)
The mother-son duo ultimately find respite in a local library. There, they teach themselves to read the books that are available to all, and this public space therefore becomes a home of sorts. The library gives them more freedom because once they learn to make sense of the books written in English, they are also able to make their own voices heard (spread 11). For example, on one of the final spreads, the readers see the mother turning to her son and stating, “someday we will become something we haven’t even yet imagined” (spread 13).
In children’s literature, as well as in literature in general, there is a long tradition of characters’ overcoming obstacles in order to achieve their dreams (Young et al., 2020). I am hopeful that the culturally specific texts which contained such narratives, especially the nonfiction books that are grounded in realities that might mirror the lives of my students, will inspire readers to continue to work hard and rise above their difficult circumstances. To that end, I don’t take issue with rags-to-riches, bootstraps stories.

However, as depicted in Jerry Craft’s (2019) award-winning graphic novel *New Kid*, there is also a tendency for texts featuring minoritized populations to be hyper focused on characters’ poverty and suffering. From historically situated slave narratives to graphic urban stories of the modern era, diverse readers don’t often get to see themselves represented in lighter, gentler, humor-filled books like their majority culture peers do. Thus, with so many of my award-winning texts fitting into the culturally specific category, and with so many of those books featuring characters who suffer (even though many of their sufferings actually happened in real life), I recognize that I will have to be conscientious in order to provide students with stories that don’t overemphasize trauma and trials at the expense of joy and healing.

**The Impact of Helpers**

In conversation with the notion of picking yourself up by the bootstraps, a second theme—the impact of helpers—offers readers an important counter narrative to the idea that one must face life’s trials alone. In what follows, I provide textual examples from *Rescue & Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship* (Kensky & Downes, 2018), *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Lukoff, 2019) and *Shanyaak’utlaax: Salmon Boy* (Marks et al., 2017), which all feature protagonists who, like those from the previous section, overcome defeat. However, in these stories, the main
characters do not prevail simply because of their mental fortitude and determination; rather, they are able to face life’s obstacles because of the help provided to them by others.

*Rescue & Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship* (Kensky & Downes, 2018), a story based on real-life events, is about two characters, a rescue dog named Rescue who questions his ability to help people, and Jessica, a victim in the Boston Marathon bombings who requires one of her legs to be amputated. Finding herself frustrated with the new ways of having to live with a prosthetic leg and the pain in her opposite leg, Jessica begins to wonder if there will be any support or help. However, she is ultimately able to overcome some of her challenges because Rescue can take up the slack when she is unable to do so on her own. (See Figure 7)
When Aidan Became a Brother (Lukoff, 2019), follows the main character, Aidan, who comes out to his parents as a trans boy. When Aidan learns his parents are expecting another child, he becomes preoccupied with whether or not his sibling will have the same support and ability to choose for themselves as he did about who they are. Aiden relays his concerns to his
parents about his experience in identifying with the opposite sex of his assigned sex at birth, and transitioning. He was met with consoling and emotional security from his parents. Aiden was able to help his parents realize the power they possessed as parents, when showing unconditional love to their children; regardless of who they choose and are meant to be. (See Figure 8)

**Figure 8**

*When Aidan Became a Brother*

> And you taught us how important it is to love someone for exactly who they are. This baby is so lucky to have you, and so are we.*


*Shanyaak’utlaax: Salmon Boy* (Marks et al., 2017), recounts the legend of a young boy who is given a piece of moldy salmon to eat by his mother. He is disgusted by the salmon and discards it. Showing a lack of appreciation for his mother and a disrespect for nature, the actions
of the boy offend the Salmon People, who within the context of the story are the link between humans and nature. As such, they turn him into a fish, and he is swept into their world. Though initially scorned by the Salmon People, Salmon Boy takes on their values and gains a deeper appreciation for both the Salmon People and his mother. Additionally, he recognizes the value of nature and its resources. Once his inner self is transformed, growing in appreciation and respect for his family and the Salmon people, he is allowed to turn back into a boy again, having learned invaluable insights about people and their relationship with nature. (See Figure 9)

**Figure 9**

*Shanyaak’utlaax: Salmon Boy*

---

As I pondered this theme, which on some levels seems so straightforward and simple and nevertheless held great meaning for me, I kept thinking about the possible impact of sharing books like these with my students. This theme matters to me because I believe it can teach young readers that they don’t have to face life’s challenges alone. The stories I’ve discussed in this section, as well as others that I didn’t mention but could have, demonstrate how help can come in a variety of forms. Additionally, they show that it isn’t weak or needy to ask for assistance. From service animals, to parents learning with and from their children, to a boy learning respect and appreciation for nature, the award-winning texts in this cultural category provided unique perspectives that in some ways dismantle the single story (Adichie, 2009) that overcoming life’s obstacles has to be done alone.

**Approaches of Communication**

Communication is vital in the way we connect with others and the world around us. Communication allows for positive experiences and opportunities, as well as new understanding, perspectives, growth, etc. In my examinations, I found certain texts from the culturally specific category opened my mind to new ways of seeing and being, as they depicted unique means of communication that connected to one’s specific culture, language, and ability.

*Vamos* ¡Let’s Go Eat* (Raúl the Third, 2020), is a book full of colorful language and illustrations, communicating through its words and pictures a unique cultural experience for the reader. *Vamos! Let’s Go Eat!* illuminates the power and synchronicity of a dual language text that both tells a story and gives an experience without the reader needing to be fluent in more than one language. For example, brightly colored characters, as well Spanish and English words that intertwine throughout, provide readers with an immersive experience that may feel foreign to some (though certainly not all) American readers. The book therefore exhibits how both
languages of the text, when read side by side, can give readers a bilingual experience that opens spaces for increased cultural understanding wherein no one way of speaking is privileged over the other. (See Figure 10)
Figure 10

¡Vamos; Let’s Go Eat

*I Talk Like a River* (Scott, 2020) is an autobiographical text that depicts the story of a boy who has difficulty using words to express his ideas, thoughts, and emotions. Because he speaks with a stutter, with “word-sounds stuck in my mouth” (spread 4), he agonizes over having to speak in front of his peers at school. However, with the help of his father, he learns that despite how stuck his words may be, there is also solace to be found when he is given a new simile of talking like a river that shifts how he views himself and his disability. His father is aware and actively helps his son to understand that his struggles to communicate do not have to hold him back at school, at home, or with friends. He makes the effort on days that the main character struggles in school to take him to a river, letting him regain perspective that even though a river may be, “bubbling, whirling, churning and crashing” (spread 13) all at the same time, it still ultimately flows in a way that is beautiful and powerful.

*Drawn Together* (Lê, 2018) follows the story of a grandfather and grandson who have difficulty communicating because of language barriers that are ultimately overcome when they learn that speaking is not the only way that they can communicate with each other. Early spreads depict the grandson and grandfather desperately wanting to connect and feeling disappointed because they can’t through verbal speech. However, when the grandson takes out his art supplies out of boredom and begins to draw, the grandfather makes a connection with him. He, too, pulls out his sketchbook, and they discover a shared passion for art. Together, they create a story through their illustrations, and like the main characters, readers “…find ourselves happily…SPEECHLESS” (spreads 14 and 15).

Many of the texts from the culturally specific category depict narratives that can help readers understand how communication helps us to feel part of our families and communities. Additionally, by drawing readers’ attention to elements that decenter majority representations
(e.g., spoken languages other than English; unique ways of speaking that might cause frustration or embarrassment), these texts can provide new mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990) through which to view the world. On a personal note, the make-up of my students spans from those with limited verbal skills in English based on second language acquisition to those who speak fluently in multiple languages. I also have students who are identified as being intellectually gifted and those with cognitive and processing disabilities.

My students represent a diverse group of learners with a wide variety of needs and skills, and I have watched them develop in their own strengths of communication. Some have learned to use models and pictures to express their needs and ideas. Others have accessed communication through the use of braille, magnifying glasses, unique facial expression and hand gestures, and more. Thus, we see communication embodies multiple modalities, and my hope is that in gathering texts that depict diverse means of expression, my students will be guided to deconstruct the notion that their way of communicating is somehow right or wrong.

**America: A Place of Tension**

Some of the culturally specific texts depicted societal and political tensions that complicate the American experience. I appreciated how authors and illustrators interrogated our nation’s complex histories, as I felt their stories would allow me to push for the types of critical conversations I want to have in my class. In what follows, I briefly provide textual examples of the ways certain texts approached sticky topics like race, class, gender, etc. in award-winning picturebooks, and I then conclude this section with a reflection on why I believe such stories can and must be told.

*The Undefeated* (Alexander, 2019) is coined as a love letter to Black America and the trials and triumphs overcome and accomplished by key historical figures. The text highlights the
tensions of an enslaved and segregated America. For example, early images capture the tension of the worn and hopeful, “with chains on one hand and faith in the other” (spread 4). In like manner, the words and images show the tension of the bound and barred traveling across unknown seas to their new incarcerations in the land of the brave and home of the free, while others find the end of their lives at the bottom of the sea.

Alexander (2019) seems intent on reminding readers that the racial tensions of America have never been fully resolved. He importantly reminds readers that the sacrifices of many have led to increased freedom and prosperity, but he also includes key spreads depicting modern-day violence against Black Americans that show there is still significant room for growth and improvement. I ultimately found *The Undefeated* to be hopeful, especially in the conclusion that states, “This is for you” (last spread). That said, the characters’ smiling faces (that in some ways look like mine) at the end of the book also reminded me that America is still a place of tension, with tragedies and injustices forcing many Black Americans to simultaneously remember and question who they are and what their lives are worth. (See Figure 11)
Figure 11

The Undefeated


Queen of Physics: How Wu Chien Shiung Helped Unlock the Secrets of the Atom (Robeson, 2019) recounts the story of Wu Chien Shiung, an immigrant from China who persevered in a gendered and racialized world that challenged her dream to become a physicist. Robeson’s text shows how Wu Chien Shiung had to push back against the tensions of norms in order to stand out. Born in China and not having been born a boy, opportunities and rights were not given. Her parents pushed back against the tensions of the cultural and created their own school before Chien was born, “So when Chien Shuing was ready, a school was waiting for her” (spread 3). Chien finished her education in China and made a move to the United States in hopes of continuing her education abroad in pursuit of her dream of being a physicist.
Making her move to the United States did not free Chien of tension. She now faced the
tensions of living in the United States as a woman and immigrant in the male dominated field of
physics. Chien led successful investigations of research that led to the awarding of the Nobel
Prize twice. However, Chien was never recognized for the work contributed and therefore not
recognized as a recipient of the Nobel Prize. This did not deter from her desired path, and instead
she opted to “Ignore the obstacles. Just put your head down and keep walking forward” (spread
17). Chien also found herself in the middle of unprecedented times and the social challenges of
World War II. The war brought tensions that found its place between many Americans, Asian
Americans and Asian immigrants like Chien. Despite the obstacles, Wu Chien Shiung endured
the tensions in front of her, pushed against them, eventually making a name for herself as a
woman, activist and physicist. Chien gained recognition and notoriety, earning herself the title,
“Queen of Physics.”

Bowwow Powwow (Child, 2018) highlights how the traditions of indigenous and Native
American cultures both harmonize with and push back against many of the norms of majority
culture American society. From the beginning pages of the text, readers can experience the story
in both Ojibwe and English. The two languages shown side by side on the pages serve as healthy
reminders that English is neither the first nor only language of this land and that colonization did
and does take place.

The illustrations also depict several tensions throughout the book. For example, on spread
6, images of traditional teepees are set up in the shadow of a large arena built up to hold masses,
the food stand selling soda and tacos. This reminds readers that while there has been a shift away
from certain traditions, some have nevertheless remained. On this same spread, the visuals depict
a handful of characters dressed in traditional clothing while others are dressed in cowboy attire.
Elsewhere, this tension of traditional and modern-day clothing is depicted as we see a procession of some characters dressed in ceremonial indigenous dress, and others in ceremonial western military attire. One character holds a flag as a symbol for the indigenous peoples and their stolen land, and on the opposite end, another character holds up the American flag. (See Figure 12)
Figure 12

*Bowwow Powwow*

She dreamed about the veterans in a Grand Entry, bearing flags and wounds from wars.

"Ogii-pawaanaa' ogichidaa' biindigeshimonid, biindigatooowiig giishwe'onan minowaa onjishikozowin bantiiwinig."

The tensions between traditional ways of being and western expansion continue throughout the picturebook, the most profound tension for me being that there are those who have a love and respect for traditional beliefs and culture, as well as an openness to working within a colonized world. *Bowwow Powwow* (Child, 2018) shows that there are Americans of indigenous lineage who find themselves balancing the tensions of pre-Columbian history with European colonization and the messiness that comes with it—whether it be the self-conflict of trying to balance both worlds, or trying to live a life with fidelity to one way or the other.

The examples described above (as well as others that could have been included) demonstrate that children’s texts are not ideologically neutral (McCallum & Stephens, 2011) and that all reading can be viewed as a political act (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Shannon, 2011). While the texts stand on their own individually, with their unique narratives and messages, when examined and grouped thematically, they serve as important interrogations of what Theoharis (2018) terms America’s “mis-histories” (p. xxi). From our country’s mythologized beginnings to the inequitable treatment of its citizens, children’s texts published in the United States rarely account for “the more robust and fuller history we need for today” (p. xviii). As such, I was pleasantly surprised to find award-winning picturebooks that thoughtfully engaged with the notion that America is a place of internal tensions, as well as ideals yet to be realized.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

When I started this study, I wanted to focus on three key questions that I hoped would help me create a more equitable classroom library and more thoughtful literary engagements with my students. As I have reflected on this process of analysis, I recognize a shift in both my awareness and my willingness to be more assertive when it comes to being an activist educator (Niesz, 2021). You may wonder what exactly I mean by that. Because my research focused on the representation of the historically marginalized in children’s texts, and because I sought out to add narratives that went beyond the single story (Adichie, 2009), I found myself speaking up and out in my day-to-day life.

Findings

This past school year, I found myself in several of my colleagues’ classrooms because I had a student teacher who was completing their solo weeks. I was asked on one occasion to go into a classroom and help a particular substitute teacher for management and behavior of students that I had had in the past. Teaching at a Title I school, we often help students to regulate behavior issues that may stem from lack of food, child services investigations, parents working multiple jobs, children taking on adult roles in the home, etc.

The school where I work is also located in one of the more ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods of the school district. Students are predominantly white and Hispanic/Latino, though there are also many Pacific Islander, Black, Asian, and Native American students. Prior to pursuing a master’s degree and participating in research, I often heard discussions about how students’ issues stemmed primarily from socioeconomic spaces. However, this year, I saw how a
lack of understanding about race and ethnicity unveiled very different issues in my school, such as the dangers of teaching single story narratives.

I was in the classroom of a colleague who had taken the day off, and I was asked to support the student teacher who was also working on their solo teaching. My task was mainly to focus on a few students and their behavior. Everything had been running smoothly, so I dismissed myself from the classroom for about an hour. Upon returning to the classroom, I observed the final part of a student groups presentation that focused on Native Americans. I asked the student teacher of the current task at hand, and she informed me that groups of students were presenting their social studies projects which focused on different peoples and their impact on America. Then the next group of students came up and began presenting. Their first slide read, “African Americans.” It initially seemed rather harmless, but that quickly changed.

The students began their presentation, with one narrating to the class that “the history of African Americans in America began with slavery.” Then, the other six students in the group began a slave trade reenactment. While some may say enslavement is a part of America’s history and therefore belongs in the classroom, it was nevertheless alarming to see. The white students acted as the slave traders and owners, using phrases like, “That one looks good.” “This is a good strong one.” and “I’ll take that one.” Of note, the three “slaves” were a Black student and two Latinx students, all of whom were female. At the time I was just trying to process what I was watching, and part of me as an educator understood that yes, this is part of our history, and therefore important for students to see. I was hopeful that the students would then begin sharing information that might shed light on the more positive impacts of the Black experience, but that was not the case.
I hesitate to say, but I watched about three to four more minutes of the same students, with their same reenactment roles, acting out two scenes of beating slaves for complaining about doing housework and for attempting to run away. Each beating scene was paired with language like, “You belong to me.” “You think you’re smart?” and “I own you!” Additionally, some students were clapping throughout to imitate the sounds of punches and slaps inflicted by the slave owners (i.e., white students) of the group.

It took me too long before I intervened and stopped the presentation. I did not shame anyone or attempt to make the students feel bad for what they had presented. I just let them know that while there was a certain accuracy to what they were presenting, the contributions of African Americans extend well beyond simply surviving the horrors of slavery. I explained that we do, indeed, need to have a knowledge of the dark parts of history because they have shaped us as a country. I also made clear that they were likely not adequately prepared with resources (e.g., texts for young readers) that could have given them more information of the African American perspective. I further explained that that was the job of the teacher. Overall, I don’t believe students ended up feeling guilty or anything of the like. That said, this experience was an important reminder that it is our responsibility as educators to have resources for our students so that they can critically engage in conversations in ways that don’t perpetuate demeaning stereotypes (Ricks et al., 2023).

I recognize that I cannot do everything to fix every school, or even my own. However, in conducting an inventory of my classroom library and examining the picturebooks on my shelves and the ways the books represent my students (Crisp et al., 2016), I have taken a crucial first step with my position of power within my classroom of making stories of the historically marginalized accessible. Additionally, I purchased award winning children’s picturebooks
representing diverse awards and analyzed those books with a critical multicultural lens. Looking at the demographics of my students and the books of my classroom library was an additional important step.

Approaching the picturebooks with a critical multicultural lens (Botelho & Rudman, 2009) guided me to understand the varying cultural levels of representation that could be found within the picturebooks of my classroom library. Representation is not just a single blanketed way of seeing oneself or others. Indeed, representation can be neutral, generic, or specific (Bishop, 1992) and still depict the diversity within and across particular cultural groups.

**Limitations**

I am fully aware that my study is not without its limitations. I specifically chose to inventory the picturebooks in my classroom library, and I then sought out award-winning illustrated texts that could fill in the gaps. As such, my study only examined a certain type of text (i.e., picturebooks) rather than longer works. I also focused on American book awards that I felt would better represent the demographics of my students, though there are other awards that could have been considered. Moreover, I only analyzed books between the years of 2016 and 2021 because of funding limitations, though I hope describing the aforementioned limitation is not taken as ingratitude, because I fully recognize that my limited funds were still likely more than many educators might receive.

**Reflections of Research**

Taking inventory of my classroom library has helped me understand the need to intentionally select diverse literature. I have also learned that it is not enough for readers to see themselves represented in books. Though that is an important starting point, it is equally important that books provide windows into others’ realities (Bishop, 1990). When books create
spaces for critical conversations, readers are able to see the world through more humanizing
lenses. And, at the same time that differences are celebrated, commonalities and similarities can
also be emphasized.

I have gained a greater understanding of and appreciation for Bishop’s (1992) categories
of multicultural texts through my analysis of award-winning picturebooks. My hope is that my
research will help others to take inventory of the books on their shelves, seek out texts that can
enhance representation, and then carefully analyze said texts for the messages they may carry. I
believe that taking small actions in this manner may break down single stories (Adichie, 2009)
about historically marginalized groups if educators will engage in critical discussions with their
students. Of course, neither the books nor the educators can be expected to do all of the work
alone, but together they can create spaces for meaningful discussions with young learners.
REFERENCES

http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story


https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806


https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/


https://www.proquest.com/docview/1837539742?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true


https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429426469


https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203986103


https://doi.org/10.1353/chi.2019.0001


CHILDREN’S LITERATURE REFERENCES


Shrivastav, A. (2020). *We are little feminists: Families*. Little Feminist LLC.


# APPENDIX

## Lee & Low Classroom Library Questionnaire

**Classroom Library Questionnaire**

Educators, how culturally responsive and diverse is your classroom library? Use the following questions as a guide to analyze your classroom library book collections and determine where there are strengths and where there is room to grow.

**To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

**1. The classroom library contains multiple books that include . . .**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>non-human, anthropomorphic main characters (e.g., talking animals, talking trucks, talking vegetables, imaginary or science fiction creatures, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2. The classroom library contains numerous books that include . . .**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>main characters who are Black, Native/Indigenous, or people of color</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>main characters who identify as LGBTQIA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>main characters with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3. The classroom library contains numerous books that . . .**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree or Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>are written or illustrated by a person of color or a Native/Indigenous person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature a person of color or a Native/Indigenous person on the front cover</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature contemporary diverse characters and storylines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature a range of family structures and family configurations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature characters with different types of gender identity and gender expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature a Black main character</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature a Latinx main character</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature an Asian or Asian American main character</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature a Middle Eastern and/or Muslim main character</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature a Native American/Indigenous main character</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are set in diverse regions of the world, including contemporary Asia, Africa, Europe, Central/South America, Oceania, and Native/First Nations/Indigenous regions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are reflective of my students’ cultures and heritages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explore different socioeconomic backgrounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explore religious diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are set in different geographic settings (urban, rural, suburban)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are written in languages meaningful to my students’ backgrounds or the community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in which they live (e.g., Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teach about immigration to the United States beyond the Ellis Island-narrative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teach about Black/African American contributions to the United States beyond the Civil Rights Movement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feature diversity throughout the year, not just in heritage and observance months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., Black History Month, Native American History Month)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. The majority of books featuring people of color or Native/Indigenous people . . .

- are only about issues of race, prejudice, or discrimination
- are only culturally specific (e.g., flags, foods, festivals)
- are only culturally neutral or contain incidental diversity
- are written by white authors
- are nonfiction

5. The classroom library contains some books that include . . .

- harmful stereotypes about a group of people
- inaccurate/Outdated information about a group of people
- generalizations about a group of people
- misrepresentations of a group of people
- discriminatory content about a group of people
- non-authentic stories about a group of people

6. The classroom library reflects the diversity of my students and the community in which we live (e.g., gender, race, family structure, language, culture, socioeconomic background, etc.)

What Now? If your classroom library is not as diverse and culturally responsive as you want it to be for your students . . . you are not alone!

Learn how others have built diverse library collections and where you can find diverse children’s books here: www.leeandlow.com/educators/grade-level-resources/classroom-library-questionnaire

Contact us at educators@leeandlow.com for more information on building customized classroom libraries or book collections for your students.

Find us online at leeanndlow.com

Educator Resources copyright © 2017 LEE & LOW BOOKS. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to share and adapt for personal and educational use. For questions, comments, and/or more information, please contact us at general@leeandlow.com. Visit us online at leeanndlow.com.