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Diversity in Children's Literature

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Diversity in Children's Literature

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Abstract

Teachers have the opportunity to make small, yet important decisions to incorporate materials and methods in their current classrooms to support students who are underrepresented, and to minimize the disconnect between the changing student population and the teacher population. While there are programs, websites, and statements about these materials, one of the easiest implementations for current teachers is through the books in classroom libraries. In 1990, Rudine Sims Bishop described books to be windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for young people. Children need to see themselves reflected in books like a mirror. On the other hand, children need books to act as windows into the world around them—to see experiences different than their own. Research shows the importance of the inclusion of books that represent different cultures and experiences in classroom libraries. Early Childhood Education major, Kendra Fix, uses this research to curate a list of quality children's literature selections and publish podcasts outlining ways to incorporate the books in the classroom. The results of this research, and collection of children's literature, are being implemented in an early childhood center in Elizabethtown, PA. The project provides a resource for educators to curate and implement diverse literature in their own classroom using research-based criteria.

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Introduction

The student population in the United States has been rapidly changing throughout the past two decades. In 2004, non-Hispanic whites comprised approximately 58% of students enrolled in K-12 public schools. Ten years later, in 2014, that percentage dropped to 50%. Meanwhile, the Hispanic student population has increased from 19% to 25% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The Hispanic student population has been the fastest growing population in public institutions. The predications for 2026 indicate that non-Hispanic white students will make up less than half (45%) of the student population, Hispanic students will constitute 29%, Black students will constitute 15%, and Asian/Pacific Islander will account for 6% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). By 2026, the white student population will be the minority; students who were once the majority will become the minority in public schools.

While the student population is rapidly changing, the teacher work force remains the same. During the 2011-2012 school year, 82% of public school teachers were white. This is a number that has stayed relatively the same throughout the past few years (Maxwell, 2014). The concern with the difference in these populations is a disconnect between students in the classroom and the classroom teacher. Students perform better and feel more comfortable if the teacher appreciates who they are and where they come from as individuals (Maxwell, 2014). Numerous researchers (Maxwell, 2014, Hawkins, 2016, Kozleski, n.d., Center for Public Education, 2016) have questioned whether a predominantly white teacher work force is prepared to teach in a diverse classroom.

One identified method to bridge the disconnect is Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) (Kozleski, n.d., Hawkins, 2016). CRT aims to connect “students’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles to academic knowledge and intellectual tools in ways that

legitimize what students already know” (Kozleski, n.d., para. 1), meaning teachers need to be aware of their students’ backgrounds to effectively deliver instruction. For CRT to be effective, teachers take the time to get to know students’ families, backgrounds, interests and experiences and include it in daily classroom life.

Although race and ethnicity is a large part of diversity, it is not the only part. Diversity also extends to ability and gender. Students with disabilities account for 12% of the student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Additionally, 77% of elementary school teachers are female. Males are underrepresented in the teacher workforce which has caused concern when it comes to male role models for our young students (Loewus, 2017). Many other researchers, administrators, and educators have spent time considering the changing student population and addressing what can be done to bridge the gap. However, the teacher workforce cultural disconnect from a rapidly increasing diverse student population and improved teacher training in cultural, ability, and gender diverse practices are significant challenges that take time and resources to address. There are smaller, more immediate measures and methods that educators can implement in current classrooms which is the focus of this research.

Literature Review

Teachers have the opportunity to make small, yet important decisions to incorporate materials and methods in their current classrooms to support students who are underrepresented and to minimize the disconnect between the changing student population and the teacher population. While there are programs, websites, and statements about these materials, one of the easiest implementations for current teachers is through the literature in classroom libraries. However, classroom libraries have come under scrutiny because of the significant role books can

play on students' perception of themselves and the understanding of the viewpoints and values of others different from them (McNair, 2016). This scrutiny has focused on the representation of the historically underrepresented groups in the books being placed on the shelves of classroom libraries.

Rudine Sims Bishop is considered a pioneer in advocating for diverse children's books and diverse classroom libraries (Thomas, 2016). In 1990, Bishop described books to be windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for young people. Children need to see themselves reflected in books like a mirror. On the other hand, children need books to act as windows into the world around them—to see experiences different than their own. Bishop feels strongly that if children see too much of their own reflection, in a world that has representation from many cultures, then they can fall into an ethnocentric point of view on the world. If children cannot find themselves in a book, the images of themselves can become distorted, resulting in a devalued feeling of self. Students of both dominant and nondominant cultures need a balance of window and mirror books (Bishop, 1990). The windows and mirrors analogy has continued to be used by educators and professionals when analyzing children's literature (Koss, Martinez, & Johnson, 2016, McNair, 2016, Thomas, 2016).

A number of labels have been used to categorize books that reflect diverse experiences of individuals. The term multicultural had previously been used to categorize books that were diverse in culture, race, or ethnicity. However, multicultural was insufficient in addressing other types of diversity such as gender, religion, sexual orientation, immigration, linguistic differences, and ability (Thomas, 2016). Diverse has become more widely used in describing books that represent differences in race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and more (Crisp, Knezek, Quinn,

Bingham, Girardeau, & Starks, 2016; Thomas, 2016). The term is broad and includes the differences that were previously excluded by the term multicultural.

More recently, critical texts is the term to describe text “that highlight salient categories of difference, give voice to those who have been historically silenced, provide examples of social action, explore systems of oppression, and include opportunities for posing questions about how and why societal positioning is maintained” (Riley, Crawford-Garrett, 2016, p. 94). Critical text takes the idea of diversity and multiculturalism deeper in that it challenges educators to use the books as a discussion or teaching point for students in their classrooms. Everett (2017) challenges labeling or placing these books into a category based on the idea that doing so makes the word “diverse” binary. He claims that there is no diverse book because diversity is only realized through a transaction between a reader and the text. What is diverse for one student many not be diverse for another (Everett, 2017).

Although educators and other professionals are aware of the need for children's literature to be diverse and reflect a multitude of experiences, there is a lack of books that would fall into this category (Bickmore, Xu, & Seridan, 2017; Crisp, Knezek, et. al., 2016; Koss, Martinez, Johnson, 2016; McNair, 2016; Riley, Crawford-Garrett, 2016; Thomas, 2016). The Caldecott Award is awarded by the American Library Association annually to honor a picture book with distinguished illustrations (Association for Library Service to Children, 2018). Books receiving the Caldecott Medal have a high probability of being found on the shelf in an early childhood classroom. Of the 111 books that were recognized or honored in the last 25 years, 71% of the protagonists are white, 19% are Black, 6% are Asian, Latinx, or biracial. Additionally, 60% of the protagonists are male, 12% of the protagonists have a physical disability, and 51% are set in North America (Koss, Martinez, Johnson, 2016). There are other awards that have been created

to award books written by diverse authors, but this further isolates these books (Koss, Martinez, Johnson, 2016). The Cooperative Children's Book Center examined 3,500 children's books published in 2014 and found that only 11% contained characters or themes about African Americans, Asians, Latinx, or American Indian. This statistic has changed very little in over twenty years (Crisp, Knezek, et. al., 2016, Thomas, 2016).

In 2015, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) released a position statement on diverse literature recognizing the importance and lack of diverse literature for young readers. The NCTE (2015) wrote:

The absence of human, cultural, linguistic, and family diversity in children's and young adult literature attests to the growing disparity and inequity in the publishing history in the United States. Stories matter. Lived experiences across human cultures including realities about appearance, behavior, economic circumstance, gender, national origin, social class, spiritual belief, weight, life, and thought matter (para. 1).

The insufficient number of diverse books has led to the creation of a grassroots movement, We Need More Diverse Books. The organization has created a social media campaign under the hashtag, #WeNeedMoreDiverseBooks in addition to programs on their website (Crisp, Knezek, et. al., 2016; McNair, 2016; Thomas, 2016; We Need Diverse Books, 2018). Educators and organizations such as the NCTE and We Need More Diverse Books are concerned that the disparity in children's literature could lead to students who are not well-versed in the world around them. By reflecting all experiences, books have the power to "invite students to consider ideas related to equity and social justice" (Riley, Crawford-Garrett, 2016 p 95).

Those researching the topic of diverse children's literature in the classroom have developed considerations for classroom teachers. It is first suggested that teachers look at their own classroom library bookshelves and question the number of books that represent diverse

characters and those that are written by diverse authors (Koss, Martinez, Johnson, 2016; McNair, 2016; Thomas, 2016). It is not enough to see in a story; characters must be represented in a culturally accurate manner (Bickmore, Xu, & Seridan, 2017; Crisp, Knezek, et. al, 2016).

Thomas (2016) claims that it is not enough to simply place these books on the shelves to just read them. The important part of sharing these stories are the social practices that come after such as creating an open dialogue and building lessons around them.

However, current and pre-service teachers are hesitant to teach diverse literature explicitly due to fear of parental protest, potential tensions that might erupt between students, and lack of knowledge of the experiences the characters may be facing (Riley, Crawford-Garrett, 2016, p. 95). Many educators, authors, and researchers have discussed the implications from their research for teachers in their classrooms (McNair, 2016; Riley, Crawford-Garrett, 2016; Thomas, 2016). Teachers need to be models for the social practices surrounding diverse literature. Students should see their teacher using the proper dialog and valuing the topics the books present. Discussions surrounding these books should happen in context and surrounding a variety of texts (Riley, Crawford-Garrett, 2016 p. 96). Teachers should also evaluate the books that are being placed on their bookshelves to make sure their library represents diverse experiences in a variety of ways whether it be through novels, picture books, poetry, newspapers, or magazines. They should also conduct an analysis of the books currently on their shelves. It is also important to be educated on diverse literature, diverse authors, and culturally accurate information (Thomas, 2016).

The disconnect between teacher and student populations can begin to be bridged through materials used in the classroom such as children's literature. Attention has recently been on the lack of literature that is representative of the student population and culturally accurate not only

on the shelves of classroom libraries, but also on the shelves of bookstores. Even with the books that exist, there is hesitation among the teacher workforce in incorporating the books in the classroom. The hesitation stems from lack of preparedness, exposure, and experience. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to create a resource for teachers to decrease the hesitation and increase the incorporation of diverse literature in the early childhood classroom.

Project Design

For my project, I used my research to create a diverse children's library to incorporate in to the Elizabethtown U-GRO Early Childhood Center's current Kindergarten classroom library. I used my research to create a criterion with which I will evaluate each book. I planned to create a bibliography outlining the books and their importance to the classroom library. Additionally, a podcast was created to assist U-GRO teachers, and other educators, in implanting the books in their classroom. Lessons that align with Common Core standards will also be created. All of this information will be accessible through a website created through Wix. The U-GRO Center will also receive a hard copy of the information. Through this website, teachers will be able to gain information in books describing various experiences of students and how to use them in the classroom.

The following is my proposed timeline:

- September: Apply for Faculty Grant to fund the project.
- October: Begin gathering diverse book titles to evaluate. Create criteria.
- November: Upon Faculty Grant Approval, begin reading and evaluating titles.
- December/January: Read and evaluate books and create bibliography.
- February: Continue creating the bibliography and begin Podcast.

- March: Order book titles, finalize bibliography, finish podcast. Finish Thesis.
- April: Deliver books and resources to U-GRO, finalize thesis, and present at SCAD.

Results

The goal of my project was to curate a diverse book list to incorporate into the U-GRO Early Childhood Center's existing classroom library in a kindergarten classroom at their Elizabethtown location. In order to create a well-rounded diverse book list, I created a criterion to use to evaluate each book. I represented it in a flow chart (See Appendix 1) to make it accessible for myself and other educators. Based on my preliminary research, I developed the following statements to evaluate a diverse book:

A diverse book should accurately portray the culture, disability, gender or experience. The book should not portray a stereotype. The characters should be believable and authentic. Illustrations should be authentic. They should represent the characters and experiences accurately and unbiasedly. The book should be appropriate for the grade level in which it is being incorporated. The book should be published within the last 10 years. The book should not be an experience that is already represented in the library heavily while others are not.

As I began reading books, I found some exceptions to these statements. There are books that are accurate, authentic, and important that were published outside of the ten-year frame. Books that tell a story that is still applicable to current students should have the opportunity to be featured in a classroom library. For this reason, *A Chair for my Mother* (2007), *The Ugly Vegetables* (1999), *And Tango Makes Three* (2005), *The Dot* (2003) and *Wemberly Worried* (2000) were incorporated into this diverse book list. Additionally, to help determine the authenticity of a story or character, take a look at the author. What credentials or experience does the author have to tell the story of a particular experience? Is he or she capable of writing the story authentically? The

statement and flow chart are a great starting place for evaluating diverse books, but it is truly to the discretion of the evaluator if the book is appropriate and relevant for the classroom library.

After researching, I developed five categories—cultures and ethnicities, exceptionalities, bilingual, family structure, and gender. These categories were created with the intention of helping to create a well-rounded library. The categories were not intended for the books to be separated by that criteria. A total of 86 books were purchased to implement into the U-GRO Center's current library. Left over funds have allowed the opportunity for more books to be purchased later. The book list (See Appendix 2) was used to create a podcast series to assist implementing the books in the Early Childhood classroom. The podcast series entitled, *Implementing Diverse Children's Literature*, discusses best practices for incorporating the literature in the classroom. The book list was created for a kindergarten classroom, but most of the books would be appropriate up to second or third grade. Lesson plans and activities, aligned with Common Core standards, were also created to assist educators in using diverse titles in the everyday classroom. All of these materials have been compiled into an accessible website: <https://fixk01.wixsite.com/diversebooks>. All lessons and activities have been tailored to the kindergarten classroom, however, they can be adapted for first and second grade. The components are intended to be used as a regular part of the Early Childhood classroom. They are not standalone materials, rather they are intended to be integrated every day as part of the curriculum. These books and materials are not intended to emphasize diversity, rather expose students to differing experiences while being used as mentor texts, anchor texts, or read aloud.

Conclusion

Although there is a greater awareness of the need of diverse books, cultures that are historically under represented continue to be underrepresented in children's literature. There are more diverse books on the classroom shelves now than there have been previously, but there continues to be room for improvement. It was difficult to gather books that represent differing family structure, books that represent boys in gender diversity, books that reflect Native American experiences, and books that encourage bilingualism. These books simply do not exist, but the students do. The stories are left to be written and organizations like We Need Diverse Books continues to advocate for books that are representative of all experiences. As more advocate to fulfill the need, hopefully more will see the need for the books to be written.

Teachers and librarians also need to recognize the need for their implementation in their classroom libraries and school-wide libraries. The books should not be separated in a "multicultural" section on the shelf, rather they should be included with the rest of the library. These books need to be read aloud and shared with all students in a manner that does not separate them from any other book. The stories in diverse books are important and desperately need to be shared. Children need mirrors. Children need windows. We all need diverse books.

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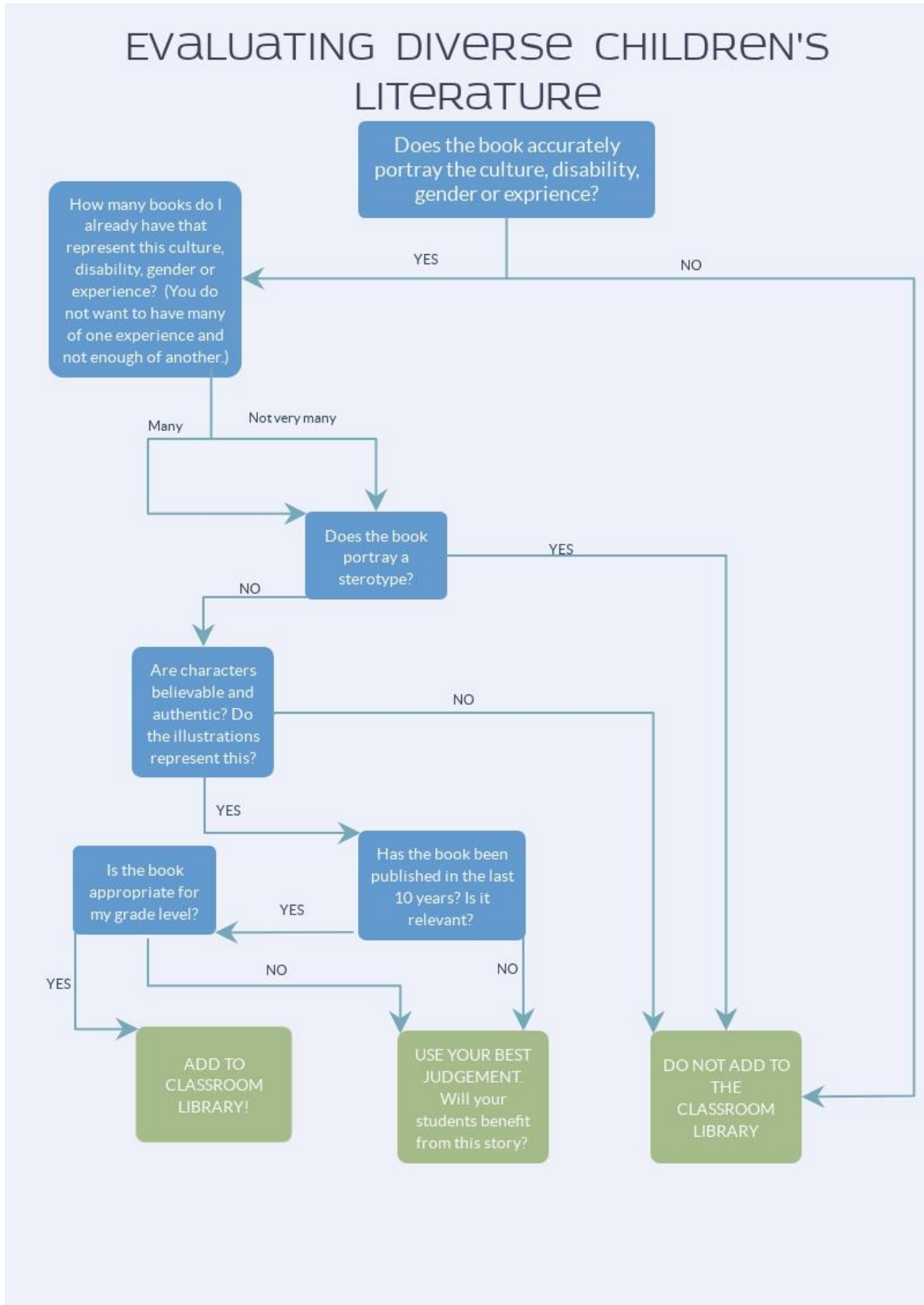
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Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Diverse Book Collection

Created by: Kendra Fix

Updated: March 2019

Title: A Big Mooncake for Little Star

Author: Grace Lin

Topics: Family, tradition, the moon

Importance: Little Star helps her mama make mooncakes, a family tradition. Little Star is not supposed to eat any yet, but she may take a few nibbles. This book uses mooncakes to talk about the phases of the moon.

Title: A Chair for My Mother

Author: Vera B. Williams

Topics: family

Importance: After losing their house to a fire, Rosa, her grandmother and her mother save coins to buy a new chair and restore their lives. Rosa lives with her hardworking mother and grandmother. After tragedy, the community helps them rebuild their home.

Title: A Different Pond

Author: Bao Phi

Topics: Family, immigration, fishing, heritage

Importance: Bao and his father fish for food before his father goes to work in Minneapolis. The fish so their family is fed for the evening. While fishing, his father tells him stories from their home, Vietnam, and a different pond. This story shows a family who immigrated from Vietnam and the younger generation has Americanized. The story they share bridges the generations.

Title: A Family is a Family is a Family

Author: Sara O'Leary

Topics: Family

Importance: One child is afraid to share about her family in school because it is too different to explain. All the children talk about their different families and she realizes that family just needs to have people who care about you.

Title: A Gift from Abuela

Author: Cecilia Ruiz

Topics: family, working hard, grandparents

Importance: Niña and her Abuela spend a lot of time together, but as Mexico begins to change so does their relationship. Abuela must work a lot more and money changes. Their love for each other never changes. The story demonstrates struggles and the culture in Mexico while showing the importance of family and relationships.

Title: A Most Unusual Day

Author: Sydra Mallery

Topics: Adoption, Family

Importance: Caroline's family is adopting a baby girl! The story follows Caroline and the effects such a big change can have on a child. Everything is right when Caroline gets to hold her new baby sister after school.

Title: Ada Twist, Scientist

Author: Andrea Beaty

Topics: science, perseverance

Importance: Ada is very curious, but her experiments never seem to go as planned. She continues to experiment and problems solve. This book showcases an African-American girl interested and active in STEM.

Title: Alma and How She Got Her Name

Author: Juana Martinez-Neal

Topics: Names, family history

Importance: Alma has six names in her name and each one tells a story about her family. She learns about her Hispanic family's heritage all through her name.

Title: And Tango Makes Three

Author: Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell

Topic: family, zoo, penguins

Importance: Based on a true story, two boy penguins find love and want to care for a child like the other penguin couples. One zookeeper found and abandoned egg and allows the two to care for it. They nurture and raise the penguin baby like the other penguin couples. This story is a true story that shows a gay couple through animals. It can be an appropriate way to begin a conversation on different types of families.

Title: Be Kind

Author: Pat Zietlow Miller

Topics: Kindness, Friendship

Importance: After a classmate is made fun of for spilling her juice, a young girl tries to be kind to her to make her feel better. This opens her mind to explore what it means to be kind and how she can be kind to everyone she meets. This book is full of characters and illustrations of many different experiences without addressing the differences directly. Kindness around the world is explored.

Title: Brave Girl

Author: Michelle Markel

Topics: Immigration, strike, worker's rights

Importance: Clara is an immigrant who barely speaks English when she arrives in the United States. This book outlines a historical strike in 1909 where girls spoke up to fight for their rights in a factory.

Title: Carmela Full of Wishes

Author: Matt De le Peña

Topic: Wishes, siblings,

Importance: Carmela has been waiting for her birthday so that she could start running errands with her brother. Her brother is not very excited about this, but Carmela tags along anyway. They are running their errands when Carmela finds a dandelion. Her brother tells her that she can make a wish on it. This book contains diverse characters and children who help with family errands. They live in a crowded neighborhood.

Title: De colores / In All Colors

Author: Elodie Pope

Topics: Colors

Importance: This book features a traditional Spanish song about colors in English and Spanish.

Title: Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin

Author: Duncan Tonatiuh

Topics: Cousins, letter writing

Importance: Two cousins are pen pals to each other. One lives in Mexico and one lives in the United States. They share how their lives are alike and different. They exchange a few Spanish phrases along with illustrations inspired by Mexican cultures.

Title: Deena Misses Her Mom

Authors: Jonae Haynesworth, Jesse Holmes, Layonnie Jones, and Kahliya Ruffin

Topics: Family

Importance: Deena's mom went to jail and now she is acting out. Her father, grandmother, and best friend work with her to try to help her feel better. The book shows a young girl experiencing one of her family members being in prison.

Title: Douglas, You Need Glasses!

Author: Ged Adamson

Topics: Glasses, eyesight

Importance: Douglas is a dog with bad eyesight. He thought he was chasing a squirrel, but really he was chasing a leaf. His owner takes him to the eye doctor where they learn he needs glasses. Together, they pick out glasses and Douglas discovers the world he was missing. This book shows that getting glasses can be a fun and exciting experience. It makes a topic that can be scary for some children funny and exciting.

Title: Drawn Together

Author: Minh Le

Topics: language, drawing, grandparents

Importance: A little boy visits his grandfather, but they struggle because they do not speak the same language. They find out that they both have a passion for drawing and they begin to

connect over their passion. The characters are Vietnamese -American and they overcome a language barrier to build a beautiful relationship.

Title: Festival of Colors

Author: Kabir Sehgal & Surishtha Sehgal

Topics: celebration, Holi, family

Importance: Brother and Sister, Chintoo and Mintoo, prepare for the traditional Festival of Color celebration as part of Holi. Children can learn about another culture's tradition or a child from this culture can see their tradition celebrated. The book was written by a mother and son duo who are a part of the culture.

Title: Fire! Fuego! Brave Bomberos

Author: Susan Middleton Elya

Topics: Fire, firefighters

Importance: This book sprinkles in Spanish words and phrases while sharing how firefighters save the day.

Title: Firebird

Author: Misty Copeland

Topics: Ballet, perseverance

Importance: This is the story of a young girl full of self-doubt. Misty Copeland, a first African American Principle dancer at the American Ballet, encourages and shows her how she can become a great ballerina through hard work.

Title: Grace for President

Author: Kelly DiPucchio

Topics: Elections, presidents

Importance: After he teacher shares that there has never been a female president, Grace decides that she is going to be the first one. This story takes readers through her campaign process as she runs for president in her school's mock election. This book showcases a young African-American girl running for president in her school.

Title: Have Fun, Molly Lou Melon

Author: Patty Lovell

Topics: Friendship, imagination, exceptionalities

Importance: Molly Lou Melon finds ways to have fun the way her grandmother did when she was young. She shares these games and activities with her new neighbor and new best friend, Gertie. Gertie happens to use arm crutches to walk, but it is not discussed in the book. Gertie is treated normally and her differences are not pointed out.

Title: Hello Goodbye Dog

Author: Maria Gianferrari

Topics: Dogs, friendship

Importance: Zara and her dog, Moose, are the best of friends. Moose always escapes to be by Zara's side. Soon they find a way to always be together. Zara is in a wheelchair; however, it is not the focus of the book. They train Moose to become a service dog.

Title: Here We Are

Author: Oliver Jeffers

Topics: Earth, living, people

Importance: This book is a funny, sweet guide to life on planet Earth. It shares the diversity and beauty on the planet. It sends readers with the message that everyone on Earth is in it together and you will never be alone. Kindness and tolerance are all that a person needs.

Title: Hey, Wall: A Story of Art and Community

Author: Susan Verde

Topics: Art, community, family

Importance: A young boy admires a large, blank wall. The blank wall is plain compared to the city full of life, color, music, and dancing. He decides to change this, alongside the rest of his community, with a mural that represents all of the community's favorite things. The illustrations represent a diverse population full of culture! They all come together to create a picture that is representative of the life around them.

Title: Hop, Hop, Jump!

Author: Lauren Thompson

Topics: dance, play, friendship

Importance: Friends go to camp and spend their time moving and playing in many different ways! Their movements throughout their time at camp take them to a talent show. Characters are of many different ethnicities and are spending time at camp playing and dancing together.

Title: How Are You?/¿Cómo estás?

Author: Angela Dominguez

Topics: language, friendship, feelings

Importance: Two giraffe friends find a baby ostrich and they are trying to learn how it is feeling. The giraffes speak different languages, but the ostrich just keeps saying no. This story sends the message that we can all be friends despite differences and language.

Title: How Do You Say?/¿Cómo se dice?

Author: Angela Dominguez

Topics: language, friendship

Importance: Two giraffes find each other as they are snacking on the same tree. They learn that they do not speak the same language, but they can still be friends and have fun together. This story sends the message that we can all be friends despite differences and language.

Title: How Full is Your Bucket?

Author: Tom Rath and Mary Reckmeyer

Topics: Kindness

Importance: Felix's grandfather tells him that everyone has an invisible bucket that people can dip out of and put into all day long. This story shares the importance of being kind to everyone around you because you don't know how full their bucket was this morning. This is a kid-friendly way to talk about kindness and a little bit into mental health.

Title: I Can Be Anything! Don't Tell Me I Can't

Author: Diane Dillon

Topics: self-esteem, overcoming, growing up

Importance: Zoe is a young girl dreaming of being many different things! There is a little voice telling her that she wouldn't be able to do it, but she continuously stands up to it. In the end, she decides she can learn, read, and achieve anything she wants to achieve. The main character is a young African-American girl who dreams of holding jobs that are not typical female jobs.

Title: I Can Do Hard Things

Author: Gabi Garcia

Topics: Perseverance, self-esteem

Importance: This book shares different mindful affirmations to lift children up. It contains encouraging words and messages that help in the world around them. This book shares positive messages for every child. Many diverse characters are featured throughout the book.

Title: I Like Myself

Author: Karen Beaumont

Topics: Self-esteem

Importance: A little girl talks about the reasons she is happy to be herself. She loves herself even if she would have funny features too. The story is presented in a fun rhyme! This is great for empowering children to love themselves! The main character is African-American and loves everything about herself.

Title: I Will Make Miracles

Author: Susie Morgenstern

Topics: growing up, changing the world

Importance: Someone asks a little boy about what he wants to be when he grows up. He knows his world needs saving so he thinks about all the ways he can save the world. This book features an Asian-American as the main character.

Title: I'm Here

Author: Peter H. Reynolds

Topics: Friendship, imagination

Importance: A little boy is at recess sitting by himself watching the other kids play. A piece of paper flies towards him and suddenly he is flying around on a paper airplane. When he is finished, he throws the paper airplane and is found by another girl which becomes his new friend. Characters of different ethnicities are represented in the illustrations. The children become friends in the end.

Title: Imagine

Author: Juan Felipe Herrera

Topics: perseverance, immigration, poetry, following dreams

Importance: Juan Felipe Herrera tells his story through a poem. He was a young immigrant who worked hard to learn English and became Poet Laureate of the United States. This is an immigration story of a young boy. He walks into a classroom not knowing the language and works hard to learn. This is a wonderful immigrant success story that is appropriate for young children.

Title: Is There Really a Human Race?

Author: Jamie Lee Curtis and Laura Cornell

Topics: the world, differences

Importance: A young boy is confused by what the words human race really means. He learns that the world is always competing as if it is a race. He realizes there are so many different people in the world with all different kinds of interests. He wonders, how can we all make the world a better place?

Title: Jacob's Eyepatch

Author: Beth Kobliner Shaw

Topics: Differences, glasses/eyepatch

Importance: Jacob and his mom don't mind telling people about Jacob's eyepatch and why he wears it. They want people to embrace differences. However, today Jacob doesn't want to answer questions. He just wants to get to the store to buy his new toy. This story sends the message that it is ok to talk about each other's exceptionalities as long as you are positive and accepting.

Title: Julián is a Mermaid

Author: Jessica Love

Topics: individuality

Importance: Julián rides the bus home with his abuela and sees women dressed up as beautiful mermaids. He dreams of dressing up just the same. He worries about what his abuela will think, but when she sees him she adds to his costume.

Title: Juna's Jar

Author: Jane Bahk

Topics: Friendship, imagination, culture

Importance: Juna and her best friend Hector loved to go on adventures before he moved away. When he leaves, Juna uses her imagination to travel the world to look for her friend. She finds friendship in new places as she travels.

Title: La Madre Goose: Nursery Rhymes for los Niños

Author: Susan Middleton Elya

Topics: Nursery Rymes

Importance: This book takes classic nursery rhymes and gives them a Spanish twist. This book is a great way to incorporate Spanish in the classroom for early grades.

Title: La Princesa and the Pea

Author: Susan Middleton Elya

Topics: Fairy Tale

Importance: This book is a classic fairy tale that given a Latino twist to reflect the culture of Peru. It features some Spanish words and phrases. It is also a recipient of the Pura Belpré Medal.

Title: Living with Mom and Living with Dad

Author: Melanie Walsh

Topics: Divorce, family

Importance: A little girl's parents do not live together. She spends time at both of their houses and she shares what her room looks like and what she does at each home. Divorce is shown in a positive way in this book. Children who are experiencing divorce can relate with this character.

Title: Love

Author: Matt de la Peña

Topics: love, family

Importance: Love is all around the world and represented in many different ways. This book explores all the places love can be found, even in the darkest of times. Many different experiences are represented in this book. The book also explores how we are connected through love.

Title: Lovely

Author: Jess Hong

Topics: Differences

Importance: This book breaks stereotypes and features many people with many unique qualities. The underlying message that everyone is lovely promotes inclusion and tolerance. It represents all areas of diversity.

Title: Mae Among the Stars

Author: Roda Ahmed

Topics: Space, NASA, dreaming

Importance: This story was inspired by the life of Mae Jemison who was the first African American woman in space. The story follows a little girl who dreams big and is encouraged to follow her dreams to work for NASA.

Title: Malala's Magic Pencil

Author: Malala Yousafzai

Topics: education, equality, peace

Importance: Malala is a young girl living in Pakistan. She loves to go to school and learn new things, but bad people come to her country and threaten that by forbidding girls to go to school. Malala begins writing to others around the world to fight for girls' right to go to school. Malala discusses what it is like to be from a country where there is war, poverty, hunger, and inequality. She is a strong female figure who fought for education and won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Title: Mia's Family

Author: Elliot Riley

Topic: Family

Summary: Mia lives with her two moms and twin brothers. Mia's family enjoys spending time with her family and caring for animals. This story includes a child with two moms without pointing it out as a difference.

Title: Miguel's Family

Author: Elliot Riley

Topics: family

Importance: Miguel has a large family that enjoys spending time with each other. He lives with his parent, sisters, and grandparents. The story explores what Miguel's family likes to do

together. This book demonstrates a family where the grandparents live with the immediate family. The characters are also of a Hispanic background.

Title: One Family

Author: George Shannon

Topics: Family

Importance: Many different families and experiences are represented in this book that celebrates community. It also features counting from 1-10. In the end, everyone is just one. One family, one community, one world.

Title: Pink is for Boys

Author: Robb Pearlman

Topics: gender, colors, identities

Importance: This story shares that colors and activities are for everyone. One color isn't for boys and one isn't for girls. People are free to express themselves through colors as they please.

Title: Red: A Crayon's Story

Author: Michael Hall

Topics: Identity, being yourself

Importance: A blue crayon was mislabeled as a red crayon and can not seem to do any typical red things. This book is a great metaphor for being true to yourself no matter what others think.

Title: Rosie Revere, Engineer

Author: Andrea Beaty

Topics: engineering, perseverance, creativity

Importance: Rosie wants to invent something, but everything she tries fails. Her aunt Rose encourages her that failures lead to successes. The two work to create Rosie's best invention yet. This story showcases two female engineers who persevere when no one else believes in them.

Title: Same, Same But Different

Author: Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw

Topics: Pen pals, cultures

Importance: Two pen pals, one from the U.S and one from India, share details about their lives. They learn that their lives are similar and they like a lot of the same things. They also learn about the slight differences in their lives, like the way their neighborhoods look. Despite their difference and the ocean between them, they can still be friends.

Title: Say Hello!

Author: Rachel Isadora

Topics: language, family, kindness, bilingualism

Importance: Young Carmelita is on her way to see her abuela, but she stops to say hello to many people in her neighborhood. Her neighborhood is full of different languages and cultures. The book uses several Spanish phrases while including "hello" in ten different languages. Many cultures are represented with something that is important to them.

Title: Say Something

Author: Peter H. Reynolds

Topics: Speaking up

Importance: All kids, all backgrounds are encouraged to stand up and say something, anything. The story explores how one small voice can make a big difference no matter who you are.

Title: Sonya's Family

Author: Elliot Riley

Topic: Family

Importance: Sonya's parents do not live together, but the family still spends time together. She shares the things her family likes to do together. Diverse characters are represented in a story about divorced parents.

Title: Stars

Author: Mary Lyn Ray & Marla Frazee

Topics: Imagination, Stars, family

Importance: Stars are everywhere and represent many different things. Many children see stars throughout the year in many different places like the beach, in school, in a pumpkin patch and

more. Many children with many experiences from different cultures are represented by happenstance throughout this book. The last few pages show different family structures watching the stars together.

Title: Tap Tap Boom Boom

Author: Elizabeth Bluemle

Topics: Rain, community, friendship

Importance: A rain storm hits a city and brings the city together. Everyone takes cover in the subway and friendships are formed! Many people of all different backgrounds from the community come together in subway during the rainstorm. They share food, umbrellas, stories, and company. It shows how something small can bring together a wide range of people.

Title: Thank You, Omu!

Author: Oge Mora

Topics: community, sharing

Importance: Omu, a word from the Igbo language used for grandmother by the author's family, makes stew that the whole community loves. People from their neighborhood stop by to have a bowl of Omu's stew. This book demonstrates the importance of community and tradition.

Title: The Big Umbrella

Author: Amy June Bates

Topics: kindness, rain, weather

Importance: A rain storm and an umbrella bring together many different people. The umbrella is big enough for everyone to stay dry. The umbrella is a metaphor for inclusion and leaves readers with the message that there will always be room for everyone.

Title: The Dot

Author: Peter H. Reynolds

Topics: Perseverance, art

Importance: A little girl thinks she cannot draw, but she is encouraged by her teacher to draw a dot. She begins to draw all kinds of dots and finds that her dots are art. She even gives advice to a young boy who also feels that he cannot draw. This is a sweet story that includes diverse characters without it being the main focus.

Title: The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin

Author: Julia Finley Mosca

Topics: biography, science, autism

Importance: Dr. Temple Grandin was diagnosed with Autism as a young girl. With the help of a great teacher and a supportive family, Dr. Grandin proved everyone wrong. The book is presented in a poem format. This is an approachable biography about a woman with autism who became an animal scientist.

Title: The Most Magnificent Thing

Author: Ashley Spires

Topics: Perseverance, invention, creativity

Importance: A young girl and her dog spend their days making things together. She has an idea to make the most magnificent thing, but it does not go as planned. She is frustrated but perseveres with the help of her dog. This young girl spends her days inventing and creating which was previously thought to be a boys activity.

Title: The Ugly Vegetables

Author: Grace Lin

Topics: Family, culture, gardening

Importance: Grace is young Chinese-American girl who does not understand why her family's garden has bumpy, ugly vegetables while her neighbor's garden has beautiful flowers. They are Chinese vegetables that are grown to make a family favorite soup. Grace learns to enjoy the vegetables her family grows as there is beauty inside them. Chinese pronunciations are provided with different names of the Chinese vegetables.

Title: The Word Collector

Author: Peter H. Reynolds

Topics: collections, kindness, passion

Importance: Kids collect all sorts of things, but Jerome collects words. When he drops his collection, he learns to use his words in all sorts of ways. One of these is to share his words with the world. The main character is a male African American. The illustrations represent a diverse group of people.

Title: This Little Trailblazer

Author: Joan Holub

Topics: Girls, Biography

Importance: This book explores several women who changed the world. The range of what the women accomplished is wide. It is presented in a rhyme format. This book presents mini-biographies of women of many professions and backgrounds who changed the world. The format is approachable for young readers.

Title: Thunder Boy Junior

Author: Sherman Alexie

Topics: Names, family, culture

Importance: Per Native American culture, Thunder is named after his father. He wants a name all to his own to show what he has accomplished. The dad and his son work together to pick out the best new name.

Title: We are Family

Author: Patricia Hegarty

Topics: Family, differences

Importance: This book showcases many different types of families while showing that families stick together despite hard times. It sends readers with the message that although families may be different, love always works the same.

Title: Wemberly Worried

Author: Kevin Henkes

Topics: anxiety, family, school

Importance: Wemberly worries about everything! Her parents try to help her overcome her fears especially since she is starting school soon. She overcomes her worries for a little while when she meets a friend similar to her. Wemberly seems to have anxiety, but it is not outwardly discussed. She also has friends with other exceptionalities.

Title: We're All Wonders

Author: R.J. Palacio

Topics: exceptionalities, diversity, friendship

Importance: Auggie is a young boy with a facial deformity. This book shares the story of how Auggie overcomes what makes him different and embraces differences among all people. This story shares characters of all different experiences with wonderful illustrations. This is a great book for kindness and embracing differences in all.