INTEGRATING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE IN K-2 CLASSROOMS: A GUIDEBOOK FOR THE EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF EXEMPLARY MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S BOOKS

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Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Learners Option

by
Lauren S. Wilson
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APPROVED BY THE INTERIM DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF
GRADUATE, INTERNATIONAL, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES:

_________________________________
Mark J. Morlock, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Charles G. Zartman, Jr., Ph.D.
Graduate Coordinator

Claudia Peralta Nash, Ph.D., Chair

Charles G. Zartman, Jr., Ph.D.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my family and friends, to my wonderful fiancée, Mazi, and to my beautiful step-daughter Ziyanna, all whom have played their part in helping me achieve this goal.

I also dedicate this project to all children: always have pride in the fact that you are different!
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This process has been a stressful and exhausting endeavor and without the following people I may have never completed this project.

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Thank you immensely

Lauren Wilson
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This project discusses the value and importance of multicultural children’s literature and the need for teachers to incorporate such literature in the classroom. The purpose of this project was to create a resource for teachers that was comprised of a checklist for evaluating literature and an annotated bibliography that provides examples of exemplary literature. The first part of this project that this author created is a checklist for evaluating and selecting exemplary multicultural children’s literature that can be used in the kindergarten through second grade classroom. The checklist was designed to
assist teachers in choosing culturally sensitive exemplary children’s books that will expand young reader’s conceptions of the world which we live. It was this authors hope that the checklist created would be user friendly and easily accessible. The purpose of the checklist is to provide a tool that will aid in selecting exemplary literature for the classroom. The second component of this project was the annotated bibliography. The annotated bibliography that is provided is comprised of fifty books that are great examples of exemplary children’s books. These books will serve to guide teachers in choosing such selections and will be a resource for teachers in the classroom. The bibliography was designed to provide teachers with a basis for developing their own list of great books. The goal of this project is to help aid in the selection of children’s books to ensure that those chosen represent the multicultural nature of the world and serve the needs of all our students. This author believes that multicultural literature can serve as a tool in bringing cultures together.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to the United States Census Bureau (2007) the population of minorities in the United States reached 100.7 million people in 2007. “About one in three U.S. residents is a minority” (United States Census Bureau, 2007). As our society becomes increasingly diverse, it is necessary that the curriculum educators develop for the classroom reflects the very nature of such diversity.

James A. Banks (1994), one of the leading researchers in the field of multicultural education defines multicultural education as “…a movement designed to restructure schools and other educational institutions so that students from all social-class, racial, cultural, and gender groups will have an equal opportunity to learn” (p. 10). Banks (1994) argues that the current curriculum appeals specifically to a dominant ideal and culture which in affect provides some students with an advantage in the classroom (p. 15). In order to teach our students the virtues of understanding and acceptance and ensure that all students are being provided an equal education we must create an educational environment that values the necessity of inclusion with the use of a multicultural curriculum.

Banks (1994) states “knowledge alone will not help students to develop an empathetic, caring, commitment to humane and democratic change. An essential goal of a multicultural curriculum is to help students to develop empathy and caring” (p. 27).
This author believes that one important way in which educators can begin to foster such understanding among students is with the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. Multicultural literature is an invaluable tool in teaching children respect, understanding and acceptance. Multicultural literature can have two main influences on our youth; 1) children who are exposed to multicultural books that portray aspects of cultural differences are more understanding of the diverse nature of their surroundings, and 2) children are taught the importance and value of their own culture within society. Such perspectives will teach children to embrace the similarities and differences of all people within the society and throughout the world empowering them to be effective and contributing members of a rich multicultural society.

Hazel Rochman (1993) explains the importance of multicultural literature in *Against Borders*. She states,

A good book can help to break down barriers. Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community: not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others. A good story lets you know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict; and once you see someone as a person-flawed, complex, striving- then you’ve reached beyond stereotype. Stories, writing them, telling them, sharing them, transforming them, enrich us and connect us and help us know each other. (1993, p. 19)

Multicultural education with the use of multicultural literature is extremely beneficial in building our communities and our society and this process must begin with children. Although our society is increasingly diverse, intolerance and prejudice still looms within the very fabric of American history. In order to build a society that values diversity as an asset as opposed to a deficit the entire system must reevaluate current perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that have been socialized and engrained within people
through education. This author believes that if integrated into the current curriculum multicultural literature can be a very successful tool for teaching open-mindedness, compassion and understanding and empathy.

Miller-Lachmann (1992) explains that with the growing diversity of this nation the majority of students in our classrooms are comprised of a multitude of cultural groups and subgroups. These groups include, but are not limited to difference of racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, ability, sexual preference, age, nationality, and gender. With our world becoming more diverse the necessity for multicultural literature becomes even more essential. Miller-Lachmann adds “it is estimated that one third of the entire school age population will be comprised of these groups by the end of the century” (p. 3). Miller-Lachmann (1992) maintains that multicultural literature “enhances self awareness and self esteem, contributing to higher achievement in school and a greater appreciation of reading” (p. 3). She argues that the melting pot theory harms young children in its demand for the society to create one culture. “Among the worst consequences of the melting pot model has been the encouragement of the immigrant child’s rejection of the parents’ culture in the process of assimilation” (Miller-Lachmann, 1992, p. 3). This process, rather than celebrating differences, encourages a dismissal of multicultural history. In return students struggle to develop acceptance of difference as well as build self confidence and pride of who they are as individuals.

Statement of Problem

Our society is multicultural; filled with various people, cultures, beliefs and lifestyles, and the classroom curriculum needs to reflect such diversity. It is this author’s
belief that the current curriculum does not cater to the growing diverse student population. Banks (1994) argues that the curriculum “often marginalizes the experiences of people of color and women” (p. 10). One of the main goals of multicultural education is to reform the current curriculum so that the experiences of all people become the curriculum. Banks (1994) states “multicultural education reforms the curriculum so that students view events, concepts, issues, and problems from the perspectives of diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups” (p. 10).

It is this author’s belief that all people need to be portrayed in the books that we read and the books that we present in our classrooms. Too often students are taught one view and one experience. This teaches children that no other group of people or experiences is valuable enough to be portrayed in literature, further widening the gap between racial and ethnic groups. Such beliefs and such literature are destructive to our students.

Another point to remember is that multicultural literature needs to be included in all classrooms, diverse or not. Even classrooms that lack a diverse nature need to have a curriculum that incorporates the experiences of all people in order to teach students the skills that are necessary to function in the diverse world that we are all a part of. Students need to be aware that even though the classroom and their living environment may not be diverse, the world as a whole is, and we all need the skills to be able to function in such a world.

It is this author’s belief that providing exemplary multicultural literature to our students will increase student’s awareness of others and build a sense of self value as individuals. However, there are issues surrounding multicultural literature that is
It is our responsibility to provide all children with an inclusive and meaningful education that is rich in multiculturalism and empowerment. In so doing it is our duty to provide our students with literature that accurately represents the experiences of all people. In order to increase acceptance and understanding in a growing diverse society the voices of all members must be included in our curriculum.

It is vital to this project to inform teachers of the importance and value of incorporating exemplary multicultural literature throughout the classroom curriculum. The purpose of this project will be first to provide teachers with a resource tool to aid in the selection of exemplary multicultural children’s literature, and secondly, to create a reference list of exemplary multicultural books this author believes all children should read.
This project will consist of several elements. The first element will be explored in the research findings of Chapter II. In this chapter, this author will provide an examination of multicultural education and the use of multicultural literature as an aid for teaching children the importance and value of difference. Throughout this element, the author will review multicultural education for both its attributes and flaws.

The second element of this project will be a guide that will aid teachers in evaluating multicultural children’s literature in an effort to ensure that the books chosen for the classroom meet exemplary literature standards as developed by this author. This guide will contain several components. The first component of the guide will be a detailed checklist that will assess children’s literature for its multicultural awareness and content. This checklist will illustrate how to choose exemplary multicultural literature and direct teachers on what they need to be aware of when choosing such books. The checklist will be geared toward the selection of books for the kindergarten through second grade (Appendix A).

The second component of the guide will be an annotated bibliography of exemplary multicultural children’s books that this author believes all kindergarten through second grade students should read. The annotated bibliography of exemplary multicultural children’s literature will provide a brief description and basic understanding of each of the books and why the book was chosen for the list (Appendix B).

This author believes that the annotated bibliography will provide an ample list of excellent books that all children should read. It is the author’s hope that the list will be a starting point for teachers to develop their own list of exemplary literature for the classroom with the aid of the guide that will be provided. With this project, teachers will
be informed in choosing literature that accurately represents and celebrates cultures, that provides students with a varying array of experiences, and that teaches children the importance of differences. It is the belief of this author that in order to change the society’s current position on diversity we must begin teaching young children the importance of multiculturalism through literature.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Chapter II

In Chapter II, the author will explore relevant research in the field of multicultural education in an attempt to discuss the importance and value of multicultural education and literature and to answer the following questions;

1. What is multicultural education?
2. What are the goals of multicultural education?
3. What are some issues surrounding the current curriculum?
4. What is multicultural literature?
5. What is exemplary multicultural literature?
6. Why is multicultural literature important?
7. What do teachers need to be aware of in choosing multicultural literature?
8. How do teachers choose exemplary literature for their classrooms?

An examination of the criteria and how it was development will also be discussed.
Chapter III

In Chapter III, the author will examine the different aspects of this project and how it was created. The purpose will be to explain the steps that were followed in order to develop the criteria as well as the list for the annotated bibliography.

Chapter IV

In Chapter IV, the author will provide a summary of the project, the research findings, the conclusions, and the recommendations for the reader.

Appendices

In Appendix A, the reader will find the checklist for evaluating multicultural literature. Appendix B contains the annotated bibliography of exemplary multicultural literature that this author believes all kindergarten through second grade students should read.

Limitations

Although this author believes that multicultural literature should be integrated into all aspects of the curriculum at all grade levels, for purposes of time and length the author was required to narrow down the scope of the project itself. As a result the author chose to focus specifically on the kindergarten through second grade curriculum based on the author’s belief that teaching about acceptance and diversity must begin in the onset of the children’s educational experience. As a result the actual project will focus specifically on these grade levels. Therefore, the criteria and literature chosen for the annotated bibliography are not relevant to the higher grade levels.
Another limitation that the author faced was the accessibility of the multicultural literature itself. Although the amount of exemplary literature is expanding this author struggled to find these books within the community of which the project was developed. Many times the author was forced to leave the city of Chico in order to find the books the author was searching for or search online resources and purchase the books out of pocket. As a result the author was somewhat limited in the amount of books she had access to during the project.

Definition of Terms

Acculturation

“Cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online).

Anglocentric

According to Banks (1994) anglocentric are the “explanations, cultural characteristics, teaching materials, and other factors related to the heritages, histories, and cultures of Whites in the United States of British descent” (p. 101). Anglocentrism can be found throughout all aspects of the current educational curriculum.

Children’s Literature

According to Ghosn (2002) children’s literature can be defined as “fiction written for children to read for pleasure, rather than for didactic purposes” (p. 172).

Culture

Culture as defined by Banks (1994) is “The ideations, symbols, behaviors, values, and beliefs that are shared by human group” (p. 101).
Discourse

Glazier and Seo (2005) define discourse as the means by which we come to acquire and create knowledge of the world and of our lives (p. 687).

Diversity

“The inclusion of diverse people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online).

Ethnic Group

Banks (1994) defines ethnic group as “a group that shares common history, a sense of people-hood and identity, values, behavioral characteristics, and a communication system” (p. 101).

Eurocentric

Eurocentric as defined by Banks (1994) is “explanations, cultural characteristics, teaching materials, and other factors related to the heritages, histories, and cultures of people of European descent who live in the United States and in other nations” (p. 102).

Melting Pot Theory

Melting pot theory “espouses the commonalities of human beings by blurring ethnicity and emphasizing the assimilation of immigrants” (Alexander, 1994, p. 267).

Monoculture

Glazier and Seo (2005) identify monoculture as the belief “in which there are those like ‘us’ and ‘others.’ (p. 686).
Multiculturalism

According to Banks (1994) multiculturalism is “a philosophical position and movement that assumes that the gender, ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society should be reflected in all of the institutionalized structures” (p. 359).

Multicultural Education

Banks (1994) defines multicultural education as “an educational reform movement whose major goal is to restructure curricula and educational institutions so that students from diverse social-class, racial, and ethnic groups—as well as both gender groups—will experience equal educational opportunities” (p. 102). Jetton and Savage-Davis (2005) define multicultural education as a “philosophical concept that is based on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, humanity, and dignity” (p. 30).

Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature is defined by Glazier and Seo (2005) as “literature that represents voices typically omitted from the traditional canon” (p. 686).

Xenophobia

According to Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) xenophobia is “the mistrust or fear of people who are strangers or foreigners, is the root of our worldwide inability to live together in peace” (p. 217).
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Throughout this literature review this author will explore the necessity and importance of a multicultural educational curriculum. Within this discussion this author will shed light on the value of such a curriculum with the use of literature that is rich in history, in world experience, in human existence and struggle; exemplary multicultural literature that gives voice to seemingly silenced experiences. This author hopes that this literature review will give the reader a better understanding of the necessity of multicultural literature and its benefits to young readers. The author will investigate what constitutes exemplary multicultural literature by examining the different literary facets of multicultural children’s literature (e.g., setting, theme, characters). Once the author has examined the literary facets of exemplary multicultural literature she will present the checklist that was developed to aid in the selection of multicultural children’s literature. A thorough examination of previous author’s criterion for evaluating literature will be examined. This author hopes to shed light on the importance of multicultural literature as a tool for teaching understanding of different cultures as well as pride in an individual’s own culture by providing a detailed examination of professional research in the field of multicultural education and multicultural literature.
Defining Multicultural Education

To begin this literature review, this author believes it is necessary to examine the definition of multicultural education and its importance within the school curriculum. It is this author’s belief that multicultural education serves to make available an equitable education for all students by providing a curriculum that is rich in human experience and that is inclusive of the diverse nature of our world. Multicultural researcher, educator and author James A. Banks contributes vital knowledge to the field regarding the importance of multicultural education. His research should be included in any literature review related to this subject matter. According to Banks (1994) “Multicultural education is an educational reform movement designed to restructure schools and other educational institutions so that students from all social-class, racial, cultural and gender groups will have an equal opportunity to learn” (p. 10). Multicultural education is a response to the inequitable educational curriculum that is present in US schools. This author believes that these inequalities can be contested with an established multicultural educational reform policy that will be discussed within this literature review. First, we must examine some underlying issues in regards to how multicultural education has been interpreted.

Educator and consultant for anti-racist education, Enid Lee provides her own definition of multicultural education. She refers to multicultural education most frequently as anti-racist education. Lee (2002) states, “multicultural or anti-racist education…addresses the histories and experiences of people who have been left out of the curriculum. Its purpose is to help us deal with all the cultural and racial differences that you find in the human family” (p. 19). However, Lee argues that the term
multicultural education has come to mean something superficial; this is in reference to the single-minded focus on holidays and foods as symbols of multiculturalism.

According to Lee multicultural education has failed to focus on what culture truly entails and how experiences within culture shape who we are and how we come to define ourselves within society. Lee argues that multicultural education has failed to deconstruct power relationships and discrimination and instead has focused on a candy coated view that “people are different and isn’t that nice” (p. 20). Lee believes, as does this author, that the curriculum has viewed certain cultural differences as deficits. According to Lee (2002) “in anti-racist education we attempt to look at—and change—those things in schools and society that prevent some differences from being valued” (p. 20). Although it is unfortunate that some individuals have construed multicultural education to mean celebrating a holiday here and there, or by celebrating multiculturalism one day a year, this author argues that the philosophy of multicultural education was comprised to meet the needs of all students and challenge the current curriculum, thus multicultural education can be very beneficial. This author maintains that when meeting its proper function multicultural education means far more than a celebration of holidays. Rather the true nature of multicultural education is a celebration of all components of the human experience this includes the positives as well as the struggles. Unfortunately, teaching students about culture and how we came to be where we are today will not always be warm and fuzzy, and at times, will be difficult to swallow for both students and teachers. Though frustrating, this work is necessary if we are to combat racism and inequality within the school system and ultimately within society.
Sonia Nieto (2003) also defines multicultural education in reference to anti-racist education. She defines multicultural education as an “antiracist education that is firmly related to student learning…it is a hopeful way to confront the widespread and entrenched inequality in U.S. schools because its premise is that students of all backgrounds and circumstances can learn and achieve to high levels, and—even more essential—that they deserve to do so” (p. 7). Nieto (2003) discusses that although she believes whole heartedly in the philosophy of multicultural education, similar to Lee (2002), she too is concerned that the goals of the educational reform movement, as it has been put to use in the school system, have become one-dimensional and do not serve to combat the inequality present in U.S. schools. Nieto believes that in order for multicultural education to serve its proper function it must be “accompanied by a deep commitment to social justice and equal access to resources” (p. 6). Multicultural education must take the necessary steps at uncovering injustices within the school system and then formulate the tools necessary to break down the walls of such injustices. This process will take a tireless commitment on behalf of teachers and policy makers if we are to provide our students with equal access to resources and a multicultural curriculum that truly lives up to its main tenants.

Gay (2004), Ladson-Billings (1994) and Nieto (2003) have come to adopt another term for multicultural education in response to the growing adversity toward the current term. They use the term culturally responsive pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy, as defined by Nieto (2003), is “founded on the notion that—rather than deficits—students backgrounds are assets that students can and should use in service of their learning and that teachers of all backgrounds should develop the skills to teach
diverse students effectively.” (p. 7). Whether the philosophy is coined multicultural education, anti-racist education or culturally responsive pedagogy the main premise remains the same; there is inequality within U.S. schools and U.S. society at large that must be combated with an educational reform program designed to meet the needs of all students by providing equal access to education and a commitment to a celebration of the human experience.

**Goals of Multicultural Education**

Banks (1994) explains three main goals for best understanding the necessity of multicultural education in the United States. These goals are the foundation of multicultural education and need to be addressed to best understand the necessity of multicultural education. The first goal is a commitment to “increase educational equality for both gender groups, for students from diverse ethnic and cultural groups, and for exceptional students” (p. 17). It is an assumption within the educational field that male students of the dominant culture are receiving a superior education and a greater opportunity for success both academically and professionally because the current curriculum caters to the dominant cultures experiences. Hill (2007) concurred stating, “multicultural education was predicated on a belief that the dominant national culture was the proper one and that cultures represented by immigrants were not beneficial to their life in a new country or to the country itself” (p. 247). As a result, many cultural experiences and historical happenings have been eliminated from the current curriculum, marginalizing the experiences of people of color, women, the poor, and the disabled.
Gay (2004) argues that multicultural education “extends to ethnically diverse students the same prerogative that European American members of mainstream society have; that is, the right to be educated within their own cultural contexts and to have access to the cultural capital that other ethnic groups have to offer” (p. 216). All students should have an equal educational experience. There is a demand and necessity within the school system to create an educational curriculum that provides equal opportunities for students learning and success both in and out of the classroom. Multicultural education seeks to provide just such an education for all students.

The second goal of multicultural education according to Banks (1994) “is to help all students, including White mainstream students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they will need to survive and function effectively in a future U.S. society in which one out of every three people is a person of color” (p. 17). In order to teach empathy, understanding, and create a value system regarding differences and similarities this author believes we must provide a multicultural curriculum that speaks to the needs, experiences and life circumstances of all people. Multicultural education reaffirms to students that all people’s experiences are valuable by including these experiences in the curriculum. When certain happenings are eliminated from the curriculum it demonstrates to students that these events and experiences are not valid, at least not valid enough to be taught in the classroom, and frankly this is unacceptable. However, if we include all experiences both positive and negative we create a learning environment capable of teaching students life lessons to prepare them for the multicultural world in which we reside. Banks (1994) quotes the brilliant Dr. Martin Luther King “We will live together as brothers and sisters or die separate and apart as strangers” (p. 15). Dr. King was referring
to the importance of citizens learning about one another in an effort to understand and feel empathy for the experiences of all people. Once we can accomplish such understanding then we can begin to work together to better our communities and the broader society. Multicultural education can be a major contributor in bridging this gap between cultures. According to Hill (2007) “multicultural education succeeds when the individual is no longer suspicious of those who are different from his or her own experiences, when the individual is comfortable with the notion that ‘different’ does not mean ‘worse’ or ‘better’ (p. 248). As difficult as many educators believe this to be, it is critical for ensuring that our students are receiving equitable educational resources as well as the tools necessary to be respectable democratic citizens.

The third goal of multicultural education is similar to that of global education; the goal being, to teach our students about cultures outside the United States (Banks, 1994, p. 22). Embedded in our society is a value system of ethnocentricity, in which the dominant United States culture holds the belief that their culture is the only true and valuable one. All other cultures are thus considered inferior and many times “primitive.” Such a belief system creates a society in which little understanding and lack of compassion for others and their struggle is harbored. Banks (1994) believes “citizens who have an understanding and empathy for the cultures within their own nation are probably more likely to function effectively in cultures outside of their nation” (p. 17). Global education seeks to expand on children’s world knowledge and self knowledge. Global education and multicultural education are similar in many ways but they do differ. Swiniarski (2006) states “global education takes traditional multicultural education a step
further, while multicultural education studies the world in the child’s local community, global education locates the child and his particular community within the world” (p. 36).

It is very important to this research to explain that developing a multicultural curriculum does not just benefit students of color, female students, English learners, economically disadvantaged students or students with disabilities. A multicultural educational curriculum is beneficial for all students regardless of race, class, gender, ability, or sexual orientation and regardless of the makeup of the classroom. Banks (1994) explains that a multicultural curriculum does not just enrich the education of students of color and female students but also white mainstream students (p. 22). However, the importance of multicultural education has not been widely accepted by educators and the general public alike because the connection between an ethnically inclusive curriculum and the mainstream culture has not been made or viewed as relevant to the majority (Banks, 1994, p. 22).

Once we understand the goals of multicultural education it is imperative that we begin to understand how multicultural education can be put into practice within the current curriculum. The implementation of multicultural education will require a restructuring of the current curriculum. In order for restructuring to take place there will be a need to redesign the current curriculum to incorporate the varying experiences of all students. Banks (1994) explains that restructuring the school system will take a continued effort among school officials for years to come. He states, “implementing multicultural education within a school is a continuous process that cannot be implemented within a few weeks or over several years. The implementation of multicultural education requires a long term commitment to school improvement and restructuring” (p. 17). This
commitment will need to come from both teachers and policy makers in an effort to eliminate the biases that are present in the current curriculum.

Miller-Lachmann (1992) agrees that there is a need for a curricular shift within the school system and suggests that multicultural literature should be an important part of this curricular shift. Miller-Lachmann explains that this new shift towards a more multicultural curriculum with the use of multicultural literature has shed light on the contributions minorities and women alike have made in areas such as language arts, science, mathematics, and social studies.

Throughout the next sections this author will explore multicultural literature and the important role it can play as a tool for building understanding and empathy among our students. First, however this author feels it is necessary to review the injustices within the current curriculum.

Racism Within the Current Curriculum

Developed in 1965, the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) has been dedicated to exploring and uncovering the racism and sexism ever present in children’s literature and within the school systems curricula. The CIBC began by examining books frequently used in the classroom, and they found an overwhelming prejudice within all the texts (Banfield, 1998, p. 17). According to Banfield (1998) the CIBC found that “historical inaccuracies, cultural myths, and cultural stereotypes were perpetuated and reinforced by constant repetition in volume after volume” (p. 18). As a result of their findings the CIBC developed the Racism and Sexism Resource Center. This center was designed to meet the needs of educators hoping to find positive and
authentic books for children. Through this center the CIBC developed tools and resources to assist educators in choosing exemplary literature as well as the ability to identify bias in the texts they provide to their students in an effort to combat the misrepresentations, stereotypes and misconceptions in current children’s literature.

The CIBC also provided schools across the United States with in service training. Conferences and seminars were also conducted in conjunction with publishing companies. The goal of the CIBC was to “promote literature for children that better reflects the realities of a multi-cultural society (Banfield, 1998, p. 17). The CIBC hoped that the general public, teachers and educators would gain a better understanding of the influence books have on how we come to understand the world. Banfield (1998) explains “I have come to understand the awesome power that books have in influencing individuals’ perceptions of people and cultures. I have also come to understand that these perceptions persist and harden as a person matures unless timely intervention occurs” (p. 20). This is where the urgency to change the curriculum comes into play. Banfield (1998) emphasized that the CIBC believes that the inherent racism and sexism within the United States has been hidden within the curriculum, maintaining stereotypes and myths of various cultural groups. Therefore, there is a dire need to promote education amongst teachers. Such education needs to include tools for evaluating literature and for uncovering racist and sexist undertones (Banfield, 1998, p. 21).

Jayne Alexander (1994) discusses some of the issues that surround multicultural texts in the educational system. An important point that Alexander writes about is the issues surrounding teachers themselves. According to Alexander many teachers have been educated around the notion of the “melting pot” theory in which the
assimilation of various cultural groups becomes paramount and the cultural differences of
the various people that make up our society become overshadowed by the insistence of
creating one culture and one identity (Alexander, 1994, p. 267). This theory eliminated
differences by forcing people to abandon their own culture and traditions in order to fit
the “model” culture which was created for, by and about the dominant culture. Alexander
(1994) points out that “Western white males defined this homogenized America to their
readers” (p. 267). Such an ideology fosters a narrow-minded focus of education and
literature in the classroom. Alexander (1994) states “teachers often settle within the
context of the familiar and allow a curriculum that is a mere reflection of the values and
traditions of the community’s dominant cultural affiliation to go unchallenged” (p. 267).
It is unfortunate that a great majority of teachers enter the educational profession
unequipped and unknowledgeable about cultural differences and various experiences
unfamiliar to their own. Therefore, they generally shy away from multicultural texts that
may challenge their personal belief system and that they may not feel comfortable
teaching. As a result, they retreat back to their place of sheltered unawareness, passing
the torch of ignorance to their students. Alexander states “teachers often lack the
knowledge and appropriate criteria for developing, implementing, and evaluating a
quality multicultural literature program of which they can be both proud and confident”
(p. 267). This is where the need for a criterion for evaluating children’s literature and a
reference list of valuable multicultural books becomes so valid and necessary for the
classroom and the teacher.

It is important to this research to discuss the current ideologies of race and
ethnicity among white teachers and white students. Many people struggle to understand
the nature of white privilege which places whiteness as the norm and assumes people of
color to be the ‘other.’ Glazier and Seo (2005) argue,

Studies in multicultural education tend to examine those in the minority, in many
ways avoiding a close interrogation of the white majority. This avoidance further
perpetuates a notion of “them” (those perceived as having culture) and “us” (those
perceived to be without culture). Because whiteness—often along with the notion of
what it means to be American—has been largely unexplored territory in U.S. school
contexts in particular, majority students often feel “cultureless. (p. 686)

Ketter and Lewis (2001) concurred by stating “white people often are not
aware of the privileges their whiteness brings them, including the privilege of naming
whiteness as the natural place from which decisions about differences are made” (p. 176).
Unfortunately, the very nature of our current curriculum reflects white privilege which is
apparent in the determination of the literature and curricula content used in the classroom.
Glazier and Seo (2005) stated

the language and texts that support and perpetuate dominant ideals and practices
continue to be valued in a majority of schools. School curricula confirm and
privilege students from the dominant culture while excluding and often
disconfirming the experiences of subordinate groups. (p. 687)

As a result, we have seen a historical silencing of minority groups that has occurred
throughout our educational curriculum, across all subjects.

Glazier and Seo (2001) explain “silence about certain issues is often a salient
characteristic of schools and classrooms. Silencing most often occurs around stories that
conflict with the grand narrative of school curriculum.” (p. 687). Issues including race,
class, gender, politics, religion, sexual orientation and ability and matters surrounding
inequality in our society are often erased from the curriculum by white educators in an
effort to evade harsh subject matter and frankly to avoid the potential questioning and
demise of white privilege. Glazier and Seo (2001) maintained that “what emerges is not
only a silencing around certain topics but also a silencing of certain individuals” (p. 688).

Glazier and Seo stress the importance of teachers and teacher educators to “consider ways to bring all students to examine their cultural voices—a necessary goal if we are to ever view cultural diversity as a resource rather than a deficit” (p. 687).

Another issue within the current curriculum is teacher perceptions. Teacher’s perceptions of their students play a key role in the success of students and make a profound difference in the formation of a curriculum. Ladson-Billings (1994) believes that teacher’s perceptions of teaching and students are directly related to performance in the classroom. Ladson-Billings quote Winfield “teachers expect more from white students than from African American students, and they expect more from middle-class students than from working and lower-class students” (as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 23) Low expectations generates low achievement. Therefore, we have historically seen a decrease in student motivation and learning and an increase is student drop-out rates among our students of color. This author believes this is a direct result of a lack of multicultural education and awareness.

Defining Multicultural Literature

To begin this section this author feels it is crucial to start by identifying a clear definition of what multicultural literature is before we can begin to understand why it is important. Jacobs and Tunnel (2004) write that multicultural literature has often been deemed literature about people of color (Jacobs & Tunnel, 2004, p. 216). However, this author would argue that this definition is not inclusive enough to accurately portray multicultural literature. Jacobs and Tunnel (2004) agree stating,
Our diverse population includes a variety of cultural groups that often cross color lines, such as religious groups. Jews, Catholics, Muslims, Mormons, and Amish all have their own subcultures and often have been misunderstood and even persecuted for their beliefs. (p. 216)

Multicultural literature is not just about people of color, rather multicultural literature gives a voice to those typically marginalized within the curriculum. Defining multicultural literature as books about people of color excludes; women, the poor, the disabled, homosexuals, those from varying religious groups and many others from the discussion. Glazier and Seo (2005) define multicultural literature as “literature that represents voices typically omitted from the traditional canon” (p. 686). Multicultural literature should be inclusive in that it represents all groups of people in our growing diverse world. Literature that seeks to represent race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender, age and ability can open a reader’s mind to the experiences of all people.

“Literature is one of the most powerful components of a multicultural education curriculum, the underlying purpose of which is to help make the society a more equitable one” (Bishop, 1993, p. 40). Multicultural literature provides students with an overview and understanding of all the various cultural experiences that make up our society. Multicultural literature can also educate teachers by giving them the tools to teach their students about culture, how to investigate other cultures as well as their own (Glazier & Seo, 2005, p. 687). Glazier and Seo (2005) explain that teaching students about culture and providing them with the tools to learn about their own culture as well as others is necessary and critical in our current classrooms (p. 686).

Children are amazing human beings. Their beliefs and values are created from the images and messages that they receive on a daily basis. Children begin to form their
understanding of the world from the moment they enter into it. St. Amour (2003) argues that children are very much aware of the differences amongst those they come in contact with from a very young age. Candy Dawson Boyd (1990 as cited in Jacobs and Tunnell, 2004, p. 217) and Lintner (2005) believe that children as young as age three are aware of race and by age ten their thoughts about race are formed. Providing children with a curriculum rich in multiculturalism with the use of literature can be critical in teaching understanding and empathy, thus better preparing students for a multicultural world. In the next section this author will examine the numerous ways in which multicultural literature is so valuable for our students.

The Importance of Multicultural Literature

Rasinski and Padak (1990) provide an excellent sentiment into the value of multicultural literature that will begin this author’s review of the importance of multicultural literature. Rasinski and Padak state,

In a multicultural curriculum, there are few stimuli with greater potential to move people to action than literature. Because it tells the stories of human events and the human condition and not simply the facts, literature does more than change minds; it changes people’s hearts. And people with changed hearts are people who can move the world. (1990, p. 576)

The importance of multicultural literature is endless. For the purposes of this research we will examine the three main benefits of such literature. Multicultural literature;

- Teaches students confidence and self worth by providing students with a voice (Ford, 2000; Glazier and Seo, 2005; Jacobs and Tunnell, 2004).
- Increases student achievement (Ford, 2000; Glazier and Seo, 2005).
• Teaches students to be understanding, accepting, and empathetic to all people’s experiences thus preparing them to enter a multicultural world (Bishop, 2003; Lu, 1998; Singer & Smith, 2003).

First, Multicultural literature teaches students the value and importance of who they are as individuals by confirming their experiences in books. As a result multicultural literature teaches students self confidence and self worth. According to Ford (2000) “many educators, namely teachers, have recognized the importance of books as critical sources of self understanding and social understanding” (p. 25). Children, when given the opportunity to read books in which the characters look like them or the stories are consistent with their personal experiences, will grow and develop a more positive outlook on the world, their culture and ultimately themselves. Nieto (1996) agrees, stating “children of the minority cultural groups need books that bolster self esteem and pride in their heritage. And children of all groups, especially the majority children, need books that sensitize them to people from cultural groups different from their own” (Jacobs & Tunnell, 2004, p. 217). Multicultural literature validates student’s experiences with images, messages and representations that are consistent with their life experiences, emphasizing to them that their place in the world is of great magnitude and should be included in literature. Bishop (2003) adds “students who do not see their culture reflected in the literature they read may believe that they have no value and little or no importance in society and school” (p. 40). Multicultural literate can combat these feelings by providing students with stories that are representative of their experiences. Multicultural literature communicates to the public that the varying arrays of people’s experiences are worth knowing, understanding and reading about. For groups that have historically been
marginalized within the school curriculum such literature is essential. St. Amour (2003) adds that when children are given a larger selection of literature they will be more likely to come across stories that reflect their own personal experiences (St. Amour, 2003, p. 48).

Secondly, multicultural literature offers minority students the entitlement of being heard when typically they have been silenced. Such assertion bolsters students self-confidence and gives them a craving for learning and success. Glazier and Seo (2005) agree that multicultural literature is a way to “encourage students who are most often voiceless in schools to find a voice” (p. 687). It is this author’s belief that such expression will essentially build on student’s confidence and thus enhance achievement in the classroom. When children feel connected to the literature and content that they are being provided with they will be more likely to succeed in the educational process because they will not feel marginalized in their own classroom. Ford (2000) concurs, stating that literature works to “increase student’s motivation and engagement, to increase students achievement, and to improve their sense of self” (p. 25).

The final aspect of the importance of multicultural literature that this author believes is crucial to the discussion is the argument that multicultural literature has the ability to teach understanding, acceptance, and empathy for all people’s experiences. Lu (1998) writes “exposure to quality multicultural literature also helps children appreciate the idiosyncrasies of other ethnic groups, eliminates cultural ethnocentrism, and develops multiple perspectives” (p. 5). Children’s belief systems are molded by the images they see and the messages they are given both in and out of the classroom. If we provide
literature that is rich in various experiences we can begin to teach students empathy. Ford (2000) states,

[B]ooks also act as windows, giving children an opportunity to look outside of themselves, an opportunity to see another person’s perspectives or another group’s worldview. Multicultural literature has special appeal for all children. Through encountering children from other cultures and those with different lives, students learn to value the similarities and differences among people. (Ford, 2000, p. 28)

With such an understanding, we can create a more empathetic society that views differences as a positive addition to the world. According to Singer and Smith (2003) “[u]tilizing literature that is multicultural helps to create a climate that welcomes diversity in the classroom, whatever the racial, gender, or cultural constituency of the class” (p. 17). These authors believe that multicultural literature is extremely beneficial for all classrooms regardless of the makeup of students. Multicultural literature communicates to students that the varying arrays of people’s experiences are worth knowing, understanding and reading about. Multicultural literature provides “the opportunities for seeing the world through other people’s eyes” (Singer & Smith, 2003, pp. 17-18; Cortez, 2004, para. 4). This can ultimately be one of the most powerful tools in breaking down the barriers that divide our society.

Every word, image, and depiction of characters in the literature that students read is critical. As Ford (2000) explains “books reflect appearances, relationships, thoughts and feelings…because student’s values and beliefs are modifiable, literature can influence these values and beliefs” (p. 27). Therefore, if teachers continue to share literature that is stereotypical or reflective of a narrow viewpoint then our students will base their understanding of others on this narrow view. It is critical that we choose literature that represents all people and experiences in order to teach students that
everyone’s differences enrich our lives and this can be extremely influential in the lives of our young readers. Lu (1998) writes “multicultural literature opens a window through which readers may explore the richness of diversity in the American society” (p. 7). This diversity is a blessing of our society not a deficit and it should be celebrated in every aspect of the educational curriculum. Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) take the argument one step further by introducing the term xenophobia. Xenophobia is “the mistrust or fear of people who are strangers or foreigners” (p. 217). They continue by explaining that such a phobia has prohibited our society from living a peaceful intercultural livelihood with one another. According to Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) “literature can be one of the most powerful tools for combating the ignorance that breeds xenophobic behavior” (p. 217).

On a final note, there are some things that need to be considered regarding multicultural literature. It is very important that as educators we understand that providing multicultural literature alone will not satisfy the overwhelming need for awareness and understanding. Glazier and Soe state “adding multicultural texts too the curriculum will not by itself create respect for cultural differences or an understanding across cultures” (2005, p. 687). Louie (2006) agrees: “simply exposing children to multicultural literature may lead to indifferences, lack of understanding, and even resistance” (p. 438). Therefore, these texts must be interrogated into the curriculum and used to be representative of a multitude of experiences that make up our society. Class discussions, journal entries, critical analysis and reviews of the stories being read need to take place in order for the students to best understand what they are reading and how it relates to them as they move throughout the world. Louie (2006) recommends providing students with “opportunities to reflect, to respond, and to allow cultural communication
between reader and the text as well as among readers themselves” (p. 440). According to Glazier and Seo as a result the curriculum “…must act as both mirror—allowing students to reflect on their own experiences—and as a window, providing the opportunity to view the experiences of others” (p. 688). Thus the texts create a cross cultural experience and education that will enhance our students understanding of both themselves and others.

**Why Students Read—Intrinsic Values**

An important thing to consider when choosing literature is to understand why students read. Once educators understand the reasons why students read then their choices of exemplary literature will be more refined. As educators and parents it is extremely important to have an understanding of our student’s response to the literature they are reading. As teachers, we want our students to love reading and to expand their knowledge with books. It is also important to challenge their thinking by providing them with literature that sparks critical, creative thinking and influences their lives. In order to choose books for the classroom that will suit the needs of our students we must have a basic understanding of the student’s response to literature. Once we understand why students are reading certain literature, we can begin to select exemplary multicultural literature for our classroom.

Cortez and Sebasta (2004) believe there are several reasons why students read. These are what they coined intrinsic values. These intrinsic values include: happiness, self knowledge, world knowledge, success, imagination, inclusion, empathy, language awareness, and escape (p. 14). When choosing literature for the classroom it is imperative that we choose books that will elicit at least one of the intrinsic values.
Choosing Exemplary Multicultural Literature

As this author has discussed throughout this literature review there are numerous benefits to using multicultural literature in the classroom. Some of these benefits, as previously mentioned include:

- Children are given an increased understanding of the multicultural world in which they reside.
- Children gain pride in their culture.
- Children from the dominant culture enhance their understanding of various cultural groups.
- Children gain a well rounded perspective on world views and issues.
- Children gain the skills they will need in order to live in a multicultural world.

After understanding the benefits of using multicultural literature in the classroom it is relevant to this research that a discussion takes place regarding how educators choose multicultural literature for the classroom. Finding literature that is exemplary multicultural literature can be a very challenging task. However it is crucial in order to ensure that the books educators choose for their classrooms are significant, appropriate, and authentic to the cultural aspects that are presented. According to Higgins (2002) “the books we select for our classrooms need to not only reflect the diversity of the students in the classroom and the school, but the diverse reality of the world in which we live” (p. 4). However, it is important to understand that just because a book has characters of color does not mean that it is exemplary. Throughout this section this author will examine what exemplary multicultural literature entails and how to incorporate such literature into the classroom curriculum.
Many factors play a crucial role in determining books exemplariness. These include design, story, theme, style, setting, character representations and specific to picture books, illustrations. It is also imperative that books are evaluated for cultural accuracy and multicultural content to ensure the books are valid. All the books that are chosen for the classrooms need to be examined for stereotypes, bias, and inaccurate information to make certain that books chosen for the classroom are suitable for our students. It is important to ensure they meet the main goal of multicultural education; to create an equitable educational experience. Literature can have a huge impact on the values and beliefs that children develop. California Department of Education (1998) states,

Both in school and out of school, young children are exposed to racist and sexist attitudes. These attitudes—expressed repeatedly in books and other media, gradually distort children’s perceptions until stereotypes and myths about minorities and women are accepted as reality. (p. 1)

Educators need to be certain that the literature that is chosen does not reflect negative stereotypes and is not biased. Choosing such books can be extremely complex. It is the responsibility of educators, teachers, librarians, curriculum developers, policy makers and school board members to provide exemplary literature for the classroom and the school libraries as well as incorporate this literature in all aspects of the current curriculum. Merely having a section of books in the library entitled “multicultural” will not meet the needs of our students. Jacobs and Tunnel (2004) provide insight into what qualifies a good book and their examination of quality literature is imperative for understanding how to choose such books. They state “quality is recognized by evaluating different elements of the book. Including style and language, character, plot, illustrations,
pacing, setting, tension, design and layout, mood, accuracy tone, point of view and theme” (p. 15). In order to choose exemplary multicultural literature for the classroom it is imperative that the following aspects of a book are taken into consideration and are used as part of a criterion for the selection of multicultural literature:

**Design and Layout**

The design of the book can play a very important role in whether or not the book is chosen to read. The design of the book refers to the basic layout and format of the actual book itself including the binding, the cover and the pages. Also, the font size and length of the story will have an impact on the reader. When choosing books for the classroom, teachers need to make sure that the books will grab a reader’s attention. Therefore it is imperative that the front cover match the story and be pleasing to the eye. Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) write “the visual appeal of a book can determine if a potential reader will pick it up or march right on by, and the look of a page can affect the readers desire to get into the content” (p. 16).

**Theme**

According to Jacobs and Tunnell (2004), the theme of the book is “the central idea of the story” (p. 16). They continue by stating some examples of themes. These examples include “friendship, coming-of-age, sibling rivalry, coping with the death of a pet, and adjusting to a new town” (p. 16). It is important that the story has a theme with a strong message rather than an obvious and shallow one. It is also important to choose literature with themes that can be integrated into the curriculum. The theme should easily mold within the curriculum and have a definite message to the reader. Jacobs and Tunnell mentioned several themes but these themes can also include the community, immigration,
speaking a new language, going to school, etc. Many of these themes can be integrated across curriculum. Arbuthnot and Sutherland (1972) agree that the theme is the central meaning of the story. They state,

> Often in children’s books the theme reflects those developmental values that are inherent in the process of growing up. The theme may be concerned with overcoming jealousy or fear, adjusting to a physical handicap or accepting a step-parent. Books that have these or other developmental values can help not only the child who shares similar problems, but also the child who does not and who needs to learn sympathy and understanding. (p. 28)

### Setting

The setting of the story is where and when the story takes place. Shioshita (1997) states “books should include accurate settings.” It is also important that the setting is believable and void of stereotypes. Shioshita (1997) gives an example of a stereotype often found in children’s literature. She states “a stereotyped image might present all Native American people in tepees, but Native Americans historically have lived in various types of homes and Native Americans are part of the present society.” The setting of the story should be clearly defined so the reader can imagine how and why the events of the story are unfolding. With the use of descriptive language the author should be able to transport that reader’s imagination into the setting of the story to best grab that reader’s attention throughout the story.

### Characters

The characters in the stories students read play a major role in the development and quality of the book. According to Arbuthnot and Sutherland (1972) the characters in the stories must be believable, consistent and convincing (p. 25). They also need to be relatable in one way or another so that students feel as though they can
connect to the experiences of the characters. This is especially important for students of color who rarely see themselves in the stories they read. When students can relate to the characters they are more likely to continue reading and to have a positive outlook on what they are learning as opposed to being turned off by it all together. According to Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) “it is impossible to identify with or have feelings for a person unless we know the individual, and it is the author’s job to show us the character’s personality in such a way that we can become involved with that life” (p. 15). Such involvement in the characters lives within the story will keep readers interested in the content.

Illustrations

According to Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) “children are generally more visually aware and alert than most adults” (p. 38). Therefore, the images they encounter in literature can have a strong impact on them as the reader. Exemplary children’s books use illustrations to capture the mood and theme of the story, to enlighten and entrance the reader, to further facilitate multicultural awareness and to bring joy through art. Jacobs and Tunnell (2004) write “as teachers and parents, we have the opportunity to help our children become visually literate through fine picture books, to curb the numbing effects of mindless television viewing” (p. 45). It is important that the stories accurately portray members of various cultural groups. Shioshita (1997) explains that “illustrations should convey the reality that members of any ethnic group look different from one another.” Arbuthnot and Sutherland (1972) continue by stating “it is through such well drawn individuals that children gain new insight into their own personal problems and in to their ever widening relationships with other people (p. 25).
Accuracy

Agosto (2002) states “accuracy of cultural representations is a crucial aspect of high quality multicultural literature. Inaccurate portrayals can mislead readers and perpetuate stereotypes.” When choosing literature for the classroom it is imperative that the information in the story be accurate. Especially in regards to historical information, the setting, and the characters. The books chosen must be accurate representations of what is factual. Throughout history, people of color and women have encountered prejudices and it is important that stories do not sugar coat the facts of such discrimination in our society. Louie (2006) writes “authenticity of content and images in children’s literature is essential” (p. 438). Inaccuracies in cultural representations or images rescind the message and significance that multicultural educators are trying to portray in such literature: that understanding and sensitivity to differences and cultural value is necessary. Louie argues that simply choosing literature by authors and illustrators of color does not imply or assure that such literature is authentic (Louie, 2006, p. 438). Educators need to examine several factors when choosing literature that is authentic. Louie (2006) believes that educators need to “examine historical and cultural accuracies…determine whether feelings are celebrated or exploited...consider the complex issues regarding whether the stories were told from an insider’s or outsider’s perspective” (p. 438).

Style and Language

Arbuthnot and Sutherland (1972) claim that “style involves the authors choice of words, the sentence patterns, the imagery used, and the rhythm of the sentences” (p. 29). As mentioned before it is important that we choose stories that are captivating and
use descriptive language if they are to capture a reader’s attention. It is also important in terms of multicultural literature to ensure that the story is free of any biased or stereotyped language or discriminating language that can be offensive or that places one group as superior over another group. The language of the story should be authentic, accurate and appropriate to the story. Shioshita (1997) also mentions that it is important to make sure the books we choose for the multicultural classroom are void of separating characters. She writes “be careful of books that separate characters into two groups: those that speak Standard English and those who don’t.” Later she points out that if a story is being translated, then it is crucial that the translation is accurate and not merely a word for word interpretation. The writing style of the author can also be very important. Authors that use descriptive and thoughtful language may have more success with readers because the words themselves captivate the reader. The style of the story should intertwine naturally with the theme, the plot and the characters so as not to confuse the reader.

Choosing Multicultural Literature for the Classroom: Developing the Checklist

The checklist that was developed for this project was designed to aid teachers in choosing exemplary multicultural literature for the classroom. Several criterions for assessing children’s literature have been developed over the years and the following section will look at some of these criterions.

According to Higgins (2002), it is important to create a criterion that will help “guide its user in evaluating books for stereotypes, negative images of cultural groups, and literary quality” (p. 6). As this author has discussed throughout this literature review
not all books that have people of color in the illustrations should be considered multicultural or are exemplary for that matter. As educators, it is important to ensure that the books chosen for the classroom are void of stereotypes. It is also crucial to ensure that the books are accurate.

Cortez (1989) discusses the need for a criterion for evaluating literature. He states “teachers, librarians, and parents obviously have a tremendous responsibility when choosing literature for children” (para. 4). Cortez continues by examining different criteria that require specific reflection. These criteria include but are not limited to; cultural considerations, linguistic considerations, educational considerations and literary considerations (Cortez, 1989, para. 5). Cortez concludes

> appropriate ethnic literature portrays the uniqueness of the human condition and represents ethnicity in ways that allow the ethnic character to approach problems creatively and with a multiplicity of believable possibilities. Only with books that meet these criteria can you meet this formidable challenge. (Cortez, 1989, para. 5)

After reading the research in regards to the value and importance of multicultural literature it is this author’s basic belief that all school classrooms should incorporate multicultural children’s literature throughout the entire curriculum, across all subjects. As was mentioned previously and as Santora (2006) points out “not all children’s literature conveys the messages we want young people to learn. Books contain the same stereotypes and biases as other media.” She continues by arguing that as a result parents, educators, and instructors have a responsibility to choose literature that is void of stereotypes and is age appropriate and that “provides children with accurate representations of all people.”
The Checklist

It is necessary to incorporate literature in the classroom that is multicultural in order to teach children the importance of difference while educating them about the experiences of others. As mentioned before the books chosen for the classroom must teach the students a lesson and force them to think critically. According to Jesús Cortez (1989) in *Choosing Multicultural Literature*, books that incorporate multicultural aspects “contribute to the understanding and appreciation of the diverse nature of our society” (para. 4). Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate these books into our curriculum in order to create a society that is accepting and tolerant of differences.

Below is an examination of the various aspects of the checklist that this author developed for this project. The checklist takes into account the multicultural considerations for the following areas; theme, story, plot, characters, illustrations, style and language, and finally, the book. This author believes that these areas are crucial for ensuring that the books evaluated will enhance student learning and development. The checklist was devised to serve as an aid for teachers when choosing books for the kindergarten through second grade classroom. It is the authors hope that this checklist will serve to be a useful tool for teachers when choosing books in an effort to ensure that the content of the books chosen are multicultural and meet the needs of all students.

Some important criterions that will be integrated into the checklist include: Is the books theme and characters multicultural? Does the theme teach tolerance and respect? Are the people of color and the women of the story represented accurately? Is the book void of stereotyping? Does the book assist the reader in building an accurate representation of
culture and people? Finally, does the book present new ideas and opinions? Throughout the next section this author will describe the various sections of the checklist.

The first element of the criteria is the theme. It is very important that the literature that is chosen for the classroom has a theme that teaches students about others, about tolerance, about empathy and about respect. Literature that can elicit critical thinking, while developing one’s character is considered exemplary.

The second element of the checklist is the story. When choosing books for the classroom it is important to pay particular attention to the actual story. Are the characters and cultural artifacts accurate and authentic? Are there multicultural characters within the story and are they portrayed positively? It is also important to ensure the story presents new ideas and views to young readers. Stories that are creatively written with interesting ideas and points of view are critical for maintaining the reader’s curiosity. Such stories have the ability to introduce new concepts and challenge readers to think outside the box. Such stories have the potential to teach students about the varying array of human experiences which as this author believes will begin to teach students empathy.

The third aspect of the checklist is the plot. For literature to be used in the classroom it must have a believable and realistic plot that all students will respond to. It must flow naturally and stir the reader’s emotions. A book can be considered exemplary for its ability to trigger the reader to feel empathy and sadness for the happenings of the plot and story line and their relation to the characters. As mentioned in the theme an important component of the literature that is chosen is that it must spark critical thinking skills of the students. The story should both connect students to their own cultures while examining the cultural experiences of those that are different from themselves. This
The author wants the literature that is chosen to make the students reevaluate existing notions and beliefs, in order to see the world through the eyes of others.

The fourth section of the checklist is the characters. In order for a book to be chosen for the classroom it is this author’s belief that the characters must be convincing and credible. The characters must be portrayed as individuals to avoid stereotyping and to teach students that everyone is different even within text. Characters must be complex in that they have both strengths and weaknesses because this is how real people are. It is important to choose books with characters from multiple backgrounds. However, it will be crucial that the characters are representative of the differences within cultures.

The fifth aspect of the criterion is the illustrations. Picture books are extremely important for the classroom. The illustrations must accurately portray members of society, include multicultural characters, be organized and detailed and finally they must enhance the story. Exemplary picture books have very detailed and beautiful pictures that add to the story. This is very important when dealing with young beginner readers because many times they are the illustrations that first capture their attention. Images are very powerful in portraying people and lessons. When choosing books for the classroom it is important to ensure that the illustrations accurately portray cultural groups and cultural artifacts. It is also important to ensure that the illustrations show diversity within cultural groups.

The sixth aspect is the style and language. The style of the book refers to the way in which the author writes. It is imperative that the style is age appropriate and authentic to the reader and the text. It is also important to ensure that the writing is fun and exciting and will capture the attention of the reader. When choosing multicultural
books for the classroom it is imperative that teachers make certain that the language used in the book is void of stereotyping and offensive language. Also, if a book represents more than one language it is crucial to ensure that the languages are accurate. For example when choosing books that have Spanish words integrated in the text it is essential to make sure that the Spanish is correct.

The final aspect of the criterion developed is regarding the book itself. It is critical that we evaluate the books ability to provide new knowledge and new vocabulary. It is also imperative that the book teaches self acceptance while enhancing understanding of difference. This is a main goal of multicultural literature.

There are several components that need to be considered when choosing books for the classroom. This author hopes that the checklist will assist kindergarten through second grade teachers in choosing exemplary literature for the classroom. The checklist is set up to be used as a resource in evaluating literature. In order to best understand if a book is exemplary most of the criteria should be checked off. Teachers can use the checklist in determining the books quality. If a book meets only a few of the criteria then one can assume the book most certainly is not exemplary. For those books that meet most of the guidelines one can assume that the book is exemplary. For any book in between it will be at the teacher’s discretion as to whether or not the book is used. Particular attention must be paid to the multicultural considerations presented throughout this section. For a book to be considered exemplary multicultural literature most aspects of the checklist must be checked. Such an intricate checklist accompanied by the evaluation process itself takes time and dedication, but this dedication is essential if we are to provide our students with a rich and fulfilling education.
Summary

Throughout this literature review, this author has examined the value of multicultural education in the school curriculum, how educators can create a more inclusive curriculum with the use of the goals and perspectives of multicultural education. The author has also explored ways in which the school system can implement a multicultural education. The author argued that using literature as a tool can be very effective in teaching children tolerance, acceptance, respect and value of difference with themselves and others. The author then went into detail about the very positive benefits that literature can have within the classroom. The author discussed what makes literature exemplary. The author then explored the ways in which teachers and educators choose exemplary literature. Finally, the author provided some guidelines and rules to follow in choosing such literature and then examined the criterion that was developed for this project. It is this authors hope that educators can use this project as a tool for incorporating multicultural literature in the classroom.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This project was designed in an effort to inform readers of the value and importance of a multicultural educational curriculum and the use of multicultural literature as a tool for teaching tolerance and understanding amongst students of varying experiences. Throughout this project, the author hoped to educate the reader of the attributes and flaws of current multicultural education while providing the logic for how multicultural education at its best can introduce children to the multicultural world that we are all a part of. This author then sought to create a guide that would aid teachers in choosing exemplary literature for the classroom with the use of a checklist evaluation tool.

An important element of this project was to create a guide for teachers, educators, librarians, curriculum developers of the kindergarten through second grade population to use as an aid in integrating multicultural literature into the classroom. There were several objectives defined at the start of the project in order to successfully create the guide provided. The objectives were as follows;

1. Introduce multicultural education as a successful tool in teaching children acceptance and empathy for others.

2. Describe how multicultural literature can be used as a tool within a multicultural curriculum in teaching the ideals of multicultural education.
3. Create a guide equipped with a checklist for the evaluation of children’s literature to be used as an aid for choosing exemplary multicultural literature for kindergarten through second grade.

4. Provide a list of exemplary multicultural books as determined by this author that all kindergarten through second grade students should read and that teachers should integrate into the classroom curriculum.

Two steps were followed in order to create such a guide:

- Step 1: Creation of a checklist for the evaluation of children’s literature. In order for educators to choose exemplary multicultural literature for the classroom they must have a knowledge base and understanding of what to look for when choosing such literature. As mentioned previously in the literature review this author explained that not all multicultural children’s books are good and just because there are people of color in the pictures does not mean that the book is exemplary or should be used in the classroom. It is crucial for teachers to have a tool for evaluating literature to ensure that the books chosen are serving a purpose and meeting the goals of multicultural education. The checklist that was developed for this project aims to do just this. The checklist takes into consideration the different aspects of literature; the theme, the characters, the illustrations, the setting, the plot and the multicultural considerations. The checklist is used as a way to identify these aspects of differing stories. It is the authors hope that the checklist will weed out books with bias, stereotyping and those books that simply do not portray a multicultural society.

- Step 2: The annotated bibliography. The annotated bibliography serves to provide educators with a list of exemplary books that can be used within the classroom.
curriculum for kindergarten through second grade. The author believes that the books in this annotated bibliography are stellar examples of exemplary literature and that they should be available in every classroom library. These books can be integrated into the current curriculum or more simply can be a resource for children during free reading and library time. This author believes that the more exemplary multicultural literature books students are exposed to, the more empathetic our classrooms and ultimately our society will become.

The goal of this project was to create a guide that will serve as a resource for educators, policy makers, librarians, and others within the educational field to use when evaluating and choosing literature for the classroom. This author believes that such a guide is necessary to ensure that accurate and exemplary literature is being chosen. Multicultural children’s literature is invaluable to our students and should be integrated into all aspects of the curriculum. This guide will assist in guarantee just that.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

In order to provide our students with an equal educational experience we must ensure that our curriculum speaks to the needs of all students. An inclusive curriculum that incorporates the varying array of experiences that make up our world must be provided for our children to have equal access both to their education and furthermore to resources outside of education. Multicultural educational programs need to be integrated into the curriculum to ensure that all students have a voice in the classroom and that they see themselves in the curriculum. Multicultural literature can play a major role in ensuring this occurs. Providing books for children that are rich in history, experience and visual representation are crucial in the process of our student’s success.

This project was developed in an attempt to show the value and importance of multicultural literature. The project comprised of several components. In the first component this author hoped to shed light on why it is necessary to incorporate multicultural literature in the classroom with a detailed and lengthy literature review. The literature review first discussed multicultural education and its function within schools. Then, it examined how literature can serve as an important component of multicultural education by examining the value of such literature. Afterwards, the author reviewed the current curriculum uncovering the need for multicultural literature. The need comes from the fact that we live in a multicultural world and we need to be teaching students how to
function in such a world. Finally, the author described exemplary literature and discussed how teachers can go about choosing such literature, which leads to the next component of this project.

In the second component of this project this author developed a checklist for evaluating children’s literature. It was the author’s goal that this checklist would serve as a tool for teachers to use when selecting literature for the classroom. The checklist was aimed at kindergarten through second grade. The checklist is there to ensure that the books chosen for the classroom are exemplary and are void of stereotyping or harmful messages.

The third component of this project is the annotated bibliography. The annotated bibliography is a list of great books that this author feels meets the criteria for being exemplary multicultural books that all children in kindergarten through second grade should read. The bibliography can also serve as a tool for teachers when looking for great books for the classroom.

This author believes that through literature we can educate and inform the minds of young readers in order to help them to be empathetic and compassionate individuals that cherish and value the diverse nature of the world.

Conclusions

The literature review provided in this project suggests that multicultural literature is valuable to all students. Multicultural literature can have life changing affects on young students. Literature that incorporates the experiences of people throughout the world teaches children the value and necessity of difference. Multicultural literature
teaches the dominant culture about people that have been marginalized within the current curriculum. Multicultural literature also teaches children of minority cultures that they are important and that the experiences of people within these marginalized groups are valuable to our educational system. When these voices are left out, the message that only certain groups deserve a voice becomes loud and clear and this needs to be eradicated. This type of curriculum keeps the division between races, between socioeconomic status, between gender and ability and between cultures separated. This division needs to be eliminated if we are ever to live in a world that celebrates our differences as an asset as opposed to a deficit. Multicultural education with the use of multicultural literature can be the first step to changing the curriculum.

Limitations of This Research

The amount of multicultural books that have been published around the world is immense and obviously it would be impossible to read and evaluate all those books. This project is a small sample of the exemplary literature published and is merely one author’s opinion and suggestions for great books to read. There are many other books that could and probably should have been included on this list but due to the scope of time and space this author had to choose fifty books to include. It is this authors hope that this small sample of excellent multicultural books provides the basis for teachers to create their own list of exemplary literature.

The checklist was geared toward kindergarten through second grade and does not look at chapter books. Although the criterion can be expanded to also evaluate books for older grader levels there is a need for a tool to evaluate specific types of literature for
all grade levels. The annotated bibliography that was developed for this project only includes picture books. It would be important to future research to develop such lists for all grade levels as well.

This author chose to focus on the primary grades because she feels that we should be teaching children from the moment they are introduced to books about diversity and multiculturalism. This author believes that literature can play a key role in such education. It is also important, however, for all children regardless of age to learn and discover the world around them through multicultural education programs and multicultural literature.

Recommendations

This project was devised to provide teachers with a resource tool when choosing multicultural literature for the classroom. It is the authors hope that the checklist will assist teachers in evaluating books and the annotated bibliography will provide samples. The following resources are invaluable tools to furthering the scope of this research project:

- Websites: when researching multicultural literature the following websites are excellent resources:
  - Shen’s Books: Shen’s Books is a multicultural literature publisher that seeks to provide literature that focuses on cultural diversity and tolerance with a specific emphasis on the cultures of Asia. Shen’s Books can be found at www.shens.com.
• Lee and Low Books: Lee and Low Books is an independent publisher of children’s books that focuses on diversity. The goal of Lee and Low is to provide children of color with stories they can identify with. Lee and Low books can be found at www.leeandlow.com

• Oyate: Oyate is an organization that seeks to ensure that the voices of Native peoples are represented accurately in books and curricula. Oyate can be located at www.oyate.org

☐ Other websites to consider:

• American Multicultural Publications: www.diversity-books.com

• Anti-Defamation League: www.adl.org

• Circle of Inclusion: www.circleofinclusion.org

• Cooperative Children’s Book Center: www.education.wisc.edu

• Gender Equity Bookstore: www.genderequalbooks.com

• Global School Network: www.globalschoolnet.org

• Multicultural Children’s Literature: www.multiculturalchildrenslit.com

• Multicultural Book Reviews: www.isomedia.com

• National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: www.naaccp.org

• National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education: www.ncate.org

• Scholastic Books: www.scholastic.com
When researching multicultural literature the following awards are excellent tools for determining exemplary books for children:

- Amelia Bloomer List: Recommended literature that embodies feminist ideals.
- Americas Award: Books that accurately represent Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinos in the United States.
- Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature: Awards books written with Asian American themes
- Carter G Woodson Award: Awards social science books that depict ethnicity in the United States.
- Corretta Scott King Award: Annual award given to authors and illustrators of African descent.
- Dolly Gray Award: Recognizes children’s books with portrayals of individuals with disabilities.
- Gustavus Myers Award: Awarded to books that have themes of the causes of bigotry and alternative ways to exert power.
- Jane Addams Children’s Book Award: Honor books that promote peace, social justice, racial and gender equality.
- John Steptoe Award for New Talent: Recognizes African American writers and illustrators.
- Mildred L. Batchelder Award: Given to outstanding foreign language children’s books.
- National Jewish Book Awards: Recognizes works that focus on Jewish themes.
- Native Writers’ Circle of the Americas Awards: The only awards given to Indian people by Indian people.
- Pura Belpre Award: Award given to Latino/Latina writers and illustrators.
- Schneider Family Book Award: Awarded to authors or illustrators whose books represent people with disabilities.
- Sydney Taylor Book Awards: Awarded to books with positive Jewish content.
- Tomas Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award: Awarded to books that authentically reflects the lives of Mexican Americans in the Southwestern region of the United States.

These awards highlight the endeavors of authors and illustrators who dedicate their work to ensuring that the voices of those marginalized are heard. These awards offer great insight to some exceptional multicultural children’s literature.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
Multicultural Considerations

The following should serve as a checklist for evaluating children’s literature for multicultural content and awareness. Use this sheet as a checklist when reading and selecting literature for the classroom. In order to determine if a book is exemplary the following should be used as a guideline.

Theme

☐ Are multicultural themes and characters present in the story
☐ Does the theme of the book teach tolerance and respect for self and others
☐ Are there aspects of empowerment in the theme of the book
☐ Can the theme of the book be used within unit and lesson plans
☐ Is the theme universal
☐ Does the theme teach empathy

Story

☐ Are the people of color in the story portrayed with authenticity and positivity
☐ Are the women and girls in the story portrayed with authenticity and positivity
☐ Does the story portray authentic characters and cultural artifacts
☐ Are alternative points of view depicted in the story
☐ Does the story introduce new ideas to the reader

Plot

☐ Do the minority characters play an important role in the development of the plot
☐ Do the minority characters of the story play an important role in the plot
☐ Do the minority characters of the story play a positive role in the resolution of the conflict
☐ Does the plot capture and maintain the reader’s attention
☐ Does the plot stir the readers emotions
Characters

☐ Are the characters portrayed from an authentic perspective (not stereotyped)
☐ Are the characters portrayed as unique individuals
☐ Do the characters change, learn and evolve from their experiences
☐ Are the characters depicted in realistic and positive ways
☐ Do the characters represent a multitude of backgrounds
☐ Are the characters portrayed with authenticity and positivity
☐ Is there diversity within cultural groups

Illustrations

☐ Do the illustrations accurately portray cultural groups
☐ Do the illustrations include the varying array of multicultural people in society
☐ Are the illustrations void of stereotyping and tokenism
☐ Do the illustrations portray diversity within cultural groups
☐ Are the illustrations aesthetically pleasing
☐ Do the illustrations enhance the story

Style and Language

☐ Is the book void of stereotyping and biased language
☐ Are the languages being used accurate and authentic
☐ Are the cultural representations of the book accurate and authentic
☐ Does the style of writing used by the author connect with the reader

The Book

☐ Does the book build on world knowledge
☐ Does the book build on self knowledge
☐ Does the book enhance students self acceptance
☐ Does the book encourage empathy
☐ Does the book present new ideas and opinions
☐ Does the book provide the message of embracing ones culture.
☐ Is the book interesting to all groups of people
☐ Does the book assist the reader in building an accurate conception of cultural differences
☐ Are cultural values portrayed as an asset to society
APPENDIX B
ANOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

50 great books all children should read


Told in the form of a poem, *Black is Brown is Tan* is a celebration of a biracial family and the good lives they share as a mix of cultures. The all-American family pictured in this book speaks to the diverse nature of American society as it honors this coming togetherness between families and the joy the children receive from their eclectic family.


Art is a worldwide language that all children can explore and experience. Art from children around the globe from paintings to theater is examined in the book about creativity and universalism.


Celebrating humans connection to the earth, this book tells the story of a young boy named Matthew who when wanting personal space spends time in his grandmothers meadow. It is there that he builds a relationship with a hawk who teaches him about life, earth, and spiritual awakening. Every year Matthew returns to the meadow to see and listen to the hawk.


A whimsical story of two Ojibway sisters who go outside on a journey through the night exploring the outdoors. There they encounter three spirits: a rabbit, a deer and a coyote whom eventually lead them to Coyote Hill where they stand in awe of the sky spirits, also known as the Northern Lights. The oldest sister eventually decides that the sky spirits are really sky sisters and the two sisters bond becomes stronger from their experience with nature.


In the spring Rosalie and her Grandfather till the garden and plant a varying array of flowers. Her grandfather tells her that when she was born red pink and yellow roses were planted under her window to represent the sunset. Rosalie asks her grandfather if she can plant blue roses and her grandfather tells her there are no blue roses. Rosalie grieves after her grandfather passes and that night dreams of beautiful blue roses symbolizing her love and memory of the man she adored.
This story is based on the life of a Lakota boy, named Curly, after his curly hair, and the bravery that he encompassed during the Lakota’s battles with white settlers. This young boy develops through the story into the warrior that we know as Crazy Horse.

For the Chinese New Year Sam receives lucky money in the form of four dollars from his mother. They head to the street market to go shopping. Sam’s mom tells him he can spend the money however he wishes. After seeing so many toys and food items he couldn’t buy Sam wondered what he would do with his lucky money. Then Sam saw a homeless man that had no shoes. Sam decides that although the mad couldn’t buy shoes with four dollars he could buy socks and Sam gives the man his lucky money.

Unhei, a Korean immigrant, on her first day of first grade in the United States is embarrassed by her Korean name and tells the students she has not decided on a name. In an effort to help her pick one the students create a name jar. But one boy decides that he likes her name and also wants a Korean name creating a domino effect as all the students decide they want Korean names. At the end of the day Unhei realizes the importance of her name and her heritage and decides that her name is just fine and she does not need to change it.

While on a bus ride with her grandmother to go feed the birds in the park, Rosalba wonders what it would be like to fly. Through her imagination Rosalba experiences the city with her abuela by her side as a bird in the sky. Each place they visit, abuela tells Rosalba a story about her experiences and the reader gets a glimpse into her history.

The Lorax is a wonderful story of the effects of pollution and human consumption that although published some 30 years prior still rings true today. This story speaks to a very vital message for both adults and children about the earth and the destruction humans can cause when we do not care about the environment. A great story to read to all children in teaching the necessity of caring for the earth.

Originally written for adults “10 Secrets for success and Inner Peace” has been creatively translated by Dr Wayne Dyer into an empowering poem for young children entitled *Incredible You: 10 ways to let your greatness shine through.*

Nadia is a young Pakistani-American girl who is asked to be her Aunt’s flower girl in her upcoming wedding. Before the wedding Nadia has her hands painted in wonderful creative designs made of henna. Once her hands are painted she begins to
worry about what her classmates are going to think of her hands. Then she has an idea to use her hands for sharing time to teach about Pakistan and her rich heritage.


Using words from the Swahili alphabet Feelings creates an informative and creative book to teach young children about the alphabet, Swahili language while informing students about aspects of East African life.


An alphabet book that introduces children to Spanish and English gives voice to the experiences of migrant farm workers with wonderful illustrations and an excellent rhythm that describes the vegetables and fruit, the people, the earth and the feelings of the environment.


This book is a celebration of a common food among most people around the world. The story teaches about the process of bread making in a rhythmic song written in both Spanish and English.


This wonderfully illustrated book paints the story of Rosa Parks and her infamous influence on the Montgomery Bus Boycott during the Civil Rights Movement.


This book celebrates the difference among children with beautiful images of the earth because children come in all colors of the earth. This book is a great celebration of diversity among children.


Jamaica Louise James is an energetic eight year old who transforms the 86th street subway with her artwork for her adoring grandmother’s birthday. Her grandmother works as a token booth collector and tells Jamaica of all the people that she encounters during her day. Her artwork tells the stories of the people who visit the subway station.


One night a new mother puts her young baby down to rest. As the night moves on she finds herself hushing the animals around her in an effort to keep her baby asleep. Using thai animal noises this author speaks to the universal experience of nurturing babies during bedtime. The author based this book on the experiences her own mother had when putting her to sleep as a baby in Thailand.

This story sends a message of open mindedness with this lighthearted poem about skin color. With a message of the importance of knowing who a person is on the inside rather than judging them from the outside this book gently celebrates diversity.


A wonderful book with images from National Geographic, of people all around the world collecting, gathering, drinking and enjoying water. A great book connecting people by showing similar experiences.


As the city waits for the rain to come and cool the land after the hot summers in Northern India, one young girl describes the experiences, sounds and sights as the city waits for Monsoon season.


The Happiest Tree is the story of Meena, an American girl of East Indian descent who is very clumsy. When her class has to put on a play she is very concerned that she will be humiliated. While on a shopping trip with her mother, Meena sees a yoga class in session and signs up for the new children’s class being taught. With the help of her instructor Meena learns to breath and move more carefully, gaining confidence and when she has to perform the play she does so with no incident.


A true story about a faithful family dog, named Selvakumar, who saves the oldest son Dinakaran from the Tsunami that raged on the Indian Ocean in December of 2004. Selvakumar was the first in the family to hear the rumbling of the ocean and could sense danger but it wasn’t until the water raced toward the village that the family reacted. In a panic Dinakaran hides inside the house and Selvakumar pulls him by his shirt out of the house and up to the upper road ultimately saving the young boys life as he reunites with his family.


This is a wonderful story of Civil Rights leader Cesar Chavez. This story chronicles his life from age 10 to age 38, through his journey to the California capital to protest the unfair working conditions of the migrant farm workers.


A wonderful story of empowerment with a message that girls can do anything written by Queen Latifah. The main character believes she is Queen of the scene and she can beat anyone at basketball, soccer, running, jump rope, etc. and she does so with grace and confidence. This enchanting story speaks to young girls about celebrating themselves, their skills and recognizing their own abilities.

Cora loves to cook and she loves to cook with her mom. One day when all her siblings are out playing Cora and her mom make pancit, a traditional Filipino dish. Then when the family all come home for dinner they learn that their little sister helped prepare the delicious meal and Cora enjoys the praises as the family’s newest chef.


*Baseball Saved Us* is the story of a Japanese-American boy who learns to play baseball while living in an internment camp during World War II. After the war is over his family moves back home and his baseball skills help him cope with the negative reaction from his former community.


Moses is deaf but he has a lot to say. Moses and his classmates communicate in sign language. Even though they cannot hear they enjoy many things. So when his teacher takes them all to a concert they have a surprise in store for them. The teacher gives all the students a balloon to hold during the concert. The balloon allows them to feel the music. After the concert the students meet one of the performers who is also deaf. Together they learn that they can do anything if they work hard at it.


This uplifting story of hope helps teach children about their rich biracial heritage and the value of importance when a young girl is told about her family’s history and diversity from her favorite Aunt Poogee.


Morris has developed the Around the World Series. As one in the series this book speaks to the human experience of eating bread. Whether it is bagels, baguettes, tortillas, or a loaf of bread all humans eat bread all over the world. Celebrating the similarity of eating breads with the difference of the type of bread this story speaks to the importance of connections between humans. Also check out Houses and Homes from the Around the World Series.


This is a great story about two strong, confident, outspoken women who become friends and defy all boundaries set for women in the 1930’s, when during a dinner party they decide to take flight in Amelia Earhart’s plane and a ride in Eleanor Roosevelt’s car. A true unknown story of two inspiring women.


Fiona Cheng is biracial. Her father is Chinese and her mother is Scottish. Fiona is confused about who she is and has noticed others making assumptions about who she is based on her appearance. When both sets of her grandparents come to visit she becomes even more confused and tries her best to please both sides. In the end Fiona realizes she is 100% herself and that is just fine for everyone.
Mike and his family own a food cart and do business on a popular corner in the city. When business gets slow Mike’s grandmother, who has moved with the family from Korea, helps save the food cart business with the help of Mike, by introducing traditional family recipes.

A heartwarming story about unlikely friends that build a bond with the help of a furry friend named Tush. Larnel an African American boy and his mom often visit Mrs. Katz a Jewish widow on their way home from their daily activities. Larnel recognizing Mrs. Katz loneliness brings her a stray kitten that he found behind his building. Together they help each other take care of Tush and their relationship grows through the years.

The keeping quilt is a true family history about four generations of Jewish immigrants who are connected by love and faith with the help of a quilt that was made from the original scraps of a traditional Jewish dress and babushka.

This book tells the amazing biography of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A mix of Kings own speeches with the authors words bring to life the inspiration and hope of this great Civil Rights leader.

This is a touching true story of two male penguins that become companions in a New York City Zoo. With the help of their zoo keeper the pair raises their own penguin by taking on an abandoned egg. This story speaks to the testament that there are all kinds of families.

Allison is the story of a young girl who begins to realize that she looks very different from her parents and more like her favorite doll. As she questions the similarities between her and the doll and the differences between her and her parents, her probing leads to the discovery that she was adopted. With the help of a stray cat Allison realizes the importance of her family and begins to appreciate that although they are different they all love each other.

Ellington was not a street is based on the experiences that poet Ntozake Shange experienced as a child growing up around very influential African American men that changed the world.

While helping make tamales for Christmas dinner Marie sneaks a peak at her mom’s wedding ring, trying it on when she leaves the room. Later when Marie realizes the ring is missing she begins to search with the help of her cousins. They eat all the tamales in an effort to try to find the ring before her mom finds out. When they don’t find the ring Maria confesses to her mother only to realize that her mother had the ring all along. The family then pulls together to make more tamales for dinner.


Mufaro has two beautiful daughters; Manyara who is mean spirited and selfish and Nyasha is caring and thoughtful. When the king calls for the worthiest women to come before him Manyara sets out ahead of her sister believing she should be chosen. However the king has a trick up his sleeve to help him choose. An African Cinderella story.


This story is the revised version of the Thanksgiving address for children. The message gives thanks to all things on earth. The message is said at social gatherings, before formal events and is part of the morning and evening prayer.


This story tells about a young African American girl who learns to love her hair through the experience of being with her mother and the stories she would tell while she combed through her hair in the evenings before bed. The book uses images of the various and fantastic ways she can wear her beautiful hair.


On the first day of school, Suki decides that she wants to wear her Japanese kimono regardless of what her older sisters tell her about how all the children will laugh at her. For Suki the kimono brings about fond memories of her grandmother’s visit during the summer. To her sisters surprise Suki wins the hearts of her classmates and teacher with a dance she performs in her kimono. Suki’s confidence and belief that she is who she is, is a great lesson for young children about being proud of whom they are as individuals.


Original African nursery rhymes inspired by West African life styles. Enjoyable characters bring to life universal stories of wisdom that enlighten the reader with images of fields, markets, dances, songs, skies, seasons, folktales and festivals.

Harriet Tubman uses her religious faith to reach freedom with the help of the Underground Railroad. She then uses the same faith to give her strength as she fights to free others as the Moses of the people. The book paints the story of the role that faith and religion played in the lives of slaves.


This story is about the inspirational life of Esther Morris. Esther Morris was instrumental in making Wyoming the first territory to allow women to vote and became the first woman to hold public office in the Unites States.


This is the true story of a young eight year old boy who is orphaned by civil war in Sudan. With the words of his father close to his heart the young boy finds a way to encourage and lead a group of boys thousands of miles to safety in Ethiopia, Kenya, and finally to the US.


This book retells the inspirational life story of Barack Obama, the historical President that uplifted America. Through the book the author tells the history of Obama and his family and the connection he has made around the world.


This story is about a young girl who is concerned that the Chinese food her parents are planning to serve in their restaurant on the fourth of July will not be eaten. To her surprise several customers come into the restaurant for some food to go after the parade.