



OHS National Center on
Cultural & Linguistic Responsiveness

Selecting and Using Culturally Responsive Children's Books



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For information about other NCCLR resources, scan the QR code with a smartphone QR code app.

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CHOOSING BOOKS

Your Collection Should Include...

- Books about people that represent all of the cultures, languages, and ethnicities in the program
- Books about children who are bicultural and/or show bicultural experiences
- Books about immigrant and refugee experiences
- Books that reflect a wide range of cultures and many books about each culture
- Books that positively show many different lifestyles (adoptive parents, single parent households, LGBT families, foster families, multigenerational families, grandparents raising grandchildren, etc.)
- Books that portray children with disabilities positively and as active, capable main characters
- Books that show female characters in positive, active roles that break gender stereotypes
- Books that show male characters that break gender role stereotypes
- Books that feature men of color in positive roles and in roles as fathers



Steps to Checking Books for Stereotypes & Bias...

Consider the Context

What is the author's background? • What is the copyright date?
• Is it high quality literature? • What does it teach?

Examine the Illustrations

Are there offensive images, e.g., stereotypes, culture as costume/object, tokenism? • Are diverse characters accurately illustrated? • Do the illustrations match the story, e.g., Native American designs that match the tribe?

Analyze the Messages

What is the overall message? • Are you comfortable sharing it with the children and families in your classroom? • Does it promote respect? • Are diverse characters shown in leadership roles and having realistic lives? • Does the message enhance the self-image of children from diverse backgrounds?

Weigh the Words

Are there problematic words (typical, normal, ordinary, etc.)? • Does the book contain any offensive, negative terms, e.g., lazy, ugly, slow, bashful, savage?
• Are dialects used appropriately and respectfully?

EVALUATING BOOKS

Remember to Be Mindful of...

- Counting or alphabet books that use any culture or ethnicity as an object to be counted, e.g., “10 Little Indians,” “I is for Inuit”
- Representations of characters playing ‘dress-up’ as people from different cultures or portrayals of cultures as costumes
- Portrayals of children in traditional dress instead of contemporary dress unless appropriate to the story, e.g., participating in a festival or ceremony
- Portrayals of Asian American women as strict and overbearing
- Portrayals of Asian Americans as model minorities, overly polite, or extraordinarily bright
- Portrayals of African American women in roles of servitude
- Showing female characters or characters of color as passive, weak, and relying on male characters for important decisions
- Depictions of European American, middle class, or male characters as rescuers, having all the power and making the important decisions in the story
- Derogatory terms or words offensive to any group
- Exaggerated physical features of any cultural group
- The use of African American Vernacular English or any dialect in an inaccurate, mocking, or other offensive way
- Native American designs that are made up or not connected to the tribe in the story
- The use of stereotyped Mexican culture to portray all Latinos
- The use of demeaning names for Native American characters
- The use of any dialect in an inaccurate or offensive way

Important Concepts:

- Relationships
- Heroes/Heroines
- Standards for Success
- Culture as costume/object
- Loaded words
- Portrayals of people of color, females, characters with disabilities



Resources for Culturally Responsive Books

Children’s Peace Education and Anti-Bias Library

This website includes a bibliography of children’s books that celebrate diversity as well as promote peace and understanding. It has a searchable database of books and educational activity ideas.

<http://www.childpeacebooks.org/cpb/index.php>

Cooperative Children’s Book Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison

This website contains multiple bibliographies of children’s books on a variety of themes, including multicultural children’s books and Spanish-English Bilingual books. Books are organized by grade level.

<http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/default.asp>

World of Words, University of Arizona

This website features many multicultural children’s books and includes lists of books organized by age level and region. It also features links to issues of the WOW review, a journal focused on reading across cultures, and a number of helpful links and ideas for reviewing and using culturally authentic children’s literature.

<http://wowlit.org>

World of Difference Institute, Anti-Defamation League

This website contains thematically organized lists of multicultural and anti-biased literature featuring a wide range of different cultures. It includes many books for very young children and also includes guidelines for assessing books for bias as well as information about using books to promote tolerance.

<http://www.adl.org/bibliography/default.asp>

Teaching for Change

This website includes children’s book lists compiled by culture and culturally responsive themes. Recommended age level is listed under the specifics for each book. It also includes professional development books to guide anti-bias, culturally responsive practice for educators.

<http://bbpbooks.teachingforchange.org/best-recommended/booklist>

NCCLR Quick Guides

Selecting Culturally Appropriate Children’s Books in Languages Other Than English helps teachers and home visitors find, select, evaluate, and use books to support language and literacy development in the home languages of young children. *How to Use Bilingual Books* offers practical, manageable ideas on how to use bilingual books in the classroom and home.

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/center/NCCLRQuickGuide.htm>

Steps to Evaluating Books Worksheet

Use this worksheet to evaluate all children’s books, including those in lending libraries for families.

Consider the Context

Who wrote the book? Is the author and/or illustrator a member of the cultural group being portrayed? What is the author’s background? When was the book written? What does it teach?

Examine the Illustrations

Are there offensive images? Are diverse characters accurately illustrated? Do the illustrations match the story?

Analyze the Message

Are the messages about sharing, friendship, overcoming obstacles? Diversity? Female characters? Characters with disabilities? People with non-traditional lifestyles?

Weigh the Words

Look for loaded words like “savage,” “lazy,” “silly,” and “bashful.” If the book contains any dialect, think about whether the use is appropriate and respectful, or could it be considered offensive or perpetuate stereotypes?

