

Why Children Need Diverse Literature:

How does Diverse Literature Affect Children?

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This paper was written for HONS-409 at Anna Maria College, taught by Professor Maruska. The writing process of this thesis was advised by Professor McDonnell, Program Director of Education at Anna Maria College

Introduction:

Some children are exposed to literature often as infants when their parents or guardians start reading to them right before bedtime. By the time a child enters preschool, they are starting to develop reading skills such as directionality, the components of a cover (author, illustrator, title, and how to turn a page). There is no doubt that the skills mentioned above are important to a young reader; these skills are necessary to become a fluent reader. A question can be raised however, about the types of books children are exposed to as emergent and beginner readers. Do the books they read expose them to a variety of different types of people? When they read are they learned about the world around them authentically? Are the books read by children accurately represent the diverse world that they live in? This leads to the overarching question of are the books children are exposed to during their childhood qualify as diverse literature.

Diverse literature has been described many times as a window into the world. It allows the reader to get a look at everything that is occurring all around the world not just in their small corner of it. Diverse literature can be seen as a mirror as well because it allows for unrepresented children to get a chance to see themselves in a book. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, a children's literature professor at Ohio State, described the concept as following:

"[Diverse]Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience.

Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books (Bishops 1990)." Diverse books allow children to feel seen, to know that their stories are valued. It also allows for those stories to be told to children who might have not been aware of those stories in the first place.

According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center located at the School of Education located at the University of Wisconsin- Madison, 73.3% of all children books published in 2015 featured a Caucasian main character. The next highest ethnic group represented was African/ African American with just 7.6%. Non-human characters such as animals and vehicles ranked higher than any other minority group with 12.5%. (Cooperative Children's Book Center 2015). When it comes to books written by ethnic minority authors the percentages are extremely low. Out of the 3,400 books reviewed by the CCBC, only 108 children books (3.1%) were written by African American authors. The only minority group to produce more children's books were written by Asian Pacific American authors with 176 books (5.1%). Caucasian authors made up a staggering 90.3% of the data. (Cooperative Children's Book Center 2015). Compared to the population statistics of children aged five to nine in the United States the above statistics don't represent the diversity present in the country. In 2015, 20,487,176 children fell into the five to nine-year-old age range in the United States. 72.26% of those children are Caucasian (14,805,326), 15.13% of children were of African descent (3,099,821), 5.5% of children were mixed race (1,133,589), 5.1% were Asian (1,056,350), 1.5% were Native Americans (330,470), and .29% of the children were Pacific Islander (61,350) (United States Census 2015). There are more children of diverse backgrounds who aren't seeing themselves in the books targeted for their

age. These children are not represented in the literature provided and targeted for the appropriate audience.

Statement of the Problem:

The books children are exposed to at an early age shape how they see the world. They often learn valuable lessons or morals throughout the story. For example, if a child was reading the novel "The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane" by Kate DiCamillo by the end of the novel they might learn that people will love you for who you are; not how you look. This lesson of self-acceptance can easily be taught with the same result through realistic diverse characters as well. For many, it will be hard to relate to the themes of a novel if they can't put themselves in the shoes of the main character. However, if the students can relate to the characters, they are exposed to there's a higher chance of retaining the morals of the story. However, there is much more to be learned from children's literature especially for the target demographic. A key takeaway to make sure these new and varied lessons are taught is through diverse literature.

Diverse literature provides the necessary exposure to the experiences of people who are different from them in a manner that is easy to understand because it is written in a way a child-friendly manner. In 1965 African American adults noticed that there was a lack of children's books written with an African American main character. These adults felt like the youth were not celebrating their heritage because they didn't have the exposure to it. This started the push to have diverse literature published and be available to young children (Thomas 2016). Without diverse literature, many children might not have the opportunity to explore the world they come from.

As of right now, there is a lack of books in publication that represent a variety of children, not just one specific kind. For children to feel represented in literature their stories need to be told. These children are not getting the opportunity to see an accurate reflection of who they are and people who are like them. In a 2016 TED Talk Asian-American author, Grace Lin talked about how the lack of diversity in children's books impacted her. When she was a child, she was an avid reader. She was also a member of the only Asian family in her town. At school, this meant that the only people who looked like I were her sisters. In many ways, she tried to "de-Asian" herself to try to fit in. This got worse after the school librarian read the book, *The Five Chinese Brothers*, and her peers made fun of her because of her race. This experience made her feel like she could never be someone of importance. This all changed when she had a conversation with an Italian friend and realized she didn't know a thing about her Chinese heritage. This made her want to learn and teach others about her Chinese roots. Her goal was to create the stories she wishes she had as a child (Lin 2016). Overly represented children need to be able to see outside of the world they live to understand the world better. But also, for underrepresented children to hear their stories told.

Background and Need:

The idea of needing diverse books is not a new concept. It has been around since at least 1965. According to Thomas: On September 11th, 1965, an article was published in *The Saturday Review* titled "The All-White World of Children's Books." It revealed that of 5,206 children's trade books published by sixty-three publishers during a three-year period, only 349 books, about 6.7%, had one or more African American characters in them. Eight of the publishers at that time published only all-white books (Thomas 2016)." It has been known for decades that

children's books often portray Caucasian children over those of color, a fact that has not improved over the years. "In June of 2013, multicultural publisher Lee and Low Books put together a graphic illustrating that although 37% of the population of the United States are people of color, only 10% of children's books published contained multicultural content (diversebooks.org)." Children are not being exposed to the diversity that the world has to offer. They are being exposed to one side of a multicolored world.

The Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the following study is to address the idea of diverse literature. There will be a look at what exactly is diverse literature and how it differs from traditional children's literature. The concept of the hesitation of exposing children to books that are considered to be diverse. It will be valuable to explore what children are reading and to see if they are considered diverse. Finally, there will be a look at the social and emotional development impact of diverse literature on children. This all will lead to the question of should we expose children to diverse literature at a young age.

Research Questions:

Many questions must be answered to understand and reach the conclusion of rather or not diverse literature is needed. First, there is the question of what diverse literature is and what qualifies as diverse literature. Next will be a deep dive into social developmental norms and the connection to diverse literature. The two questions that will be answered during this deep dive will be how diverse literature contributes to a child's social development and how diverse literature connects to the emotional development of children. When these questions are

answered the next question will explore how to implement diverse literature in a typical classroom environment. Finally, there will be a look at the diverse books for children ages 5-9.

Definitions:

Diverse Literature: Literature that exposes the reader to a variety of characters. Characters are varied in one way or another. Variations common in diverse literature include the following: race, ethnic group, nationality, social-economic status, urban versus rural settings, family dynamics, abilities/disabilities, and sexuality identity (LGBTQA+). Genres of diverse literature can vary between non-fiction and fiction.

Family Dynamics: In this thesis, family dynamics will refer to the makeup of the main character's family in a story. Is the character raised in a "traditional" family (mom and dad) or a single-parent household? Do they have visitation with their parent? Are they adopted or in foster care? Are they or their family immigrants? Do they have same-sex parents instead of parents of opposite sexes? Do they live with a guardian (grandparents, aunt, uncle, family friend, etc.) instead of their parents?

Social development: Social Development refers to how people develop social and emotional skills. Social development allows us to form positive relationships with family, friends, teachers, and other people in our lives.

Emotional development: Emotional development refers to the ability to recognize, express, and manage feelings at different stages of life and to have empathy for the feelings of others.

Emergent readers: Young children gain an understanding of the communicative purpose of print. Moves away from pretending reading to reading predictable books. Moves away from using simulated writing to writing patterned sentences (I see a cat, I see a baby, I see a cupcake).

Beginner readers: Growing ability to use phonics to decode and spell words. Learning to read and write many high-frequency words.

Fluent readers: Reads fluently and with expression. They recognize most one-syllable words automatically and can decode words efficiently and use comprehension strategies effectively.

Multicultural classroom: A classroom that is welcoming of all students. There are no differences in the treatment of students due to race, religion, family life, abilities, or economic status.

Literature Review:

There can be no study of diverse literature without understanding key concepts. Firstly, there is a question on what qualifies as diverse literature and how it differs from traditional literature. Next, there needs to be an understanding of why there are hesitations on "exposing" diverse literature to children. Then a look at what exactly what children are reading. Finally, there will be an exploration of the social and emotional developmental impact of diverse books.

Diverse Literature Versus Traditional Children Literature:

For many when they hear the term children's literature they think of the classics: Green Eggs and Ham, Beezus and Romona, and Junie B. Jones. These books compared to the definition given above of what diverse literature is wouldn't meet expectations to be considered diverse.

It doesn't mean they aren't good books it simply means they are typical to the genre of children's literature. The Library of Congress defines children's literature as: "material written and produced for the information or entertainment of children and young adults. It includes all non-fiction, literary and artistic genres and physical formats (Library of Congress)." There are different types of genres within children's literature including historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, realistic fiction, folktales, fairytales, picture books, and nonfiction. The books produced are targeted to specific age demographics of children.

Diverse Literature in many ways can be viewed as a subgenre of children's literature. All children's books aren't necessarily considered diverse literature. There are some defining characteristics of diverse literature that must be present to be considered a part of that genre. Not all these characteristics have to be present to be considered diverse literature, but the book needs to include at least some elements. Diverse literature is not having one character who is "different", and those differences aren't explored. It is more than having someone of a different background on the cover of a story about typical experiences than never talked about in the story.

According to We Need Diverse Books, a non-profit organization to help to produce and promote literature that reflects the lives of children everywhere, diverse literature is: "recognizing all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities (We Need Diverse Books 2014)". The International Literacy Association defines diverse literature simply as "literature for all (Dodge 2015)". They also stress that "Diversity in literature goes beyond ethnicity. Diversity may include the various facets of sexuality and

gender, cultural, and societal groups (Steiner 2016)". Diverse literature targets children who aren't represented in typical children's books and allows them to hear and see stories that truly represent them.

Just because a book is a children's book it doesn't mean it is diverse. A book must represent an audience that is "different" from the norm seen in most children's books. For example, the children's novel *Beezus and Romona* by Beverly Sills explore the complexity of a sibling relationship. There's no known diverse characteristic about the story's characters; they're not racially diverse, disabled, or culturally diverse. They don't identify as LGBTQ+ and don't have parents who identify as that either. This book is considered to be a realistic fiction book under children's literature but not a diverse one. Another novel that explores the same topic, complexity of a sibling relationship, is *Little Big Sister* by Amy McCoy. This novel is about a younger sister and her older brother who has Autism. This book is considered to be diverse because it talks about an experience (growing up with a sibling with Autism) that is different from the normal status quo in the genre of children's literature. This book would be considered diverse realistic fiction under the umbrella term of children's literature.

The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at the School of Education at The University of Wisconsin-Madison is the leader of data collection on diverse literature. Since the establishment of the library in 1963, the CCBC has had the goal of promoting literature to youth. The CCBC has released statistics on the number of books either about, written, or published by people of ethnic minorities in a given year since 1985. Since 2018 they have expanded their data collection to include books about LGBTQ+ and disabilities. Many people in the fields that deal directly with literature (librarians, teachers, publishers, etc.) often use the

CCBC as a leading source of diversity in literature. There are some limitations however to the CCBC and how they collect their data on diverse literature due to the fact the center doesn't receive every single book published in a given year. This fact can sway the data of diverse books in both a positive or negative manner.

Hesitations on "Exposing" Diverse Literature to Children:

The goal of diverse literature in many ways is to expose children to stories that often aren't told. Through diverse literature, children get a chance to learn about people who might be different from them or going through different challenges they might not face. Although many people and organizations support the need for diverse literature amongst children's books, some people don't share that view. There is an increasing number of diverse books being banned across the United States due to various reasons.

There are many reasons why people might want to ban a book. Some common topics amongst banned books include LGBTQ +, political viewpoints, and religious viewpoints (American Library Association). For children's books, the main reason for banning is inappropriateness for the target audience. An example of a commonly banned book is Uncle Bobby's Wedding by Sarah Brannen. This story is about a little girl whose uncle is marrying his long-time boyfriend and she is worried she won't be her uncle's favorite person anymore. This is banned due to all four of the major topics stated above in the town of Brentwood Missouri. A library patron in the area challenged Uncle Bobby's Wedding presence in the children's section of the local library due to the following " that its [the books] purpose is "to glorify homosexual marriage" and that it could open the door to library books advocating other interests such as white supremacy or

pedophilia (Maren Williams 2012)." The original publication of the book featured a guinea pig family as the main characters and is being republished in May 2020 to feature human characters.

Another book that is being challenged constantly is the novel *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. This book is about an African American teenage girl Starr who joins the Black Lives Matter Movement after witnessing the police shooting of her friend. In 2017 it was banned by the school district in Katy Texas due to the "pervasive vulgarity and racially-insensitive language". In 2018 it was banned by the Fraternal Order of Police in Charleston South Carolina for the claim of "almost an indoctrination of distrust of police and we've got to put a stop to that (Gomez 2018)." Some people believe that children are too young to be exposed to topics as serious as the one in this novel. However, it can be used as a tool to help children understand what is occurring in the world around them.

Books like *Uncle Bobby's Wedding* by Sarah Brannen and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas are being banned because it goes against the belief system of certain people or groups. Children are unable to learn about diversity in the world when books are taken off the shelves. In the course of a lifetime, a child will be exposed to the concept of same-sex marriage at some moment in their lives. Many children have also seen news footage of the Black Lives Movement. Banning appropriate diverse books limits children's ability to learn about diverse situations and people. It can even limit children's exposure to stories that are relatable to them. It does more harm than good to ban appropriate diverse children's books because it limits children's exposure to the real world around them and is a part of it.

What Children are Reading:

It is important to understand what children are reading at the current moment and to look at if they are being exposed to diverse literature in the classroom environment. It is also important to understand what children are naturally gravitating towards in terms of reading material before looking at the impacts of what reading diverse literature can have on a student developmentally. Renaissance Learning, a literacy program used in roughly one-third of schools in the United States, has gathered data on what children in various grade levels are reading.

Emergent readers are typically children that are two to six years old (kindergarten age). This is a time of rapid reading growth for a child. They go from not understanding what a book is, to be able to start reading independently (Tompkins 2017). At this stage, especially at school, children are still being read to by a teacher. This is a way to help children build their knowledge of the world of books and key skills. According to Renaissance during the 2018-2019 school year, 45% of a child's reading came from being read to by the teacher. The top five most popular books for kindergarteners are The Biscuit Series by Alyssa Satin Capucilli, The Dr. Seuss Collection by Dr. Seuss, the Pete the Cat Series by James Dean, The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle, and Elephant & Piggie Series by Mo Willems (Renaissance Learning 2020). There is only one book (at number twenty) on the list that would qualify as a diverse literature book. The book is called The Snow Day by Ezra Jack Keats. The story takes place on a snow day in Brooklyn, New York. It is diverse due to the urban setting. The main character of the story is a little boy named Peter, who happens to be African American. Peter's race is never talked about in the book however, but he is considered to be one of the first non-caricatured African Americans to be featured in a major children's book (Pope 2015).

Beginner readers are children typically aged six to seven (first to second grade). At this stage, children are starting to read more independently and homing in on strategies that will help them improve their reading skills (Tompkins 2017). Starting in first-grade students are more likely to be independently reading than being read to at 70% and 15% respectfully. This trend continues in second grade with only 10% of students being read too compared to 83% reading independently. The top three books read by first graders during the 2018-2019 school year are The Dr. Seuss Collection by Dr. Seuss, the Fly Guy Series by Tedd Arnold, and The Biscuit Series by Alyssa Satin Capucill. The top three books read by second graders are The Dr. Seuss Collection by Dr. Seuss, the Click, Clack... Series by Doreen Cronin, and the If You Give... Series by Laura Numeroff (Renaissance Learning 2020). On both of the lists, there isn't one book that would be considered diverse.

Fluent readers are children from age eight (third grade) onwards. When a person is a fluent reader, they can read a story and comprehend what is occurring in the story. They can read with expression and use targeted reading strategies as needed (Tompkins 2017). From third grade onwards most of the child's reading instruction is independent compared to being read to in the younger grades. The books read by a child in third and fourth grade are often longer and more complexed compared to the books they were reading in the past. The top three books read by third graders during the 2018-2019 school year are the Dog Man series by Dav Pilkey, Charlotte's Web by E.B. White, and Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo (Renaissance Learning 2020). On this list, there are two books, Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo and Stone Fox by John Reynolds Gardiner that would be considered diverse. Both book's diversity is because the main character's home lives are unique to the standard

traditional family unit. In *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo, the main character lives with her single father in a mobile home after the mom left the family. In *Stone Fox* by John Reynolds Gardiner the main character lives with his ill grandfather on a farm who must come up with a way to save the farm. The top three books in fourth grade are *Diary of a Wimpy Kid Series* by Jeff Kinney, the *Dog Man Series* by Dav Pilkey, and the *Fudge Series* by Judy Blume (Renaissance Learning 2020). On the list out of twenty books, six are considered diverse. Two include unique family situations, two offer stories with a character with atypical needs, one offers a story of a teen in a juvenile detention camp, and the last one is a story of a Native American child trying to survive in an extreme circumstance.

As children develop their reading skills, the books they read are featuring more diverse characters and circumstances. Children are being exposed to a variety of issues and points of view as they develop the skill to independently read. It is important that all children no matter what their reading ability is, are exposed to diverse literature.

Developmental Impact:

Diverse literature can impact the social development of the children who are exposed to the concept. Social development is defined as how people develop both social and emotional skills. Social development allows us to form positive relationships with family, friends, teachers, and other people in our lives. What is the link between being exposed to diverse literature and the social development of a child? One of the biggest goals of diverse literature is to help children learn about people who are different from them. Perhaps the book the child is reading exposes

the child to a different ethnic group, race, religion, or skill set (disability). Is a child who is exposed to those differences more likely to interact better in social situations?

If children are exposed to diverse literature their social awareness will increase. "Social awareness is the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports (MN Department of Education)". Diverse literature increases social awareness because it exposes children to cultures that vary from their own. A child's view of the world increases due to being exposed to all kinds of people. According to the New England Reading Association Journal, multicultural books help students understand others and the world: "... The study of [diverse] literature can not only foster awareness and tolerance, but it can also foster action upon the world. For instance, when reading about bullying, students might be encouraged to think about how they can employ their own words in the service of societal improvement (Morrell and Morrell 2012)." Diverse literature can allow children to be more accepting of differences and look past them. Children must learn at an early age to listen and tolerate different perspectives. These skills are often taught through diverse literature without children realizing it.

Diverse literature in many ways can help foster relationships, especially in the classroom setting. The Morrells explains that multicultural literature can help students find commonalities within the classroom that might have otherwise not have been explored: "For example, while reading [Paul] Fleischman's *Seedfolks* with sixth graders, we discovered that many of the students translated for their non-English speaking parents and struggled with the shift in power

and roles that this responsibility brought. Students who were not expected to translate empathized with their peers and asked thoughtful and sensitive questions about how this impacted their identity (Morrell and Morrell 2012)." Children are building these connections due to the books they are reading that might have not been explored otherwise. It can allow children to build cross-cultural friendships: "Multicultural literature promotes the interaction of children across different ethnic backgrounds (Steiner 2008)." In many ways, diverse literature can be used as a way to eliminate barriers by showing children that people tend to be more alike than different. This encourages students to explore the world around them and reach out to people that are different from them. Thus, helping foster friendships with all different types of people.

The development of a child emotionally is something that is also very important. You want the child to have the proper skills to be able to cope with both the good and bad that life has to offer. Emotional development refers to the ability to recognize, express, and manage feelings at different stages of life and to have empathy for the feelings of others. In many ways' books can be used to help children learn these valuable skills without them even realizing it.

To develop positively, a child needs to have a sense of self-worth/ self-esteem. Self-worth is the idea that a child has confidence within themselves about who they are and what they are capable of doing. The National Health Service better known as the NHS says that poor self-esteem can hurt a person. Low self-esteem may cause avoidance of problems, depression, anxiety, and unhealthy coping strategies such as drinking and smoking. A way to build self-esteem in children is through literature. For many children a book can provide a positive role model on how to handle difficult situations, some might develop a mindset that if they (the

book character) can do that so can I. That connection can be increased if the book character looks like the child or comes from a similar background. According to the Morrells relating to a character can have a major impact on children: "Through encountering stories that serve as a mirror into our own lives, we come to understand ourselves better as we read and react to the stories of others who have had similar fears, joys, and experiences. This is only possible through a rich and diverse selection of literature that allows students to encounter many points of view (Morrell and Morell 2012)." When a child can see that someone who is like them can achieve something that seems hard or difficult then they develop the idea that they can do that as well. Diverse literature can be a way to see a positive and true mirror image of themselves in a story/book.

The development of empathy is a key skill in fostering a child's emotional development. Empathy is the ability to understand what another person is feeling. It can be described as being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes. For example, if a child can understand why their friend is sad over the divorce of their parents and can express that they understand the friend's sadness then the child has empathy skills. Take the example of author Karol Ruth Silverstein for instance. She was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at thirteen that caused her hands to become deformed and the need to use leg braces. She often receives stares from young children who don't understand her disability. She found that when she explains to the children what had happened that the children react empathically: "What's even more telling is that, after I fill the kids in on how I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at 13 and how that illness affected my joints over the years, they inevitably start telling me stories of their own—how one had her tonsils out and another broke his arm or others have a grandparent who has

arthritis or a neighborhood friend who uses a wheelchair (Silverstein 2019)." Not all children are exposed to someone who is different from them or might not be able to have a conversation with that person. Diverse books are a way to make sure children are exposed to those stories. When a child is exposed to something that they aren't used too and then see it normalize it can help the child to not fear it and will, in turn, be more likely to become more accepting of the difference. Diverse literature can teach a child how to deal with new situations, empathy skills, and how to see the world from a different perspective.

Reflection:

Through the exploration of the literature on the topic of diverse literature, it is clear to see that children benefit from being exposed to the medium. Diverse literature offers children an insight into both people and issues that they are unfamiliar with in a manner that is appropriate for children. It is through this exposure that children develop a broader worldview. This means that their view of the world is not limited to just what they are familiar with and what they have seen during their short lives but to experiences that are vastly different from theirs. This, in turn, offer students the chance to become better global citizens. In the 21st century it vital that children are aware of the diversity in the world and be accepting of the differences of people in the world. Diverse literature author Jacqueline de Rose-Ahern described the global citizen concept as followed: "Multicultural children's literature opens a door to a different world, a different way of thinking, acting and behaving. It also accentuates the humanistic similarities we all have and reinforces the fact that we are all interconnected in some way. These stories can quench stereotypes and provides a platform that embraces diversity and celebrates uniqueness. It provides a premise to nurture global citizens, who are accepting and conversant

(de Rose-Ahern 2017)." When a diverse book is written successfully, they offer an insight into a perspective that is different from what the child is typically used to. This allows the child to see that humans are more alike than different. Diverse literature can dispel stereotypes that children might have had been exposed to. Once children are exposed to that "unknown others" they are more likely to respect what makes them different from themselves. This will lead the children to be more accepting of different types of people.

Diverse literature is also a way to ensure children can see themselves reflected in the books they are reading. Most children do not fall under the typical stereotyped characters seen in children's books; white, middle class, neurotypical, non-handicapped, and a part of a traditional middle-class family. The world is full of children who don't match that standard. Those children who don't fit the mold deserve to be able to see themselves in the books they read. When a child is exposed to stories that reflect them it can help build up their self-esteem and give the child the sense that their story deserves to be told. Author and publishing expert, Walter Dean Meyers explained this notion in a 2014 interview: "As I discovered who I was, a black teenager in a white-dominated world, I saw that these characters, these lives, were not mine. What I wanted, needed really, was to become an integral and valued part of the mosaic that I saw around me (Meyers 2014)." A child must know that their own story is valued. When a child sees a character that reflects their story it can truly make a difference. It is also important that children who often do see themselves represented in books also get a chance to read about people who are different from them because it allows them a chance to get a look into a different perspective that is quite different from their own. This can allow children to be exposed to the struggles of others that they might have not been aware of. Laurie Edwards, a

teaching professor at Northeastern University, recalled a moment that she experienced this firsthand with her daughter: "That night, she picked "Keep Out, Claudia!," where Asian-American babysitter, Claudia Kishi, is turned down for babysitting by a family because of her race... Little kids are naturally inquisitive and don't let injustices slide; my 8-year-old wanted to know why a family would treat Claudia that way. What followed was an important conversation about racism and prejudice (Edwards 2019)." Children should be made aware that the world can be very difficult for some people and reading diverse literature is a way to do so.

Conversations like the one Laurie and with her daughter are tough to have but it allows for the child to learn about the true reality of the world they live in.

Diverse literature is a way to help foster the idea of having a multiculturalism classroom. This is a type of classroom that is welcoming of all students. There are no differences in the treatment of the students due to race, religion, family life, abilities, or economic status. The classroom could be used as a way to expose children to diverse literature and those no one right way to do so. The classroom teacher must keep in mind what will work best for the children in the class. Danielle Yadao describes this concept as followed: "By reading a diverse book for your community or all-school read, it reaffirms the value of everyone in the community and fosters an environment of inclusivity (Yadao 2019)." When a child can see themselves in a novel it makes them feel more welcomed. The most basic exposure would be having diverse literature available in the classroom library. Offer students a variety of different points of view in the books in the library. Even display some of them within the classroom. Another easy way diverse literature can be used in the classroom is to have the read-aloud story (in younger grades) be a diverse book. This is a small way to make sure students are hearing diverse stories. Having a

class discussion following the book can be a great way to encourage the students to think about what they had read as well. In older grades having the books used for literature circles be diverse books is a great way of ensuring that children are reading and analyzing diverse literature as well as having conversations about diverse literature. By having diverse literature in the classroom, the foundation of having a multiculturalism classroom is set. This will make the classroom environment a welcoming place for every student in the class.

When diverse literature is included in the book collections of young children, they become better people because of it. They learn about people who live differently from them and learn it in a way that makes sense to them. Diverse literature offers a window for children to learn about the authentic experiences of people who are unlike them. Danielle Yadao describes this concept as: "Reading books that represent different abilities, cultures, beliefs, and skin colors help us change our attitude toward those differences. Offering a diverse title for a community read allows the reader to both step into the shoes of the protagonist and have a buffer from their reality (Yadao 2019)." Children who read diversely are more likely to learn to be accepting of others by understanding that those differences simply just add to the unique makeup of that person. They will then be able to look past those differences and focus on the other qualities of the person. This idea will help students see that people are more alike than different and help children prepare for their role as global citizens.

Conclusion:

Children must be exposed to diverse literature during their childhood. Diverse literature is not only important to teach children about new cultures but also to teach children about their own

culture. By being exposed to diverse literature they will be made aware of the world and people around them as well as how they fit into that world as well. Children are global citizens and should be exposed to books that will allow them to be successful in that environment. Diverse literature is a key tool to help to build a child's social and emotional development by encouraging empathy, positive self-esteem, and building healthy relationships. Children who read diversely will more likely be accepting of those that are different from them. The books children are exposed to at an early age shape how they see the world. Exposing children to diverse literature is a way to make sure they see the world as it is wonderfully diverse. It is valuable for an elementary school-age child to be exposed to diverse literature. By being exposed to diverse literature they will be made aware of the world and people around them. If they aren't exposed to diverse people, this will provide an opportunity to be exposed. They will learn that there are all different types of people in the world and to value those differences. This skill will help them navigate the world around them positively and respectfully. Diverse literature will help children learn about people that live both near and far and about people who live differently from them. It is beyond valuable for children to be exposed to diverse literature during their elementary schooling years due to the global climate they presently live in. Exposing children to diverse literature is key to the development of children. Diverse literature helps aid in the development of the whole child by aiding in the social and emotional development of the child.

Recommended Diverse Books by Categories:

Race:

1. *Hands Up* by Breanna J. McDaniel
2. *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats.
3. *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi
4. *In the Footsteps of Crazy Horse* by Joseph Marshall
5. *Mama's Nightingale* by Edwidge Danticat
6. *Whoever You Are* by Mem Fox
7. *Same, Same but Different* by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw
8. *Skin Like Mine* by Latashia M Perry
9. *Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America* by Carole Boston Weatherford
10. *Lovely* by Jess Hong

Family Dynamics:

1. *And That's Why She's My Mama* by Tiarra Nazario
2. *Tell Me Again About the Night I was Born* by Jamie Lee Curtis
3. *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* by Rose Lewis
4. *Was it the Chocolate Pudding?* by Sandra Levins
5. *Ask Me* by Bernard Waber
6. *Far Apart, Close in Heart* by Becky Birtha
7. *Always Mom, Forever Dad* by Joanna Rowland
8. *A Family is a Family is a Family* by Sara O'Leary

9. *Lily Hates Goodbyes* by Jerilyn Marler
10. *Missing Daddy* by Mariame Kaba

LGBTQ:

1. *Stonewall: A Building. An Uprising. A Revolution* by Rob Sanders
2. *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* by Rob Sanders
3. *I Am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel
4. *Stella Brings the Family* by Miriam B. Schiffer
5. *Julian Is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love
6. *The Flower Girl Wore Celery* by Meryl G. Gordon
7. *Donovan's Big Day* by Leslea Newman
8. *Home at Last* by Vera B. Williams
9. *When Aidan Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff
10. *Annie's Plaid Shirt* by Stacy B. Davids

Disabilities:

1. *Susan Laughs* by Jeanne Willis
2. *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco
3. *We'll Paint the Octopus Red* by Stephanie Stuve- Bodeen
4. *Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah* by Laurie Ann Thompson
5. *My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay* by Cari Best

6. *The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin* by Finley Mosca
7. *Understanding Sam and Asperger Syndrome* by Clarabelle van Niekerk
8. *Moses Goes to a Concert* by Isaac Millman
9. *Catherine's Story* by Genevieve Moore
10. *We're All Wonders* by R. J. Palacio

Immigration Status

1. *Carmela Full of Wishes* by Matt de la Peña
2. *Angel Child, Dragon Child* by Michele Maria Surat
3. *Here I Am* by Patti Kim
4. *Grandfather's Story* by Allen Say
5. *When Jessie Came Across the Sea* by Amy Hest
6. *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales
7. *Islandborn* by Junot Diaz
8. *A Shelter in Our Car* by Monica Gunning
9. *Chocolate Milk, Por Favor* by Maria Dismundy
10. *Good-Bye, 382 Shin Dang Dong* by Frances Park

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