

Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias and Anti-Racist Classroom Texts

Should I choose this book?

As you use this guide to make choices about book selection, think about books in these three categories:

- This is a good choice
- This book has some questionable parts (if I choose it) I'll want to be sure I address them directly
- This book is harmful, I won't use it

What to watch for

The following are categories to examine for both verbiage and illustrations to ensure the texts you choose are both anti-bias and anti-racist selections.

Watch for...	Why it matters	Examples
Stereotypes: an oversimplification of a person or group; usually derogatory	Stereotypes remove the complexity that comes with being human or belonging to a cultural group. Seeing an entire group in a limited way is dehumanizing and perpetuates misinformation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All group members are drawn or behave in the same way (no diversity within groups) ▪ Images are reduced to caricatures ▪ Other common examples: Black males only playing sports, young women in caretaking or "helper" roles; other stereotypes here (Box 1) ▪ Common book examples here
Tokenism: the only "one" that represents an identity or perspective different from the other characters. Often this "one" character can be paired with a stereotype	Diversity exists within and across groups and cultures. When we limit differences to a single character (often not even a main character) we reinforce the ideas of "sameness" with a few exceptions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One child of color among all white children ▪ One child in a wheelchair among able-bodied children ▪ Watch for narratives that reinforces the idea that there is a normative culture or that does not honor unique perspectives and experiences
Invisibility: underrepresentation or lack of representation of characters (especially main characters) from diverse experiences and backgrounds	Children need to see themselves represented in a variety of contexts, past, present, and future (mirrors). They also need windows into other worlds to expand knowledge of the world, especially if they live in perceived homogenous communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lacking a variety of identities ▪ Casting groups as only in the past (i.e. Native American or Indigenous groups) ▪ Casting groups in only oppressive roles (i.e. slavery) ▪ Animal characters are used to teach diversity concepts instead of human characters. (See inanimate characters represented over BIPOC characters here) ▪ List of invisible groups found here (Box 2)

Watch for...	Why it matters...	Examples
Relationships and Lifestyles: central characters and story lines follow dominant cultural norms	Story lines that reinforce power and privilege send messages that value some ways of being over others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited concepts of families ▪ Limited concepts of relationships and/or gender ▪ Main characters' choices and behaviors are almost always representatives of dominant cultural norms
Language: there are multiple ways to represent language; choose asset based and respectful representations	Presenting Standard English "correct" or preferred, undermines the many ways people access and use language. Recognize and remove racist language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stereotypical phrases or dialect ▪ Language portrayed as "broken" or "weird" English ▪ In bilingual books, English text larger or on the top of the page, the second language in smaller text on the bottom of the page

Questions to ask yourself:

- **Am I avoiding a learning opportunity because I believe it's too controversial, children are "too young", or the adults in the community are "not ready"?** *Children are aware and capable of feeling the effects of oppression at young ages. If children are experiencing harm; we can and should talk about it.*
- **Am I choosing a text with biased or racist messages or images? Who will this cause damage and harm to?** *Some may argue for a text as a teaching tool, maybe about how things were in the past. Some may argue for a text as an essential component of the cannon of knowledge (ex: To Kill a Mockingbird). This learning almost always benefits white, privileged groups at the expense of historically marginalized groups that may be traumatized or stigmatized.*

Where can I find inclusive and diverse children's books?

- Social Justice Books: A Teaching for Change Project <https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books/>
- We Need Diverse Books <https://diversebooks.org/resources/where-to-find-diverse-books/>
- Diverse Book Finder <https://diversebookfinder.org/>

Resources

- Huyck, David and Sarah Park Dahlen. (2019 June 19). Diversity in Children's Books 2018. sarahpark.com blog. Created in consultation with Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Horning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner, with statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-about-poc-fnn/>. Retrieved from <https://readingspark.wordpress.com/2019/06/19/picture-this-diversity-in-childrens-books-2018-infographic/>
- Social Justice Books A Teacher for Change Project retrieved from <https://socialjusticebooks.org/booklists>
- Whatcom County Library System. Children's Literature with Negative Portrayals and Stereotypes for Curriculum retrieved from <https://wcls.bibliocommons.com/list/share/606377252/606389837>
- Vroom Fick & Heidick (Dec. 2017) Identity Inclusive Text Rubrics. Wheaton College
- Vroom Fick & Heidick (Dec. 2017) Identity Authentic Language Rubric. Wheaton College