

HOW TO ESTABLISH A DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARY



An essential part of MDE’s ongoing efforts to improve literacy achievement, the second goal of **Michigan’s Top 10 Strategic Education Plan**, includes identifying resources that provide the opportunity to experience educational materials that reflect learners’ identities such as, race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and ability. This guidance document offers practical information on how to establish or refine a diverse classroom library. It extends on the information of creating engaging literacy learning environments for students described in **MDE’s Equity in Literacy** document.

It is first important to understand **WHY** diverse libraries are important and **WHAT** diversity might include when thinking about **HOW** to develop a diverse classroom library. The questions in each section are designed to guide you in thinking about the complexity of diversity in reading materials and the impact on learners.

Why is it important for my classroom library to include reading material that is authentic, engaging, motivating, and affirming for all learners?

It is well-known that the stories learners read have the power to impact their motivation to engage in literacy activities and to find purpose and significance in reading throughout their lives. This occurs when the stories reflect learners’ authentic histories and experiences, and those of others.

Diverse libraries provide learners:

- Access to content that reflects people’s authentic histories and experiences, which aids learners in examining their own lives and structures that shape the world.
- Opportunities to see their identities mirrored in text which increases a sense of self and belonging.
- Opportunities to reflect on how their lived experiences are like others and unique in the global society.
- Storylines that counter stereotypes, and honor strengths and **funds of knowledge** for all people.

“Exposing students to meaningful texts that represent a diverse set of backgrounds and circumstances allows students to see themselves and others in the literature and learning materials.”

–Equity in Literacy, MDE



Research is clear that many classroom libraries and curriculum reading materials often lack diversity in identity representation, authentic experiences, and various perspectives (Muhammad, 2020; Tatum, 2009). Instead of providing a **single story** of who people are and can be, it is recommended classroom libraries reflect Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors, an analogy first created by **Rudine Sims Bishop**, suggesting that classroom reading materials should reflect **the accuracy of our world**. Mirrors are about learners seeing themselves in reading materials, while windows are about accurate depictions of others' experiences in the world. As learners gain knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world, this knowledge acts as sliding glass doors to gain access to choices, opportunities, and desired outcomes.

What do I, as the teacher, need to know about myself, and how does that influence my selection of reading material for my classroom library?

It is vital to start with one's **mirror**, self-reflecting on how your individual experiences influence ideas about learning, perspectives about others, and even preferences in reading material, storylines, and genres (Milner, 2007).

Self-reflection also includes understanding how history, systems, and language influence beliefs and shape how you might teach your learners. There are several tools available to help with self-reflection, like this one from the **Pennsylvania Department of Education**. As you engage learners in instruction and reading material, know that **language has the power** to influence learners' perceptions about themselves and the world.



As you engage in self-reflection, ask:

- What are my identities, beliefs, and experiences?
- How does my background influence how I experience the world and interpret the experiences of others?
- How does my understanding of history, social systems, and use of language impact literacy instruction in my classroom?

How can selecting new reading material engage and motivate learners?

While achieving high academic standards continues to be a central goal for all learners, fostering other competencies is also equally important for lifelong learning. Included in these competencies is:

- **Identity** – discovering who they are, who others say they are, and who they desire to be;
- **Intellectualism** – learning about the world around them;
- **Criticality** – recognizing power, privilege, and inequalities; and
- **Joy** – appreciating what reading can do for the mind and soul (Muhammad, 2020).

Having reading materials in the classroom library that are motivating and engaging have the potential to nurture these competencies while also assisting learners in participating in productive literacy learning (Muhammad, 2020). Your ability to choose motivating and engaging reading materials is influenced by your understanding of the strengths, interests, and lives and communities of your learners. Additionally, ask learners what reading materials are interesting and motivating to them. Learners have insight into what matters most to them, and the nuances of youth culture can be unfamiliar to many adults (Morrell, 2002). Knowing what is interesting and motivating to learners helps deepen your understanding of them, which in turn helps you identify appropriate reading materials. This information, coupled with learners' input on the design and organization of the classroom library, can help ensure your classroom library is respectful of learners and promotes a climate of caring for oneself, others, and the reading materials. By involving learners in the development of classroom libraries, they have greater potential to gain access to information and ideas that are important to them and promote agency over their learning.

Questions to consider:

- What are the identities, cultural heritages, and histories of my learners and their communities?
- How does this reading material advance my learners' understanding of identity of themselves or other people/cultures?
- Does the reading material contain current and correct information?
- Does the reading material connect with my learners and their interests?
- How have my learners contributed to the selection of reading material in the classroom library?
- How does the reading material advance my learners' literacy skills and cultivate critical thinking?



How can evaluating current reading material identify gaps for diversity?

As a classroom library grows and develops, you may realize your ideas about diversity and equity begin to shift. **Various tools are available** (See **Learn More** below) that can support you in evaluating the reading materials currently in your library and provide insight into gaps that may exist. Furthermore, collaborating with and learning from families and community members will enhance the diversity of your classroom library. Families can share what matters to them and topics that resonate with their children and promote connections. When you know your families, you are more likely to choose reading materials that accurately reflect their experiences instead of stereotypes or single stories. Regularly talking with learners and their families about the classroom library and reviewing and evaluating the reading materials are crucial. This ensures that the classroom library reflects learners' evolving identities, interests, and goals.

Learn More

- [Reading Diversity Lite: A Tool for Selecting Diverse Text \(Teacher's Edition\)](#)
- [Reading Diversity: A Tool for Selecting Diverse Text \(Extended Edition\)](#)
- [Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books](#)
- [A Guide to Selecting Multicultural Literature](#)
- [A Checklist for Evaluating Diverse Children's Media](#)
- [10 Criteria for Choosing Diverse Texts in Your Classroom](#)
- [Assessing Children's Literature](#)
- [Classroom Library Questionnaire](#)
- [Text Analysis Toolkit: Selecting and Analyzing Texts for Complexity and Cultural Relevance Toolkit](#)

Questions to consider:

- Does my classroom library contain a mix of Mirrors and Windows reading material?
- Does the reading material contain current and correct information?
- Does the reading material connect with my learners and their interests?
- Do learners see themselves in the reading material, including their cultures, identities, interests, experiences, desires, and future selves?
- Does the reading material promote vocabulary development and extension of learning and ways of thinking of the content?
- How do I collaborate with and involve families and community members in evaluating and choosing classroom library books?

What are some tips for accessing diverse reading materials to fill a classroom library?

A good place to start identifying diverse reading material is MDE's [Celebrating Authors of Color and Their Works of Literature](#) and MAME's [Diverse Book Resources](#). See a list of additional resources at right.



Other sources to access diverse reading materials:

- [Children's Literature](#)
- [We Need Diverse Books](#)
- [Diverse Book Finder](#)
- [Unite for Literacy](#)
- [Social Justice Books](#)
- [Diverse Books: Booklists and Related Resources](#)
- [Diverse Classroom Libraries for K–6 Students](#)
- [Embrace Race](#)
- [The Brown Bookshelf](#)
- [American Indians in Children's Literature](#)
- [Diversity Resources](#)
- [Latinxs in Kid Lit](#)
- [Reading While White](#)
- [Cotton Quilts](#)
- [MISelf in Books](#)
- [Black World Schoolers](#)
- [Colorín Colorado: Bilingual Books](#)
- [Language Lizard](#)
- [Cooperative Children's Book Center](#)
- [The Coretta Scott King Book Award](#)
- [Jane Addams Children's Book Award](#)
- [Lee & Low Books](#)

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