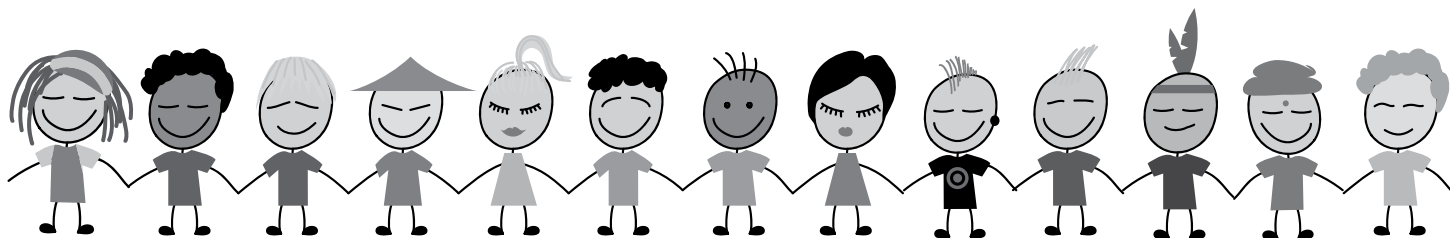


By Laurie A. Sharp and Robin D. Johnson

Overcoming Cultural Inequalities With Diverse Children's Literature: Recommendations That Support Culturally Responsive Teaching With Multicultural Literature



Abstract

In a diverse society, teachers must adopt a culturally relevant pedagogy that utilizes culturally responsive teaching practices, such as the incorporation of diverse children's literature. In doing so, teachers build global perspectives and global citizenry in students as they see themselves in text, encounter alternative perspectives, and develop understandings of lives beyond their own. The purpose of this article is to articulate three literature-based recommendations that enhance educational opportunities and overcome cultural inequalities through the inclusion of diverse children's literature.

Keywords: diverse children's literature, English language arts teachers, culturally responsive teaching

Diverse children's literature has been widely accepted as texts that address themes related to ethnicity, race, culture, and languages (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015). Other themes recently reflected in diverse children's literature include LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual), gender,

Laurie A. Sharp is the Dr. John G. O'Brien Distinguished Chair in Education at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Texas. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses and works closely with area public school districts to identify best practices. Prior to being a faculty member in higher education, she was an elementary and intermediate level classroom teacher in Florida and Texas public schools. Her research interests include literacy, educator preparation, and learner engagement for all levels of learning. She can be reached at lsharp@wtamu.edu.

disabilities, religion, socioeconomic status, dialect variances, and differences in family structures. As classrooms continue to reflect the increasing diversity of the world, teachers have a responsibility to foster global citizenship among students (Garrison, Forest, & Kimmel, 2014). Using diverse children's literature serves as a "mirror," "window," or "door" (Bishop, 1990, p. 3) of the world and fosters students' ability to see themselves in text, encounter alternative perspectives, and develop understandings of lives beyond their own (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching

The principal goal of a culturally relevant pedagogy is "to empower students to examine critically the society in which they live and to work for social change" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 314). Culturally relevant pedagogy aims to address students' academic performance as well as their ability to embrace their own cultural identities. As teachers work with students who have diverse backgrounds, teachers must be skilled with culturally responsive teaching, which draws upon "the cultural characteristics,

Robin D. Johnson is an assistant professor at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, where she teaches early childhood courses and undergraduate students during their field-based semester. She has taught 1st through 4th grades in Texas public schools and was an elementary curriculum coordinator in the areas of literacy and social studies. She is the 2016-2017 President of the Texas Association for Literacy Education and co-editor of the *ALER Yearbook*. She is a Gold Level Abydos literacy facilitator and the author of *Time to Write*. She can be reached at robin.johnson@tamucc.edu.

Table 1
 Culturally Responsive Teaching with Diverse Children's Literature

<p>Interactive Read-Alouds</p>	<p>May et al. (2014) described how coupling reading aloud diverse children's literature selections with discussions among students possess numerous cultural and linguistic benefits.</p>
<p>Family Response Journals</p>	<p>Schrodt et al. (2015) provided an overview of the Kindergarten Family Backpack Project, which engaged students and their families with reading, writing, and culture beyond the classroom through diverse children's literature selections and family response journals.</p>
<p>Support Content Area Instruction in Mathematics</p>	<p>In order to connect students' mathematical understandings to the real world, Iliev and D'Angelo (2014) advocated that teachers share diverse children's literature selections during instruction with prereading activities, reading activities, and postreading activities. For example, <i>My Granny Went to Market: A Round-the-World Counting Rhyme</i> is an excellent text that reinforces the one-to-one counting concept among young learners.</p> <p>Leonard et al. (2014) shared results from a study conducting among preservice teachers that explored the effect of preparation efforts regarding the use of diverse children's literature during mathematics instruction during an elementary mathematical methods university course.</p>
<p>Support Content Area Instruction in Language Arts</p>	<p>During grammar instruction, Gartland and Smolkin (2016) described how the inclusion of diverse children's literature selections have the potential to encourage students' appreciation of language differences, as well as validate their own use of language.</p> <p>Stewart (2015) outlined various literacy activities as part of language arts instruction that drew upon the life experiences of refugee students through diverse children's literature selections.</p>
<p>Support Content Area Instruction in Science</p>	<p>Lawrence (2007) suggested ways in which teachers may select texts that enrich science instruction through cultural stories presented in various diverse children's literature selections.</p>
<p>Support Content Area Instruction in Social Studies</p>	<p>Through diverse children's literature selections, Meléndez (2015) highlighted how teachers are able to foster healthy identity development among young students, as well as respect for differences among others.</p> <p>Suzuki et al. (2015) reviewed how specific diverse children's literature selections support students' understandings regarding the realities of war throughout history.</p>

experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106).

As shown in Table 1, integrating diverse children’s literature into instruction has proven to be an excellent tool for teachers to practice culturally responsive teaching through structured learning experiences, such as:

- interactive read-alouds (May, Bingham, & Pendergast, 2014);
- family response journals (Schrodt, Fain, & Hasty, 2015); and
- tools to support content area instruction in mathematics (Iliev & D’Angelo, 2014; Leonard, Moore, & Brooks, 2014), language arts (Gartland & Smolkin, 2016; Stewart, 2015), science (Lawrence, 2007), and social studies (Meléndez, 2015; Suzuki, Huss, Fiehn, & Spencer, 2015).

Diverse children’s literature selections are also excellent resources for developing young students’ personal cultural identities and taking action on social issues (Martens et al., 2015) as well as advancing all students’ critical thinking skills (Moreno, 2015). Practicing teachers must be skilled in locating and selecting quality diverse children’s literature that is (a) sensitive in both visual and textual elements, (b) authentic and accurate in cultural portrayals, and (c) reflective of multiple ideologies (Boyd et al., 2015).

Preparedness of Teachers to Incorporate Diverse Children’s Literature

Integrating diverse children’s literature into instruction is a rich culturally responsive teaching technique that addresses the unique learning needs of each student as well as academic standards [e.g., those articulated in the *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills* (Texas Education Agency, 2016) and professional standards [e.g., those articulated in the *Standards for Reading Professionals—Revised 2010* (International Reading Association, 2010)]. This begs the question: Are teachers adequately prepared to enter classrooms and incorporate diverse children’s literature as a tool to enhance educational opportunities and overcome cultural inequalities?

Over a decade ago, Brindley and Laframboise (2002) contended that taking multicultural courses in isolation was not an ample way to confront teacher candidates’ existing cultural beliefs and develop their understandings regarding culturally responsive teaching. Howrey and Whelan-Kim (2009) also noted that one assignment within a course was equally insufficient. More recently, Brinson (2012) conducted a study designed to assess teacher candidates’ knowledge of diverse children’s literature and reported that most were unable to identify books that portrayed cultural groups other than Anglo American. Based on the findings from these studies, building teacher candidates’ knowledge of how to use diverse children’s literature to practice culturally response teaching requires much attention.

Recommendations for Effective Inclusion of Diverse Children’s Literature

As recommended by Brindley and Laframboise (2002), teacher educators must take a more comprehensive approach in order to prepare teacher candidates to incorporate diverse children’s literature in the classroom successfully. Although the following suggestions are not exhaustive, they provide teacher educators with three literature-based recommendations that may be incorporated into their children’s literature courses as well as throughout their respective teacher education programs. Moreover, these recommendations provide practicing teachers with an opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills associated with effective inclusion of diverse children’s literature.

Recommendation #1

Teacher candidates and practicing teachers must become advocates for more quality diverse children’s literature (Brinson, 2012). Although publishers are printing more texts that portray underrepresented groups (Anderson, 2013), the number of available quality diverse children’s literature still drastically lacks (Anderson, 2013; Boyd et al., 2015). Teachers must ensure that the diverse children’s literature accessible within their classrooms and school libraries are deemed high quality. Teacher candidates and practicing teachers must be aware that parents and organizations may challenge specific diverse children’s literature selections, which leads to the potential for censorship (Anderson, 2013). One resource to assist teachers with navigating the selection of diverse children’s literature is the National Council of Teachers of English’s website, *Guidelines for Selection of Materials in English Language Arts Programs* (<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/material-selection-ela>).

Recommendation #2

Teacher candidates and practicing teachers require knowledge of awards that recognize and honor authors and illustrators of diverse children’s literature (Boyd et al., 2015; Brinson, 2012). Awards, such as The Pura Belpré Award, Sydney Taylor Book Awards, and Schneider Family Book Awards, recognize and honor books that have been judged by experts as high quality diverse children’s literature (see Table 2 for a list of current awards and award-winning books). Becoming familiar with award-winning books will help teachers identify excellent models of diverse children’s literature for inclusion within their classrooms.

Table 2
Awards for Diverse Children's Literature

Awards	Criteria/Guidelines	Selected Titles
The Amelia Bloomer Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommended book list from the Feminist Task Force of the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association annually Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portrays feminism 	<p><u>Selected Titles (2016 List):</u> <i>We Should All Be Feminists</i> - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie</p> <p><i>The Born Frees: Writing with the Girls of Gugulethu</i> - Kimberly Burge</p> <p><i>The Boston Girl</i> - Anite Diamant</p>
The Américas Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs annually Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portrays the Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinos in the United States cultural experience 	<p><u>2015 Winners:</u> <i>Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez & Her Family's Fight for Desegregation</i> - Duncan</p> <p>Tonatiuh <i>Silver People: Voices From the Panama Canal</i> - Margarita Engle</p>
The American Indian Youth Literature Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the American Indian Library Association every two years to American Indian authors and illustrators Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portrays the Asian/Pacific Americans cultural experience 	<p><u>2014 Picture Book Winner:</u> <i>Caribou Song</i> - Tomson Highway (author), John Rombough (illustrator)</p> <p><u>2014 Middle School Winner:</u> <i>How I Became a Ghost: A Choctaw Trail of Tears Story</i> - Tim Tingle</p> <p><u>2014 Young Adult Winner:</u> <i>Killer of Enemies</i> - Joseph Bruchac</p>
The Arab American Book Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the Arab American National Museum to Arab American authors annually Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portrays the Arab American cultural experience 	<p><u>2015 Children/ Young Adult Winner:</u> <i>The Turtle of Oman</i> - Naomi Shihab Nye</p>
Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association annually to Asian/Pacific Islander American authors and illustrators Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portrays the Asian/Pacific Americans cultural experience 	<p><u>2015 Young Adult Winner:</u> <i>P.S. I Still Love You</i> - Jenny Han</p> <p><u>2015 Children's Winner:</u> <i>Full Cicada Moon</i> - Marilyn Hilton</p> <p><u>2015 Picture Book Winner:</u> <i>Juna's Jar</i> - Jane Bahk</p>
The Batchelder Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the Association for Library Service to Children annually Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that was originally published outside of the U.S. in a language other than English, and later translated into English and published in the U.S. 	<p><u>2016 Winner:</u> <i>The Wonderful Fluffy Little Squishy</i> - Beatrice Alemagna</p>

Awards	Criteria/Guidelines	Selected Titles
The Coretta Scott King Book Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the American Library Association annually to African American authors and illustrators Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portrays the African American cultural experience 	<p><u>2016 Author:</u> <i>Gone Crazy in Alabama</i> -Rita Williams-Garcia</p> <p><u>2016 Illustrator:</u> <i>Trombone Shorty</i> - Bryan Collier</p>
The Coretta Scott King Book Awards/ John Steptoe Award for New Talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the American Library Association annually to new African American authors and illustrators Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portrays the African American cultural experience 	<p><u>2016 Authors:</u> <i>All American Boys</i> - Jason Reynolds & Brendan Kiely</p> <p><i>The Boy in the Black Suit</i> - Jason Reynolds</p> <p><i>X: A Novel</i> - Ilyasah Shabazz with Kekla Magoon</p> <p><u>2016 Illustrators:</u> <i>The Book Itch: Freedom, Truth & Harlem's Greatest Bookstore</i> - R. Gregory Christie (illustrator)</p> <p><i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> - Christian Robinson (illustrator)</p>
The Coretta Scott King Book Awards/ Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the American Library Association in even years to recognize substantial and lasting literacy contributions of African American authors and illustrators Awarded by the American Library Association in odd years to recognize a practitioner who uses award-winning African American literature during enriching literacy experiences 	<p><u>2016 Recipient:</u> Jerry Pinkney (author/illustrator)</p>
The Ezra Jack Keats Book Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation to an outstanding new writer and new illustrator annually Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portrays the universal virtues of childhood and the diversity of our world 	<p><u>2015 New Writer Winner:</u> Chieri Uegaki (author), <i>Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin</i></p> <p><u>2015 New Illustrator Winner:</u> Chris Haughton (illustrator), <i>Shh! We Have a Plan</i></p>
The Jane Addams Children's Book Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the Jane Addams Peace Association annually Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that promotes the cause of peace, social justice, world community, and the equality of the sexes and all races 	<p><u>2015 Winner for Younger Readers:</u> <i>Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez & Her Family's Fight for Desegregation</i> - Duncan Tonatiuh</p> <p><u>2015 Winner for Older Readers:</u> <i>The Girl From the Tar Paper School: Barbara Rose Johns and the advent of the Civil Rights Movement</i> - Teri Kanefield</p>
The Lambda Literary Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the Lambda Literary Foundation annually Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portrays the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender experience 	<p><u>2015 Children/ Young Adults Winner:</u> <i>Five, Six, Seven, Nate!</i> - Tim Federle</p>

Awards	Criteria/Guidelines	Selected Titles
The Once Upon A World Children's Book Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the Simon Wiesenthal Center/ Museum of Tolerance annually Recognizes excellence in diverse children's literature that portray themes of diversity, tolerance, and social justice that inspire readers to promote positive change 	<u>2014 Winners:</u> <i>Barbed Wired Baseball</i> -Marissa Mossña <i>Hero on A Bicycle</i> - Shirley Hughes (author/illustrator)
The Pura Belpré Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awarded by the Association for Library Service to Children annually to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator 	<u>2016 Author:</u> <i>Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir</i> - Margarita Engle

Using diverse children's literature is a phenomenal way for teachers to model that they themselves value diversity, while also serving as windows looking into the life experiences of others and mirrors that reflect their own life experiences (Bishop, 1990).

Recommendation #3

Teacher candidates and practicing teachers need frequent opportunities to read and discuss diverse children's literature. Teacher educators should weave regular and ongoing opportunities for teacher candidates to encounter diverse children's literature throughout their courses and facilitate discussions about these selections (Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Wee, 2015). Similarly, school districts must support continuous professional development opportunities for practicing teachers to engage in the reading and discussion of diverse children's literature. Reading diverse children's literature and participating in subsequent discussions provides teacher candidates and practicing teachers with a safe environment to encounter topics with which they may not be familiar and comfortable. As teacher candidates and practicing teachers confront diverse topics and themes presented in diverse children's literature and examine these topics and themes through discourse, their awareness and attitudes towards diversity increases (Iwai, 2013).

As teachers continue their awesome responsibility of building global perspectives and global citizenry among their students, we must each ensure that our own pedagogy is relevant. Practicing teachers must be guided by a culturally relevant pedagogy and employ culturally relevant teaching practices, such as incorporating diverse children's literature inside and outside of the classroom. Using diverse children's literature is a phenomenal

way for teachers to model that they themselves value diversity, while also serving as windows looking into the life experiences of others and mirrors that reflect their own life experiences (Bishop, 1990). In doing so, we overcome cultural inequalities and empower students to be "active, successful participants in this 21st century global society" (NCTE, 2013, para. 1).

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