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Changing Terms, Not Trends:**A Critical Investigation into Children's & Young Adult Literature Publishing & Its Effect
in Curriculum & Pedagogy**

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Authors' Note

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We have no conflicts to disclose.

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Abstract

The central argument proposed within this article is that while recent publishing trends in children's and adolescent literature have changed for the better (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2020) and research about the importance of diverse reading experiences for students has become concentrated, centered, and validated (Adichie, 2009; Bishop, 1990; Ebarvia et al., 2020; Parker, 2020; Thomas, 2016; Tschida et al., 2014) many schools are still struggling with changing or hesitant to change the texts centered in classrooms with youth. In the end, this article provides practical steps that practicing teachers can take in order to feature the voices and narratives of historically marginalized individuals within literacy classrooms.

Keywords: literacy, literacy education, children's literature, young adult literature, English education

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Prologue

We choose not to wait to discuss our role in this research or to discuss the various positionalities and subjectivities that allow and hinder our research in classrooms. There is too much at stake to postpone this discussion. At the time of the writing of this document, according to a *Washington Post* database, 981 people were shot and killed by police in 2020 (Tate et al., 2021). Twenty-four percent of those murders were of Black folx, despite the fact that Black or African Americans only make up 13% of the total U.S. population (Unites States Census Bureau, 2019). This statistic is the only racial demographic collected by the U.S. Census Bureau for which there is a disproportionate number of police shootings and killings; all other racial demographic data across both databases are at or below the same percentage. Just as appalling, the scourge of discrimination and violence against Black transgender folx has continued to increase in recent years. In 2019, 91% of the transgender or gender non-conforming people that were fatally shot or killed by other violent means were Black women (Human Rights Campaign, 2019). This is anti-black racism and transphobia at murderous rates, and as white, married, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper-middle class, private-college educated, middle-aged, Christian, cisgendered, English-speaking, American people, we represent just about every form of privilege one can have. Therefore, we are complicit, in a multitude of ways, in the systems that allow for racial injustice to continue. We refuse to maintain our ignorance of and complicity in these facts; we refuse to allow our students to remain ignorant of and complicit in these facts; we refuse to remain complicit in systems of oppression that murder and maim; we refuse to insulate ourselves

and our students; we refuse to perpetuate and invoke racial violence by allowing ourselves and our students to remain inactive and ignorant. There are too many lives at risk.

Just as importantly, we refuse to allow the narrative of cultures in crisis to be the most frequently told story. While we will not look away from the violence being enacted on folk of color in systemic and violent ways, we will also not look away, or allow our students to look away, from the abundance of narratives about the joy, magic, and love of these same communities. Therefore, embracing and enacting the core principles of #DisruptTexts (Ebarvia et al., 2020) in predominantly white spaces will recognize the historical and contemporary modes of violence and racism in which we are complicit and showcase the counternarratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) of liberation and love.

Introduction

The lack of diversity in children's and young adult (YA) literature publishing and curricula isn't a new debate. If we're being honest with ourselves, it isn't even much of a debate.

Overwhelming evidence suggests that the "diversity gap" (Cooperative Children's Book Center [CCBC], 2020; Huyck & Park Dahlen, 2019; Lee & Low Books, 2021) permeates our social consciousness and is evident in our politics, our entertainment, and in our technologies.

Similarly, the lack of diversity in the teaching force isn't a new debate either—at least not since *Brown v. Board of Education* (Meckler & Rabinowitz, 2019). What do these two systems have in common? Overwhelming whiteness. We, the authors, have little power over the lack of diversity in the teaching force, but we, as teacher-researchers, can control what is centered in our classrooms with youth.

This most recent focus of making diversity an integral part of children and young adult reading experiences has revitalized a discussion that has been going on for over 50 years

(Larrick, 1965; C. Myers, 2014; W.D. Myers, 2014; Thomas, 2016). A close reading of the ways in which this conversation has entered the mainstream media demonstrates that while the terms we use to engage in these “debates” might have changed, not much else has.

Therefore, this paper seeks to address two questions: (1) What current trends can be found in secondary research about children’s and young adult book publishing and what effect have those trends had on curricula, and (2) What changes can practicing teachers make in order to disrupt white supremacy in our curricula and pedagogies? In order to answer these questions, we first provide a brief discussion of the scholarly definitions of children’s and young adult literature as well as multicultural, diverse, and inclusive literature. We then discuss current data about the children’s book and young adult literature publishing industry provided by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) and Lee & Low books. Next, we provide practical strategies that we have used in our classrooms and with other literacy educators to help embrace the core principles of #DisruptTexts and enact change in our curricula and pedagogies. We conclude this paper with a call for an active antiracist literary pedagogy which requires educators and students to compose and comprehend different ways of being in the world.

The central argument proposed within this paper is that while recent publishing trends in children’s and adolescent literature have changed for the better, if even ever so slightly (CCBC, 2019), and research about the importance of diverse reading experiences for students has become concentrated, centered, and validated (Adichie, 2009; Ebarvia et al., 2020; Parker, 2020; Thomas, 2016; Tschida et al., 2014) very little progress has been made to diversify children’s and young adult book publication or K-12 literary curricula. The confluence of these statistics and trends requires, therefore, a drastic shift in how teachers and scholars conceptualize the literacy

experiences of children and young adults so that students can realize these diverse stories as a crucial center to the collective literary imagination rather than existing on the periphery.

Setting the Scene: A Definitions of Terms

As with most research, a continual redefining and renegotiation of literacy terms is important because language always occurs within and is shaped by a cultural context (Bakhtin, 1986; Elkins & Luke, 1999; Halliday, 1973). What exactly scholars mean when they discuss children's literature as opposed to middle grade books or young adult (YA) literature are important distinctions to make. Furthermore, literacy and diversity deserve definition here as the latter is often used interchangeably, if even incorrectly, with multiculturalism, and the former is ever-evolving (Leu et al., 2004). Literacy, therefore, reflects the "social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world" (Gee, 1996, p. vii). As such, the constructs of these literacies figure prominently in the reading experiences of youth. What texts students read matter, how those texts are read within these sociocultural paradigms matter, and how those texts are constructed—for whom and by whom—matter.

Diversity refers to the variety of similarities and differences among people, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, age, appearance, dis/ability, national origin, language, spiritual belief, size [height and/or weight], sexual orientation, social class, economic circumstance, environment, ecology, culture, and the treatment of animals (Conference on English Education Commission on Social Justice, 2009). It is also important to note that when we refer to dis/ability, we refer to the social model of dis/ability (Annamma et al., 2013; Ferri & Connor, 2014) to include physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, chronic conditions, and mental illnesses, including addiction, and the barriers in the social

environment that exist/persist due to lack of equal access, stereotyping, and other forms of marginalization (We Need Diverse Books, 2021).

Children's literature, then, is defined as "material for an audience of up to and including ninth grade or age fifteen" (Library of Congress, 2015). The specific formatting, content, and literacy skill required to engage with these texts varies based on age. We more narrowly define children's literature to include materials written for an audience between ages 0 to 8. Stock children's literature texts like Eric Carle's *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (1967), Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), and Peggy Parrish's *Amelia Bedelia* (1963) are quintessential examples of the type of children's literature to which we refer.

YA literature refers to material produced for "an audience of ages twelve through high school" (Library of Congress, 2015). We further categorize YA literature to include middle grade texts, or books written for youth between the age of 8 and 12 which focus on the experiences of individuals within those ages, and young adult texts, or books written for youth between the ages of 12 and 18 which focus on the experiences of individuals within that age range. Middle grade texts include more characters and more complicated narrative structures, like Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* (1963), and YA texts include complex and nuanced narrative structures and contemporary/mature issues, like *The Outsiders* (1967) by S.E. Hinton, which is largely considered the first text written by an adolescent (Hinton wrote it when she was 17) for adolescents.

It is important to note, here, that the examples we provide for children's and YA literature above were intentionally chosen from books published in the 1960s. These texts were among the first to be written for youth during a time when the social activism of young adults was becoming more prominently displayed in the media, especially as it relates to the Civil Rights Movement.

The death of Emmett Till in 1955, the integration of Little Rock Central High School in 1957 by the Little Rock Nine, the sit-in held by the Greensboro Four in 1960, Ruby Bridges's admission into the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in 1960, the Children's Crusade in 1963, and the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing on September 13, 1963 all brought the experience of children and young adults into the living rooms of America. While it was, most certainly, not the singular intent of the long Civil Rights Movement to change children's and young adult publishing trends, it is difficult to think that such a focus on the lives of children and young adults in literature wasn't, at least minimally, affected by the prominent role that youth played in these watershed moments.

Looking Back: A Historical Look into Diverse Literature for Youth

Any investigation into the diversity in children's and YA literature must also include a definition of what diversity means and has meant as it relates to children's and YA literature. The lackluster response on the part of the educational institutions to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, along with the continued fight of historically marginalized individuals, made the 1960s & 1970s the cradle for multicultural education (Banks, 1989, 1993, 1995). As the social and political consciousness continued to shift, an awareness of difference in all of its multifaceted forms began to rightfully gain its collective place in the conversation. As a result, the term *multicultural* shifted to *diverse* in order to provide a more inclusive range of identities (Thomas, 2016). Even this term is troubling for some scholars as it fails to confront and demystify the structures of race and power that come from white supremacy (Older, 2014; Thomas, 2016). However, such a broadening of terminology allows educators the opportunity to revise curricula to include the "human, cultural, linguistic, and famil[ial]...lived experiences across human cultures including realities about

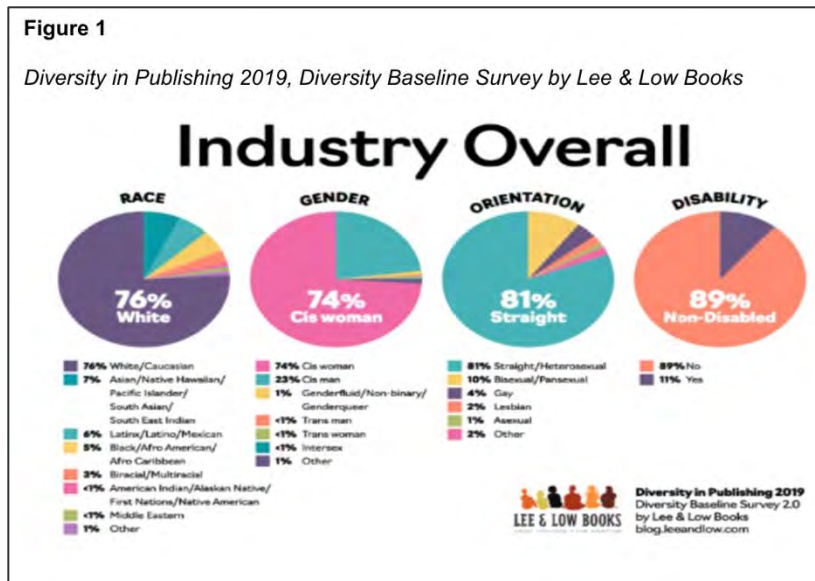
appearance, behavior, economic circumstance, gender, national origin, social class, spiritual belief, weight, life, and thought...” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2010). While this definition may not include all identities that must be considered when discussing the inclusion of multiple perspectives in children’s and young adult literacy education, it does provide a more efficacious lens through which to discuss the need for diverse children’s and young adult literature, both in the publishing industry and in the classroom.

It should be noted that some scholars suggest a further broadening definition of *inclusive literature* which attempts to leverage the diversity of narratives by and about Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) to create a fair, equitable, and critical learning space for youth. Inclusive literature, therefore, must, according to Professor of Inclusive Education and Disabilities Studies at Syracuse University Dr. Beth Ferri, “move beyond a focus on identity to actually naming and working to dismantle oppression” while simultaneously recognizing that “oppression is cut through with lines of power, and dominant groups are often loath to share or give up power [in order to dismantle oppression]” (Newvine & Fleming, 2020). No matter the term being used (though we would contend that any choice of terminology is deliberate and, therefore, always matters), the conversations about the lack of diversity within children’s and YA literature has been taking place over many decades.

“But We’ve Come So Far”: Contemporizing Diversity in Books for Youth

In 2020, Lee & Low Books published a “Diversity Baseline Survey 2.0” update to the previous collection of demographic information (Lee & Low Books, 2016) about the diversity among publishing staff in 34 book publishing companies (see Figure 1). Their survey collected statistics of publishing staff across the four categories (race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and ability) and seven levels/departments (executive level, editorial department, sales

department, marketing and publicity department, book reviewers, literary agents, interns). The



results of their survey, seen in

Figure 1, are astounding and

clearly corroborate the

frustrations felt by the

secondary scholarly research.

These new figures show, but

only very little, with the largest

increase for a more inclusive

representation at 7% (straight/heterosexual). On just the race/ethnicity category results, the

highest percentage of Black/African American employees found across the five

levels/departments was an appallingly low 8% (Lee & Low Books, 2020).

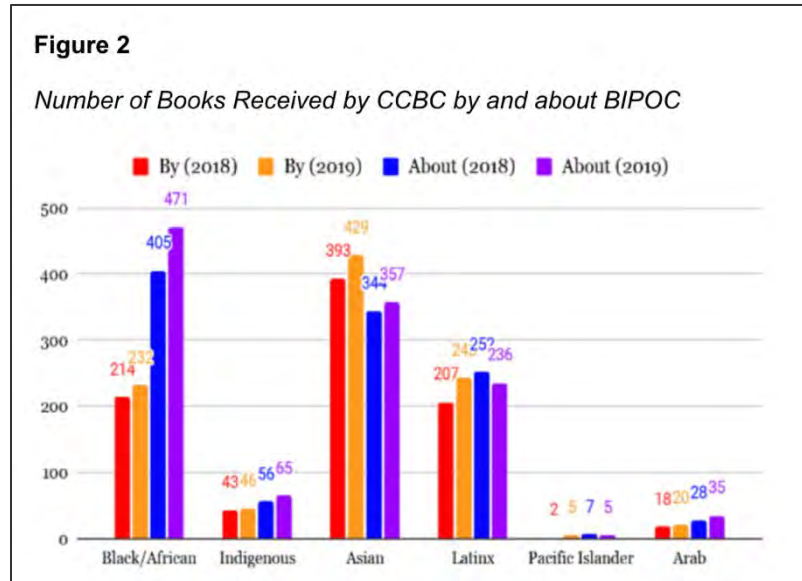
The Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison was started in 1985 by then director Ginny Moore Kruse. Her inspiration stemmed from her involvement with the Coretta Scott King Award committee, and in 1985 she found that only 18 of the over 2,500 trade books published that year were written by Black authors and illustrators (CCBC, 2020). Since then, the CCBC has collected “Diversity Statistics” for the number of books written for children and young adults by and about BIPOC received from children’s and young adult book publishers as a statewide book examination center (CCBC, 2021). The CCBC began to collect publishing statistics for children’s and young adult books by Black authors and illustrators between 1985 and 1993. From 1994-2001 the data collection widened to include children’s or young adult books written by and about Black/African, Indigenous, Asian Pacific, and Latinx folx. In 2002, a change in terminology occurred to include

publishing statistics for any children's or young adult book written by and about Black/African, Indigenous, Asian Pacific/Asian Americans, and Latinx folx (CCBC, 2020). Then, in 2018 the CCBC revised their categories to its present model in order to include books written by and about Black/African, Indigenous, Asian, Indigenous, Latinx, Pacific Islander, and Arab folx.

Between 1985 and 2001, the CCBC received anywhere from 2,500 to 5,000-5,500 books. Between 2002 and 2017, the number of books collected by the CCBC was anywhere from 2,800 (2004 and 2005) to 3,700 (2017). More recently, the CCBC has received 3,682 and 4,035 books from publishers in 2018 and 2019, respectively (CCBC, 2020).

Such a shifting set of organizing categories and number of books received demonstrates two important things: the CCBC is committed to an ever-evolving and culturally sensitive mode of statistics, and the publishing industry is, sometimes, attempting to include more authors of color. One of the potential causes of the undulating publishing trends noted above has to do with the lack of diversity within the publishing industry itself (Lee & Low Books, 2020).

The 2020 CCBC statistics¹ for the 2019 year show a 9% increase in the number of books written by and about persons of color and First/Native Nations

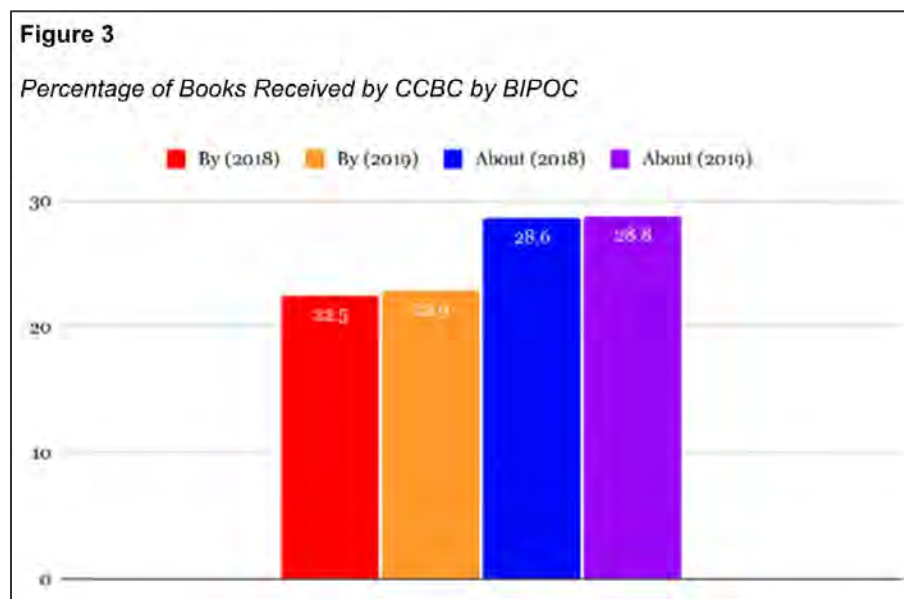


from 2018 to 2019. At first blush, this increase in books written by and about BIPOC deserves to

¹ Statistics for 2020 were released after the publication of this article. For more recent statistics, visit <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-and-or-about-poc-2018/>

be celebrated; almost all categories are increasing, with the exception of books written by Latinx authors and Pacific Islander authors (for a note about the collection and categorization of texts about Pacific Islander folx see <https://bit.ly/3xXVxmF>). That decrease in authorship is alarming, though, as it suggests a co-opting and colonization of narratives about Latinx folx by authors that do not, necessarily, share that form of identity. More books were written about those communities, but less authors from those communities were published. Hence, the importance of texts written by individuals from and within these communities become all the more crucial as statistics tell us that narratives are potentially being “borrowed” by some authors.

Moreover, a closer look at the percentage of books received by CCBC that feature stories by and about BIPOC shows much less progress. Books written by Black and Indigenous People of Color increased a mere 0.4% between 2018 and 2019, and books about Black and Indigenous



People of Color increased even less (0.2%).

So, it seems that secondary scholarly research has continually addressed issues of diversity in children’s and YA literature since

the mid-1980s (see Larrick, 1965). Moreover, researchers, practitioners, and authors alike continue to press book publishers and educational institutions to modify their practices and

pedagogies to meet the needs of a changing American population. As evidenced in Figures 2 and 3, such a change is slow at best.

We recognize that there is no binary here. An increase in children's and YA literature that represents a more diverse readership does not necessarily lead to changes in teaching practice. Moreover, changes in teaching practices do not necessarily lead to more representation in writers and readership. However, no change in the former has no chance of changing the latter. To quote James Baldwin (1985): "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Even if publishing companies only published books by and about historically marginalized individuals, it would take a conscious effort on behalf of the teachers to center those stories in the classroom and curriculum. We wholeheartedly acknowledge that much more work needs to be done--even within the discussion in this article itself--but we also know that we cannot ignore the implicit relationship between these two industries, nor can we attribute it to a casual binary.

All told, the numbers are encouraging and should be celebrated. The tireless work of the people at the CCBC, We Need Diverse Books, Lee & Low Books, and all authors of color deserves to be acknowledged and praised. It should also be acknowledged that some book publishers are listening; they just aren't willing to give up their power just yet. White privilege has a way of doing that. Derrick Bell (1980) called it an interest convergence. George Lipsitz (2006) calls it a possessive investment in whiteness. Charles Mills (2003) calls it white supremacy. You see, the terms have changed, but not the trends—at least not at the same pace.

“But There is Still Work to Do”: #DisruptingTheCanon

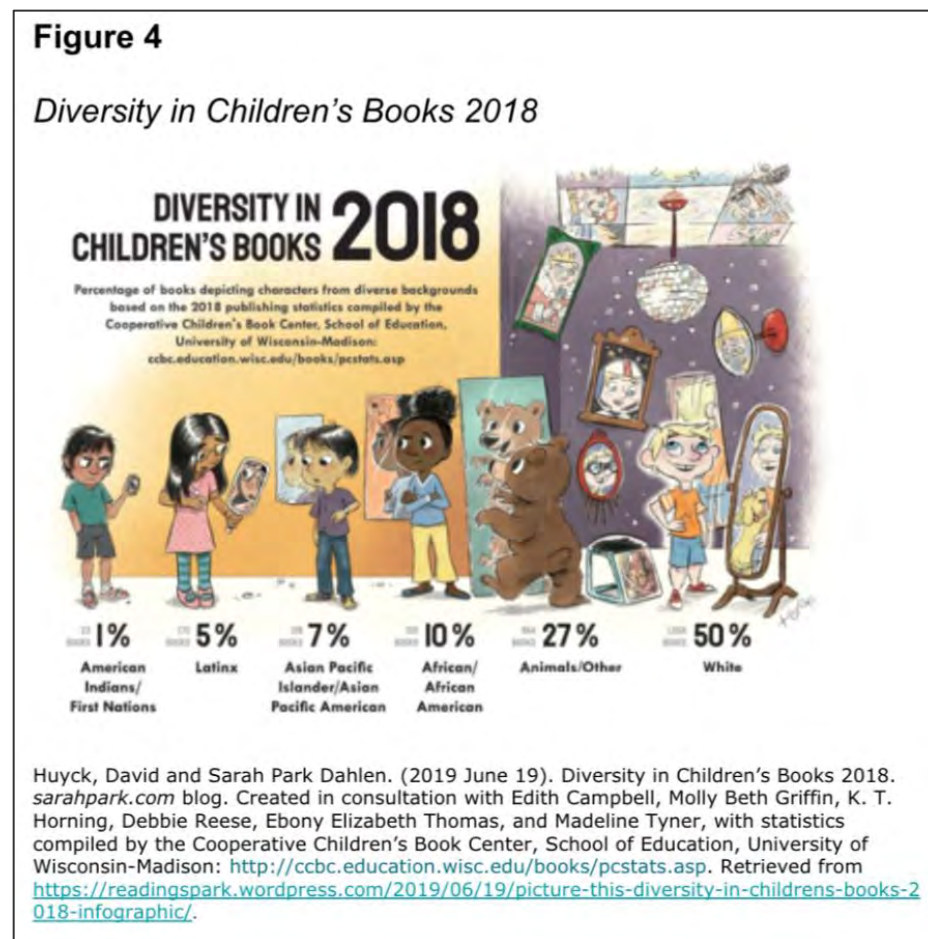
There is one striking metaphor that you will find in just about every site or publishing company or study about diverse literature. The power behind this metaphor is its simplicity.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) says that books can serve as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. Books can allow readers to look into strange places or familiar realities, acting as windows, and even allow readers to “walk through in imagination to become a part of the world” (Bishop, 1990, p. ix) that has been created by the author. These two aspects of literature are inspiring and thoughtful, but there is a haunting “othering” to them—a voyeurism and a potential colonization that worries even the most careful reader. Looking into those “strange” places or becoming a part of another person’s world is enticing but dangerous. Done carefully, with empathy and compassion and love, and positioned as nurturing knowledge and appreciating the experience of those involved in the narrative, this type of reading experience can be very powerful. Done incorrectly, and positioned as colonial and depreciating, this type of reading experience can lead to bigger walls and stronger animosity; such a reading experience recenters whiteness rather than the experience of BIPOC and reifies the voyeuristic position.

It is the final third of Bishop’s metaphor that provides the most crucial insight into the importance of diversity in children’s and young adult literature: “When the lighting is right, 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 a part of a larger human experience” (Bishop, 1990, p. x). One immediately acknowledges just how logical this metaphor is and then asks, “So where are all the mirrors for minority youth?” Like Larrick (1965) before her, Bishop’s article is important because of its date of publication. She may have changed the terminology or built on previous work, but the trends in 1990 hadn’t changed. According to the CCBC (2020), of the approximately 5,000 books published in 1990, only 51 were by a Black author or illustrator. That’s 1%—a decrease from the figures Larrick provided in her work in 1965.

However, there are often two portions of this seminal text that often get overlooked. Bishop encourages readers—who are hopefully the teachers and leaders and publishers of children’s and young adult literature today—to print, find, and center books which allow for youth to see themselves in books and in a larger tapestry of experience. She warns readers that when students can’t find themselves reflected in the books they read or when those images are distorted or negative, they might learn about how they are devalued in their own world.

The 2019 infographic (see Figure 4) created by David Huyck and Sarah Park Dahlen brings this insight to life. They use the 2018 CCBC statistics to demonstrate how the mirrors



provided by children’s and young adult literature distorts the reading experience for all readers. Youth who identify as persons of color or American Indian/First Nation only see portions of themselves, over-exaggerated features, or pieces of themselves in shards

of glass. White readers see themselves overwhelmingly reflected in the books they read from a variety of ways, and even in ways that reify their whiteness and distorts their reality.

This second idea reflects the other portion of Bishop's (1990) article that gets overlooked, and its importance warrants full inclusion here:

Children from dominant social groups have always found their mirrors in books, but they, too, have suffered from the lack of availability of books about others. They need the books as windows onto reality, not just on imaginary worlds...In this place where racism is still one of the major unresolved social problems, books may be one of the few places where children who are socially isolated and insulated from the larger world may meet people unlike themselves. If they only see reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world--a dangerous ethnocentrism. (pgs. x-xi)

Arthur Applebee's 1990 article confirmed Bishop's concern. His list of the ten book-length works taught in high school English courses corroborates Bishop's ideas and paints a sad picture of American secondary English education. When he collected his data in 1989, nine of the 10 authors listed were dead; four of the 10 texts most frequently taught were written by Shakespeare; nine of the ten authors were male and all 10 texts were written by a white author, and only three of those texts even featured issues about race and racism (Applebee, 1990). This was the canon then, and this is the canon now.

Stotsky, Traffas, and Woodward (2010) revitalized and expanded on Applebee's original work. Their study made a distinction of note (which we will come back to later). Stotsky et al. (2010, p. 13) collected data about "the most frequently assigned titles" in classrooms while Applebee (1990, para. 3) collected data about "the most frequently taught titles" in classrooms at the time (see Table 1).

Table 1

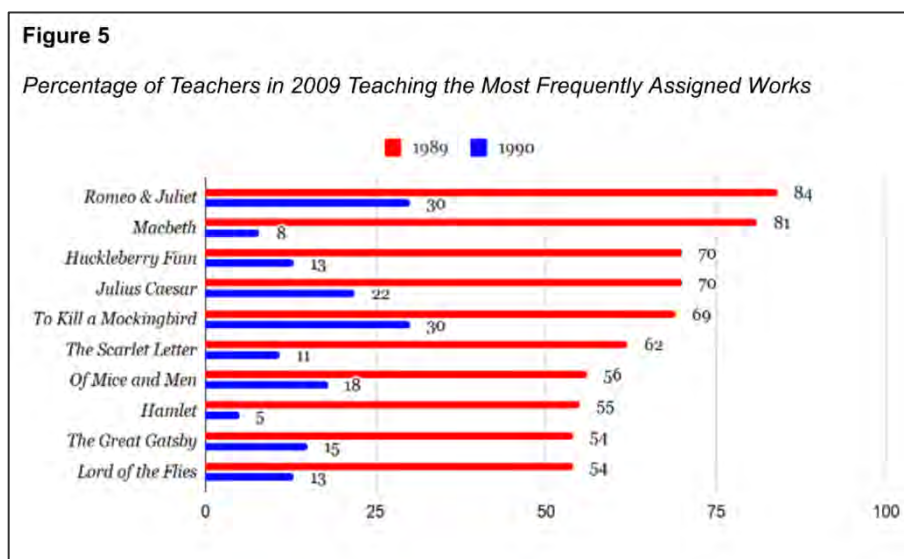
Top Ten Most Frequently Taught Titles (Applebee, 1990)	Top Ten Most Frequently Assigned Titles (Stotsky et al., 2010)
<i>Romeo & Juliet</i> by William Shakespeare	<i>Romeo & Juliet</i> by William Shakespeare
<i>Macbeth</i> by William Shakespeare	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> by Harper Lee
<i>Huckleberry Finn</i> by Mark Twain	<i>The Crucible</i> by Arthur Miller
<i>Julius Caesar</i> by William Shakespeare	<i>Julius Caesar</i> by William Shakespeare
<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> by Harper Lee	<i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck
<i>The Scarlet Letter</i> by Nathaniel Hawthorne	<i>Night</i> by Elie Weisel
<i>Of Mice and Men</i> by John Steinbeck	<i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald
<i>Hamlet</i> by William Shakespeare	<i>Lord of the Flies</i> by William Golding
<i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald	<i>Huckleberry Finn</i> by Mark Twain
<i>Lord of the Flies</i> by William Golding	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i> by Nathaniel Hawthorne

As anyone can see, not much of anything has changed—with the exception of the inclusion of Arthur Miller and Elie Weisel’s texts: nine of the 10 authors listed are still dead and another has been added (Harper Lee); two of the 10 texts most frequently taught books are written by Shakespeare (a decrease of two texts); nine of the 10 authors are male (no change); all 10 texts are written by white authors (no change), and still only three of those texts even featured issues about race and racism (no change). That was the canon then, and this is the canon now.

One of the only differences in this 2010 study is that “the actual number of classes in which these titles are assigned is, with only a few exceptions, very small” (Stotsky et al., pp. 21). One begins to wonder: if these texts aren’t being assigned in classrooms as

frequently as they once were, then how are they still the most frequently assigned texts in 2009? One answer could be that more/different classrooms were surveyed in 2009 than in 1989, and this increase in data sets allows for the frequency to remain the same while the percentage of teachers assigning these texts has decreased. The other, perhaps more troubling, answer is that while frequently these texts are “assigned” has remained relatively the same, the percentage of teachers “teaching” these texts has decreased significantly. Does this mean that the major distinction noted previously—i.e. that Applebee collected data about texts “most frequently *taught*” and Stotsky et al. (2010) collected data about texts “most frequently *assigned*”—suggest that the canon may not have changed, but how much instruction students receive with those texts certainly, and drastically, has? Are teachers still assigning these texts at such high rates that they are still in the top ten but are leaving students to read them on their own?

These powerful insights and questions, coupled with the statistics provided by the CCBC, Lee & Low Books, and websites like Racial Dot Map from the University of Virginia (Cable,



2013), creates a stunning reality in K-12 education. America continues to be segregated by laws and practices that push minorities into specific urban environments and

away from the white suburbs. In fact, some studies show that schools are more segregated now

that they were post *Brown v. Board of Education* (Frankenberg, 2019; Meatto, 2019; Mervosh, 2019; Sparks, 2020). Taken together, the social isolation that Bishop (1990) mentions in her text seems not only to be present but is even further entrenched. Therefore, there is an urgent need within our communities to engage in active antiracist literacy (Hodge, 2016) pedagogies within our overwhelming white classrooms to combat the dangerous ethnocentrism that Bishop forewarned us of, and which can be seen and felt in the media and lived experiences of ourselves and our students.

Still, there is hope on the horizon. Book publishing companies who only focus and feature diverse books are growing and gaining popularity. Lee & Low Books prints diverse books for young readers from a wide array of cultures. They also have three imprints—Children’s Book Press, Tu Books, and Shen Books—which feature bilingual picture books in Spanish and English, science fiction and fantasy texts for young adults that feature characters from diverse backgrounds, and Asian/Asian American books for young readers (Equity in Library, 2017). HarperCollins Children’s Books now offers the imprint Heartdrum, which features stories by Native creators “informed and inspired by lived experience” (We Need Diverse Books, 2021). In short, some book publishers and readers are listening.

As we write, Angie Thomas’s *The Hate U Give* (2017) has been on the *New York Times* Bestseller for 200 consecutive weeks. It’s staying power might also have to do with the social consciousness of its time. Like the children’s and young adult texts mentioned earlier which were all reflective of the importance of literature for youth during a time when youth were actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the popularity of this text, and others (e.g. *Dear Martin*, *All American Boys*, *Tyler Johnson Was Here*, *Anger*

is a Gift, *Ghost Boys*, and others) speaks to the importance of publishing and centering books for youth about important social movements like #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, #QueerLivesMatter, and #OwnVoices. One could only hope, therefore, that the watershed moments of the most recent years, including but not limited to the recent protests after the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, would bring about a similar uptick in books written for youth that focus on important issues in contemporary times. In that dialogue with youth, though, we are reminded to amplify and uplift narratives that speak to the joy and love and brilliance from communities of color. Centering stories by and about BIPOC must go beyond the “traditional” discourses of trauma and pain and suffering. Texts that depict people of color as tattered and torn are a part of our (white) history to be sure, but they are not the center or soul of our (collective) history. All told, this shift in curricula requires a shift in entire discourses within academic spaces—a shift that is long overdue. But we must go beyond those conversations and move to action more directly and immediately.

All of this suggests that popular media are starting to pick up that the narratives of persons of color matter—they always have—it’s just that now (white) people are listening and reading. Unfortunately, Thomas’s text and the many others that are gaining and have been gaining attention all focus on the same deadly social trend: police brutality (Alter, 2017). However, perhaps these texts can break down the walls of racial isolation to engage all readers in real conversations about race and racism

Practicing Disruption: A Potential (Re)solution

#DisruptTexts began in 2018 as an attempt to “challenge the traditional canon in order to create a more inclusive, representative, and equitable language arts curriculum that our students deserve” (Torres et al., n.d.). Since then, Tricia Ebarvia, Lorena German, Dr. Kimberly Parker,

and Julia Torres have provided specific methodologies and core principles (Ebarvia et al., 2020) for practicing teachers. These four women of color have, rightfully, been recognized at the national and international level for their commitment to anti-racist/anti-bias teaching pedagogy and practices.

#DisruptTexts provides the following core principles that advocate for curricula and instruction that is antiracist and culturally sustaining: (1) continuously interrogate our own biases and how they inform our thinking, (2) center Black, Indigenous, and voices of color in literature, (3) apply a critical literacy lens to our teaching practices, and (4) work in community with other antiracist educators, especially Black, Indigenous, and other educators of color.

We have embraced these core principles in our classrooms and offer the following steps that practicing teachers who look like us can take in order to create a more inclusive, antiracist, and culturally sustaining literacy classroom.

Core Principle	Antiracist Action
Continuously interrogate our own biases and how they inform our thinking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep a daily journal of your interactions, real and virtual, with students and colleagues, especially interactions that have to do with race, gender, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and any identity marker different from your own. 2. Engage in a curriculum audit, including defining diverse and inclusive literature, creating curriculum timelines, completing learning outcomes organizers, and finding alternative/paired reads (see Appendix A).
Center Black, Indigenous, and voices of color in literature	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Follow #DisruptTexts, #WeNeedDiverseBooks, #OwnVoices, #THEBOOKCHAT, @ATN_1863 and other hashtags/accounts on your social media channels. 2. Begin/continue reading curated lists of

	<p>books by Black and Indigenous People of Color (see Appendix A).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Diversify the curriculum in your classroom to provide more inclusive reading experiences for youth after engaging in the curriculum audit (see Appendix A). 4. Codify your curriculum by committing to a curriculum audit every five years by drafting and enacting a Board of Education policy (see Appendix A).
<p>Apply a critical literacy lens to our teaching practices</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read <i>How to Be an Antiracist</i> by Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, <i>Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You</i> by Jason Reynolds & Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, <i>We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom</i> by Dr. Bettina Love, <i>So You Want to Talk About Race</i> by Ijeoma Oluo, <i>Not Light, But Fire: How to Lead Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom</i> by Matthew Kay, and <i>This Book is Antiracist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action, and Do the Work</i> by Tiffany Jewell 2. Find co-conspirators in your school district or nearby school districts to engage in professional book study with <i>We Got This: Equity, Access, and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be</i> by Cornelius Minor, <i>Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy</i> by Dr. Gholdy Mohammad, and/or <i>Letting Go of Literary Whiteness: Antiracist Literature Instruction for White Students</i> by Dr. Carlin Borsheim-Black and Dr. Sophia Sarigianides
<p>Work in communities with other antiracist educators, especially Black, Indigenous, and</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Buy from Black-owned bookstores and bookstores owned by BIPOC (see

other educators of color	Appendix A) 2. Find a social justice organization in your area and become involved with those groups (see Appendix A)
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Conclusion: Implications and A Call to Action

Change happens over time. It isn't called the long Civil Rights Movement because it happened overnight. The literary canon is only the canon because someone decided to continue to read and teach that text day-after-day and year-after-year. As we suggest, a redefinition can happen if educators use their collective positions of power to shift the paradigm. If we, as educators, decided to teach texts which center the narratives of historically marginalized people day-after-day and year-after-year, maybe we could cannon the canon. Maybe, just maybe, we could build bridges, not walls.

We acknowledge and note the limitations of this article in and of itself. Future research must go beyond the initial steps and provide specific data which speak to the results of these changes rather than theorize about the need for change itself. Additional research, being conducted by ourselves and many other coconspirators (Love, 2019) is already taking place: we just need to center it in more accessible ways for teachers. Therefore, we call all literacy educators to embrace the core principles of #DisruptTexts and engage in the necessary reflexive work to provide the more inclusive, culturally sustaining, culturally relevant, and liberatory curriculum our youth are aching for; people's lives depend on it.

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Appendix A

<p>Sample Curriculum Audit</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/Qa18r</p>	<p>Book Lists & Book Awards</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/gtUJ9</p>	<p>Children & YA Book Awards</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/Gju6n</p>	<p>Children & YA Book Awards</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/e3dtf</p>	<p>Curated List Children's/YA Lit</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/rXME2</p>
<p>Curated List Children's Books</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/3vC7j</p>	<p>Curated List Children's Books</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/hucwu</p>	<p>Curated List Children's Books</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/b77sT</p>	<p>Curated List Children's Books</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/14RPJ</p>	<p>Curated List Children's Books</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/JGqX4</p>
<p>Curated List YA Lit</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/VQXEE</p>	<p>Curated List YA Lit</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/9htGf</p>	<p>Curated List YA Lit</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/5dVjh</p>	<p>Curated List YA Lit</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/pdmoK</p>	<p>Curated List YA Lit</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/HhNVp</p>
<p>Sample Curricula Codes/Procedures</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/HggoF</p>	<p>Black-Owned Bookstores</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/yJ7i9</p>	<p>Black-Owned Bookstores</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/XupGf</p>	<p>Black-Owned Bookstores</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/pNjBx</p>	<p>Black & BIPOC Bookstores</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/V67Az</p>
<p>Social Justice Organizations</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/oiNaW</p>		<p>Social Justice Organizations</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/QnY2b</p>		<p>Social Justice Organizations</p>  <p>https://qr.go.page.link/VswSv</p>