

CAPSTONE

**The Impact of Multicultural Literature in Education**

A Review of the Importance, Noted Research, and Bibliography of  
Culturally Diverse Children's Literature

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March 1, 2011

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### **Abstract**

As America continues to be the culturally rich and diverse nation that it is, there is a tremendous need for schools to be well-equipped with the tools to recognize and support each student's unique culture. All students' backgrounds deserve to be represented in the learning environment and curriculum and a foundational way of establishing a multicultural education is through literature. At any grade level, the use of culturally responsive literature can be a stepping stone in accommodating learners from all circles of life. In this capstone, a look at the definitions of multicultural literature and diversity in terms of their context in education will serve as a starting point. By looking at the learner, learning context, curriculum and strategies, the reasons for a variety of literature are highlighted to support its use to students. The grounds for supporting this topic are: the influence of diversity and how it affects each learner; issues with traditional canon in terms of learning principles, curriculum and strategies; advantages of attracting student interest by focusing on the learner; and the effort to create global citizens not only in the learning environment, but in the community. Weaved into these sections is a review of noted researchers' work in the particular areas that serves as evidence-based reasoning and reinforcement of claims. Tools to use in evaluating children's literature are included just before an annotated bibliography of quality children's books. The books are centered on cultural identity and forming relationships across cultural boundaries as well as suggestions for implementation in the curriculum.

*Keywords:* Multicultural education, culturally responsive literature, diversity

As Alma Flor Ada states in her foreward to Stanley Steiner's *Promoting a Global Community* (Steiner, 2001), children of the United States need to understand the strength and significance of each of their individual cultures while also learning about the beauty of sharing and learning from cultural literature other than their own. Steiner (2001) reflected that in "celebrating the world's diversity and the multicolored mosaic of our own society" (p. 29), educators have the enormous responsibility to enrich the lives of young students around the world by providing them with multicultural materials inside the classroom. This task might appear overwhelming as teachers today juggle multiple obligations not only from the school, but the district, state, and federal level in adhering to the standards and meeting the requirements for high-stakes testing. Nonetheless, by incorporating multicultural connections within the curriculum to the diverse population of students in classrooms, educators will recognize their efforts as rewarding upon realizing the impact and specialty of what is referred to as a culturally responsive classroom (Banks, 2006).

This capstone will draw connections between the need for multicultural literature in the classroom, research guiding philosophical and theoretical claims, and ideas for practice in using multicultural literature to enhance children's education. To specify where cultural relations should be found in the curriculum, this essay will focus on two central themes: identity and relationship. Before students can appreciate the differences in various cultures, they must gain an understanding and appreciation for their own cultural identity (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Each child carries his/her own uniqueness and special characteristics. Teachers are in the perfect place to assist in each student's discovery and understanding of their place in the world in regards to their extraordinary and distinctive history and identity as cultural beings.

Differences do not have to result in clashes and poor relationships (Ford, 2010). Relationships can go hand in hand with identity formation when one treats the inherent differences of people as an advantage that can bring multiple perspectives to relationships. Teachers have the opportunity to portray the presence of cultural differences as boundaries or borders. Students must know the possibilities of forming cultural boundaries, referring to the *presence of cultural differences* as opposed to cultural borders, *social constructs that are political in origin* (Erickson, 2005). By looking at cultural differences objectively and in a positive light, educators can model to students the importance of relationships with others across boundaries of ethnicity and tradition not just in schools but in everyday life.

In a culturally responsive classroom, an annotated bibliography of seminal children's books focused on themes such as identity and relationship across cultures serves as a tool to connect theory and practice, and acts as a gateway to enriching and/or adding to traditional curriculum. A brief summary will provide a straightforward guide on how each work relates to the specific goal of teaching through multicultural literature.

### **What is Multicultural Literature?**

Before looking at the classification of multicultural literature and what the term means in context, multiculturalism must be defined. Multiculturalism in the school refers to creating the best learning opportunities for all types of students categorized but not limited to: race, ethnicity, and social class (Higbee, Lundell, & Duranczyk, 2003). In supporting each individual's cultural background, schools can alter the educational community to reflect the diversity of its students. Emphasis on identity and relationship is influential in creating this multicultural environment so that students will know his/her culture and history in order to better clarify the diverse characteristics of the school. As a separate yet similar notion from diversity, which is to be

defined in the next section, multiculturalism focuses on the connecting of diverse groups so that ultimately all cultures are represented and are interacting collectively.

As multiculturalism gained popularity in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, many definitions of multicultural literature have surfaced. A common interpretation of the term multicultural literature is that it is any material written about people different from the mainstream. This vague description leads to much controversy over what cultures or people are and are not included in the mainstream. Some example categories apart from the mainstream could be defined as people outside the Anglo-American group, religious minorities, or families with same sex parents (Almerico, Barren, & Silverman, 2008). This capstone will focus mainly on the cultures and ethnicities of all students, with special attention to those apart from the mainstream.

Authentic multicultural literature is determined by some to be books written by or about cultures around the world. Many scholars feel that historical accuracy and validity can only be reached if the author is of the nationality or race being written about (Higgins, 2002). The evaluation tool presented in a later section clarifies what makes a multicultural book accurate and valid. With many classifications of multicultural literature in the world today, it is up to educators to create a classroom environment where such texts are valued and explored daily.

### **Why the need for multicultural literature in the classroom?**

Why do students need teachers that are willing to work harder to implement and support a multicultural curriculum? Four points will be discussed in this section that will build a foundation for necessary change in today's classrooms:

- A. Influence of Diversity (Learners)
- B. Debatable Traditional Canon (Curriculum and Strategies)

C. Benefits of Appealing to Student Interests (Learners)

D. Preparing Minds for Success in a Global Community (Banks, p. 25, 2006)

(Learning Context)

### **A. Influence of Diversity on Learners (Learners)**

At first glance in taking advantage of our diverse country, a look at the definition of diversity is of the utmost relevance:

**DIVERSITY:** the condition of having or being composed of differing elements : **VARIETY**; *especially* : the inclusion of different types of people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization <programs intended to promote *diversity* in schools>. (Merriam-Webster, 2011)

Since the definition notes differing elements and types of people, which many schools in America are privileged to have, shouldn't the literature present in the libraries of the schools reflect such diversity?

The "differing elements" defined here are also a key piece in understanding the importance of cultural variances. Schools with students from many backgrounds have the opportunity excel by bringing each student's individuality to the spotlight. The opportunities are endless for teachers in creating culturally rich learning experiences, if implemented in a culturally sensitive manner. Without using literature that matches the cultural richness of students in attendance, schools could lose valuable chances to interest and engage students. Simply by allowing a student to share his/her customs to the rest of his class or selecting books relevant to different groups within a classroom, educators can incorporate meaningful activities that will better serve the diversity of the classroom. In giving students authentic literature, the *world* could be brought inside a classroom. Once teachers allow sharing of backgrounds and cultures and surround students with important texts that extend on the diversity, students will

begin to notice the uniqueness of their individuality and understand more not only about themselves but about their peers.

Interesting to note, the last part of the definition from Webster's online dictionary places the term in context: "programs intended to promote *diversity* in schools" (Merriam-Webster, 2011). A direct reference to the education system could be a coincidence or a seminal exemplar of the importance of this word in its entirety related to education. This implies that diversity *is* one of the most important aspects of schools in America. Accordingly, should diversity not be treated as an advantage, not completely ignored or viewed as a deficit? As reported by the Behar-Horenstein (2010), in the year of 1972, 22% of students enrolled in public schools in the United States were of a racial or ethnic minority group. In 2003, the number was recalculated to show an increase of 20% to a total of 42%. The increase is a result of more diverse students being born in America. When data reveal such an increase in diverse student populations, classrooms must adjust and nurture the change as a way for all students to become comfortable with diversity and students will be more inclined to participate outside the class as well-rounded, globally-minded citizens in society.

Far gone is the "melting pot" nation (Banks, 2006). America's strongest attribute is being a multiethnic hub and should entertain the "salad bowl effect" (Banks, 2006), that is, valuing all ethnicities in a mixture, not an assimilation. Diversity is a privilege. Each and every culture, race, and individual is worthy of being valued for its unique contribution and history. Starting with children ensures a promising future of an equally represented country. Providing diverse literature in today's classrooms is a fundamental step toward this goal. In so doing, teachers can use culturally rich literature to assist in students' discovery of their own cultural identity and from there, help them build relationships across cultural boundaries. Reading can

provide a gateway to the world for children, and it is of the greatest importance that this gateway is culturally inviting. As stated by Martinez and Nash, literature that reflects the cultures of children can assist students in gaining a better understanding of themselves and others and what his/her place in society is in order to ultimately see what and how they can be more effective citizens (as cited in Ramirez, 1994).

At the current state of the nation's education, in 2011, the schools are rich in many ways. Rich in diversity, rich in able students, and rich in responsibility. One missing component is richness in *unity*. As Banks (2006) states in *Cultural Diversity and Education*, "Unity without diversity results in cultural repression and hegemony. Diversity without unity leads to Balkanization and the fracturing of the nation-state" (p. 25). If public schools across the United States held this vision of the need for togetherness and motivation, and valued each and every student's race, religion, and culture, one can only imagine the progress each student could make in empowering, culturally reflective environments.

### **B. Debatable Traditional Canon (Curriculum and Strategies)**

Baldwin (1985) brings a striking point to consider in that the commonly used, Eurocentric curriculum tends to support the status quo, reinforce social and political structure, and mold students into being unreceptive by making them accustomed to only one point of view—that of the mainstream American male. Many teachers, administrators, curriculum writers, and students are unaware of much of the biases in current programs of study because this same type of work has been produced and reproduced over the centuries. This one-dimensional canon has been viewed as *right* for so long, it is easy to understand how difficult altering the canon can be.

For instance, teaching about Christopher Columbus's glamorous discovery of "The New World" and the valiant and heroic misinterpretation of John Smith in Disney's version of *Pocahontas* are not only degrading to Native Americans, but reinforce the status of Whites in society today (Banks, 2006). More recently, the efforts to publish a combined volume of *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* free of the "n" word are coming to fruition after much controversy and distress (Bosman, 2011). Alan Gribben, an English professor noticed the decline in book lists that contained these Twain classics simply because of the uncomfortable reference to African Americans and decided there must be change in order for the books to remain in the mainstream curriculum. In many ways, the substitution "slave" in place of "nigger" in new publications (to be sold in spring of 2011) can be viewed as an attempt to keep with the history of the time period but conveying the issue of race differently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Arguments arise as to how much of this change is purely political and censoring the literary techniques of idol Mark Twain, which holds true to the claim that much of curriculum remains debatable (Bosman, 2011).

The one-sided, Eurocentric viewpoint, forgets to share the contrasting case or the many accomplishments, trials, and struggles of the other side *from their perspective* (i.e. Native Americans during America's exploration or slaves in *Huckleberry Finn*). How can educators hope for their students to appreciate one another's differing backgrounds and culture and what each person brings to the classroom? In addition, how can students be prepared for a global, diverse society if history and vocabulary in literature and curriculums are offensive to many cultures today?

Banks (2006) also comments on changing the canon of education from being Eurocentric and culturally biased to transformative and multidimensional, complete with all voices and

perspectives presented and valued. In reference to literature and how books from all types of literary backgrounds work towards achieving this goal, Banks claims that the transformative curriculum does not just use the additive approach, but becomes altered from within to present opportunities for readers to hear multiple voices and perspectives in just one story. As Starrs comments about the reading of various voices and perspectives, students can generate their own translation of culture through literature in terms of students “translating their many voices, and in the process they will join in creating culture—not simply receiving it” (as cited in Banks, 2006, p. 210).

As teachers work to create this culture, it is important to remember that this variety of multicultural literary devices integrated into the curriculum must go hand in hand with providing the opportunity for the cultures *within* the classroom to be discussed and recognized as unique learning experiences, that is, if each student is comfortable sharing any of his/her perspective, or cultural background.

As most educators know, creating or adapting the perfect curriculum is a difficult task. A feasible start is to evaluate the literature integrated into the present curriculum for its validity and support of multiple views. In a later section of this capstone, there is a checklist (Higgins, 2002) for evaluation of multicultural children’s literature that has proven to be useful in examining all aspects pertaining to culturally influential literature. Once estimation of depth in cultural representativeness and assessment of certain checkpoints is determined, teachers and curriculum writers can know where and when multicultural literature could be incorporated to enhance and widen student perspectives. To make this inclusion almost effortless and hopefully enjoyable, learning environments such as classrooms and libraries need a multitude of resources that extend

on the literature. For example, folklore, music, history, and art of any and all ethnicities and cultures provides effective enrichment to the already powerful literature (Banks, 2006).

While incorporating such variety in the curriculum, there is also a great need for transfer of the knowledge gained during previous learning experiences if the full potential for learning is to be achieved. Bransford (2000) writes that design of instruction should be based on prior knowledge and learning with a wide range of context to encourage transfer. With the traditional canon, learners are expected to excel in particular content areas, but without many opportunities to take what they have learned *across* content boundaries or *outside* of the school context. How is this useful and relevant to students' everyday and future lives?

### **C. Benefits of Appealing to Student Interests (Learners)**

In many of this author's experiences with students of differing racial and ethnic origins other than that of the mainstream in the classroom, there have been cultural barriers inhibiting learning from taking place, not only because the students are not represented in the curriculum or library, but simply because these students see no relevance to his/her life at school and become disinterested all together.

Literature is a seminal way to draw students in by tapping into their particular interests while also going hand in hand with the promotion of transfer, as discussed by Bransford (2000) in the previous section. A well-chosen book can spread across content areas, while also connecting students' lives to education through reading. In support of this notion, Ladson-Billings (1997) states that successful culturally relevant teaching is the result of teachers who "depend heavily on the experiences of their students to make the *literature* [emphasis added] come alive" (p. 127). Knowledge on what books would appeal to students includes surveying the diversity within each particular class, investigating student interests, and focusing on certain

experiences students have had (or that teachers would hope they could have) to create deeper relations through a multimodal, multicultural library. Once literature is chosen to enhance student appeal, teachers might be surprised to notice their students deciding to become self-directed readers who, for example, voluntarily take a book off the shelf in the classroom or library more often. Teachers once again must always keep an open mind and know their curriculum well enough to notice learning opportunities and check what objectives or activities might enhance student achievement through literature. In addition to lesson planning, great teachers have a unique ability to find teachable/readable moments throughout each day and can bring multicultural literature to life in the classroom.

In a contrasting example, Wiggins and McTighe (2005) state that in lesson planning to adhere to objectives primarily, then to choose desired results, and lastly to create learning experiences. If teachers know the objectives well enough, they will know what literature could effectively supplement such goals and have the materials available and on hand for students to engage spontaneously. In no way is having multicultural literature a “solve all problems” scheme for the classroom, a variety of procedures and strategies are needed in order to reach all types of students. This effort is but one way to reach students who might not otherwise voluntarily pick up a book.

In *Lives on the Boundary*, Rose (1989) works with intellectually challenged students in low socioeconomic schools via Teacher Corps in Los Angeles, California. In the small neighborhood of El Monte, he explores the curriculum at a particular school during his experience that failed to provide opportunity for fostering students’ creativity. Rose found that many of the labels placed on his students as a result of ability tests were not correlating with the fascinating work the students were producing in their personal reading and writing exercises

(Rose, 1989). By pulling from the diverse community's culture and family histories and tapping into student interest, Rose was able to engage the students with influential literature which resulted in academic success. The fact that Rose knew enough about his students and their interests served as a strong extension of the underlying factor of relationships in the classroom. Establishing a rapport with students that is not only formed on mutual respect, but enables teachers to know what and how their students like to learn is essential in taking advantage of student interest as a way to provide the most effective, responsive education.

In *Studying Your Own School* (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007), another prime example of a case where students were being forced to learn a curriculum in which they were not represented is described as having a direct effect on their intellectual interest level. In an action research endeavor, a middle school teacher and counselor teamed up with another member of the independent school's faculty to conduct an investigation of the reasons behind minority students' lack of success at a predominantly Anglo school. As the counselor, the researcher had encountered one too many unhappy, lonely, and unaccepted students of color in her time at the school. She wanted to find out why students were feeling this way when this certain institution prided itself on its level of cultural diversity and a supportive, welcoming environment. After an interview with four African-American boys, an interesting conversation developed around a certain t-shirt and hat a boy was wearing that caused others at the school to question its purpose. The design was an "X," representing the civil rights activist, Malcolm X. The student stated he was slightly offended every time someone asked him what the X meant and why he wore it. He blamed this ignorance on the school culture's lack of awareness of historical figures other than the White males in traditional history curriculum. As the group of boys later agreed to ask the school administration for a more "inclusive course of studies that represented a diversity of

histories” (Anderson et al, 2007, p. 108), not only was increased awareness a direct result, but a committee was established and recognized as one of the legitimate organizations on campus.

With a group named the “Minority Awareness Committee” (MAC), and two teachers that sponsored and supported their cause, the school’s environment and curriculum were greatly altered to represent and welcome all histories and individual cultures.

#### **D. Preparing Minds for Success in a Global Community**

Along with the need for more diverse children’s literature to increase interest levels, it is essential that students today leave elementary and secondary schools with knowledge about the world. This does not simply mean reading a book about the globe. This can mean anything from having the ability to see more than one viewpoint in a situation (i.e., hearing two or three accounts about a war between countries), examining biases in society and the curriculum, volunteering in poor communities, and more.

Because students of racial identities different from the mainstream are often situated in an environment where the choice is to either assimilate or to be an outcast (Ogbu, 1992; Fordham, 1988) even when students choose to assimilate or in a less extreme form, adapt, it seems they are not always treated equally or are denied some forms of inclusion and participation. Schools are in the perfect place to set the stage for a young person’s life in an interdependent global society by linking cultural studies in literature to the everyday functionality in a diverse community. In many ways, just having students come in regular contact with individuals different from themselves by being engaged in a book about a child on the other side of the world helps to increase opportunities for comfortable relationships with others and the ability to somewhat step into one’s shoes from time to time resulting in empathy or compassion. Ford (2010) states, in regard to identifying oneself and others, the less we know about a group, the more we tend to

make up. If teachers can engage students in learning more about cultures and people different from themselves, there will be no room for stereotyping and misconception. Banks claims the following in regard to multicultural relationship:

Students who can relate positively to and function within a variety of cultures within their own nation are also more likely to function successfully in cultures in other nations than are individuals who view domestic ethnic cultures as exotic and strange (Banks, 2006, p. 25).

In order to relate multicultural literature and global learning experiences, teachers must foster the relationship between students and the world outside the classroom. Bringing real-world experiences, issues, and current events that are happening in various cultures around the United States and world to the spotlight through relation to education, students will see the importance of being well-read in terms of relationships to places outside of school.

When students reach a stage of understanding about the world, his/her connection will most likely foster more comfortable interactions with a global society in the future. If students are sheltered from real cultural experiences as a result of mainstream curriculum and one-sided viewpoints or stories, how can educators expect any of the minority students to appreciate and take advantage of schooling if it has no relevance to how they will be expected to function in their own societies?

In terms of the importance of forming relationships, Ramirez (1994) states that since the world of travel and communication is shrinking, students will need to know more about people and cultures across the globe. Since many diverse classrooms are privileged to have such wide range of cultures and experiences present in the classroom, teachers would be foolish to ignore this opportunity for students to form relationships across cultural boundaries at such an early age. These relationships are easily formed in the elementary years. It is the junior high and high school ages that tend to segregate themselves for reasons most likely tied to racial and/or cultural

identity. Books such as When My Name was Keoko, Iqbal, and The Diary of Anne Frank serve as great literary tools for older students when thinking about having students read material that would help them in not only learning history, but in reflecting on their own upbringing and identity. Read as a teenager or young adult, these books and others listed in the bibliography could instill a sense of hope and encouragement to students to become active citizens like the characters in the books. The following quotation encompasses one of the reasons for incorporating multicultural literature into student's lives: "Children's literature that reflects the contributions, lifestyles, and values of these ethnic groups will help children to have a better understanding of who they are and what contributions they can make to this country (Ramirez, p. 3, 1994).

### **Evaluation of Literature (Assessment)**

Before placing multicultural literature into the classroom, teachers should adopt a form of assessment to decide whether or not a text should be included in the classroom library or a lesson plan in order to properly judge a book's features. In the world of literature, there are many checklists, rubrics, and surveys that attempt to examine a book's validity through looking at various features.

#### **Checklist for Developing and Evaluating Multicultural Literature (taken and adapted from Higgins, 2002)**

- **High literary quality-** The book could stand alone as a superior piece of literature worthy of being read by a child.
- **No distortions or omissions of history-** Various perspectives and voices are valued and no misconceptions are present.

- **Stereotyping-** No negative or inaccurate stereotypes of the ethnic group are being portrayed. If a certain stereotype does exist, the book establishes the judgment or the teacher establishes the setting in a way that allows the reader to construct his/her own opinion.
- **Loaded words.** There are no derogatory overtones to the words used to describe the characters and culture, such as "savage," "primitive," "lazy," and "backward."
- **Lifestyles.** The lifestyles of the characters are genuine and complex, staying true to the originality of the culture being presented, never oversimplified or generalized.
- **Dialogue.** The characters use speech that accurately represents their oral tradition without relegating importance of individual cultures.
- **Standards of success.** The basic plotline and characters are strong on their own, without need of assistance from mainstream figures.
- **The role of females, elders, and family.** Women and the elderly are portrayed accurately within their culture. The significance of family is also portrayed accurately for the culture.
- **Possible effects on a child's self-image.** There is nothing in the story that would embarrass or offend a child whose culture is being portrayed. A helpful question to pose is: would you be willing to share this book with a group of children of mixed-races?
- **Author's and/or illustrator's background.** The author and/or illustrator have the qualifications/ background needed to accurately portray the culture(s) respectfully.

- **Illustrations.** The illustrations do not generalize or reinforce stereotypes of a cultural group. The characters are depicted as unique individuals and are not given generalizations of whole group. A variety of physical attributes within a culture are present.
- **Relationships between characters from different cultures.** Minority characters are (or have the opportunity to be) leaders within their community and solve their own problems. Whites do not possess the power while cultural minorities play a supporting or subservient role.
- **Heroines and Heroes.** Heroines and heroes are accurately defined according to the concepts of and struggles for justice appropriate to their cultural group.
- **Copyright date.** During the mid- and late 1960's most books on minority themes were written by White authors and reflected a White, middle-class, mainstream point of view. More recently (beginning in the 1970's) books began to reflect a pluralistic society. Day (1994) states that the copyright date of a book may be *one* clue as to the possible biases to be found within it (as cited in Higgins, 2002).

### **Annotated Bibliography**

The following books are organized by culture. The categorization is intended to make this resource straightforward and easy to navigate, not to separate ethnicities. Many of the entries are written about one or more cultures but are listed under one title for simplicity. The cultures listed are as follows: African-American Literature, Asian/Asian-American Literature,

Hispanic/Latino Literature, and Native American Literature. Within some cultural categories, a more distinct group is mentioned, for instance under Hispanic/Latino, if the book is more specifically about Mexico or Mexicans, that culture is also mentioned.

Two additional sections are added to encompass books that do not fall under one cultural category. The books listed under “Universal Literature” have multicultural characteristics in that they collectively present various cultures within one text. The section titled “Variety of Literature” includes a list of additional books written about particular cultures that are slightly less reflected in school demographics today in comparison to the other categories. The last section titled “Literature for Students with Disabilities” is an additional resource of books with themes of identity and relationship for teachers when working with disabled students. Often in schools, students with disabilities are singled out as if they have a culture separate from other mainstream students. In an effort to provide extra support for yet another category of students, this group is added in hope to include as many learners as possible. In no way are the books listed the *only* multicultural texts worthy of being read by students, this is simply a tool to use when attempting to establish a culturally responsive education that could always be expanded or enhanced.

Within each entry, relevant information is listed: author, illustrator, grade level, publisher, year of publication, focus, and possible subject area integration. The subject areas for integration are taken from Tennessee Department of Education’s Curriculum Standards (2011) and applied to each text. Following the basic information, a short synopsis presents possible strategies to integrate this literature into the classroom with a focus on building cultural identity and the formation of relationships across cultural boundaries. Most texts listed represent the

culture through various storylines and literary elements and others are simply written by or about people of ethnicities different from the mainstream.

### **African American Literature**

*Amazing Grace*- African American

Author: Mary Hoffman

Illustrator: Caroline Binch

Grade: Kindergarten- 2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and Year of Publication (YOP): Dial Press, 1991.

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, English/Language Arts, Drama, Reading

This is a story about the stage play, *Peter Pan* and how an African-American girl yearns for the part. She gets the part with help from friends and family. Students learn about the negatives of stereotyping but also the positives of keeping an open mind. This is an excellent, beautifully illustrated read for younger students as they begin to learn more about themselves and the new friends they are making at school. Whether before an audition for the school play or as a way to show students how to take on different responsibilities in the classroom, this book provides a helpful example of a young girl's quest to discover her own identity.

*Black Like Kyra, White Like Me*- African American

Author and Illustrator: Judith Vigna

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: A. Whitman and Co., 1992

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Social Studies

The story introduces race being an issue regarding neighborhoods. A Caucasian girl is overly excited about a new playmate moving in next door, an African-American girl named Kyra. Both girls learn what prejudice is, in its most shallow form. With a realistic ending, readers learn that what everyone else is doing is not always right, and to hold true to what one believes in.

*Cornrows*- African American

Author: Camille Yarbrough

Illustrator: Carole Byard

Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Coward-McCann, 1979

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Language Arts, Social Studies, Reading

This award-winning story tells of the African tradition of braiding hair into cornrows, which symbolizes much more than a hairstyle. Similar in topic to *I Love My Hair*, this book portrays

physical traits as unique and special to one's identity. For children looking to appreciate/understand their own physical appearance, this book speaks volumes to valuing oneself.

*Daniel's Dog*- African American

Author: Jo Ellen Bogart

Illustrator: Janet Wilson

Grade: Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Puffin Books, 1992

Focus: Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Social Studies, Reading

The birth of a new sibling causes Daniel to create an imaginary dog-friend when he feels neglected at home. Bogart claims that the role of the ghost-dog stems from African folklore in a way that the dog is representative of a deceased relative (Daniel's grandfather). This book is a great one to explore various cultural traditions while also relating to many children who deal with new brothers and sisters coming into their lives and the changes they undergo.

*Fishing Day*- African American

Author: Andrea Davis Pinkney

Illustrator: Shane Evans

Grade: Kindergarten-4<sup>th</sup>

Publisher: Jump at the Sun 2003

Focus: Identity and Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Social Studies, Reading

A book about a young African-American girl and her mother during the historical era of Jim Crow laws. A great read for students to see how children do not have to view cultural and racial differences as borders, like parents sometimes do. This book provides a different perspective than textbooks might by seeing segregation through the eyes of a young girl.

*I Love My Hair!* - African American

Author: Natasha Anastasia Tarpley

Illustrator: by E.B. Lewis.

Grade: Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup> grade

Publisher and YOP: Little, Brown and Company, 1998

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Social Studies, Reading

A young girl questions the tangles in her hair each night until her mother teaches her to celebrate her beautiful locks in remembrance of her culture and family. The book tells of various ways in which she can wear her unique hair. This story would be helpful in teaching each child to value his/her appearance because it represents each individual heritage.

*In the Time of the Drums* –African American

Author: Kim Siegelson

Illustrator: Brian Pinkney

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Hyperion Books for Children, 1999

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Language Arts, Social Studies, Reading

This unusual story about African heritage is told not only through the text but through Pinkney's amazing art work. Set in Georgia, a young boy who is a plantation slave, is told by his grandmother the many tales and treasures of African life which helps them to get through the harsh times of slavery in America. This book is an excellent read if looking for multiple voices about this particular time period.

*Shining*-African American

Author: Julius Lester

Illustrator: John Clapp

Grade: 2nd-6th

Publisher and YOP: Harcourt Books 2003

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Reading

This book is about a girl named Shining who grew up an elective mute and is shunned from her village until they come to realize how unique and special she is. This book shows the importance of accepting who you are regardless of what others think. *Shining* is a great read for students in the middle/pre-adolescent grades.

*The Old Dog*- African American

Author: Charlotte Zolotow

Illustrator: James Ransome

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: HarperCollins, 1995

Focus: Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Reading

A combination of simple writing and magnificent illustrations provide the reader with a reassuring and comforting story of a boy who grieves the death of his dog. This is a great book to show relation between text and art.

*The Road to Memphis*- African American

Author: Mildred D. Taylor

Grade: 6<sup>th</sup> and Up

Publisher and YOP: Dial Books, 1990

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Social Studies, Reading

During the 1940's, while racism and prejudice is still taking place in the deep south, a family attempts to get their friend Moe to move from Jackson, Mississippi to Memphis, Tennessee and

on to Chicago, Illinois because he has beaten a few white boys and will ultimately be severely punished for his actions. This book portrays the harsh reality of a historical period as experienced first-hand.

*Yo! Yes?* –African American & Caucasian

Author: Chris Raschka

Grade: Toddler-1<sup>st</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Orchard, 1993

Focus: Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Reading

An African-American boy and Caucasian boy find friendship even though they come from different backgrounds and are not experts on making friends. This book would be a great way to discuss feelings of uncertainty when meet new people. Striking illustrations and simple dialogue give the book a kid-like feel that comforts all.

### **Asian/Asian-American Literature**

*Angel Child, Dragon Child*- Vietnamese

Author: Michele Maria Surat

Illustrator: Vo-Dinh Mai

Grade: Pre-Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Carnival Press, 1983

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Social Studies, Reading

A story of a Vietnamese girl who moves to America without a mother and has to adjust to school and new friends. Feeling as though she does not fit in, she goes through a very realistic quest to find her own place in the new environment. Students would see the importance of welcoming new types of people from all over the world in order to make the school a more exciting place. A brief geographic study of Vietnam and the culture and traditions unique to the country could be implemented.

*Children of the River*- Cambodian

Author: Linda Crew

Grade: 7<sup>th</sup> and Up

Publisher and YOP: Delacorte Press, 1989

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: English, English as Second Language, Foreign Language, Reading, Social Studies

Sundara flees Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge invasion and is uncomfortable in her new school trying to fit in while also being forced by her family to carry on Cambodian culture in America. Intended for a young adult audience, this story portrays how a 17-year-old girl mixes her new American culture with traditions of Cambodia. This would be a great book for students to read in order to find a balance between cultures they experience at home and school. This

book could be read during a geography unit (for older grades) on Asia and even more in depth, the Khmer Rouge invasion.

*The Chinese Mirror*- Korean

Adapted from Korean Folktale by Mirra Ginsburg

Illustrator: Margot Zemach

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1988

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

This is a tale about the first time people look into a mirror. Problems arise and the reader learns the importance of focusing attention on others and not themselves. This book provides an interesting perspective of how people view themselves and what everyone physically looks like. This would be a great opportunity for students to explore what they believe a mirror does *not* show. An introduction to Korea and countries in the surrounding region's cultures could be instigated by this book.

*Cleverticks*- Chinese

Author: Bernard Ashley

Illustrator: Derek Brazell

Grade: Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Crown Publishers, 1992

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

This book is a perfect example of a diverse class where each and every culture is recognized and appreciated. A boy named Ling Sung wants to find his niche or special ability because his friends already know how to tie shoes or write their names. One day, his friends notice him using paintbrushes as chopsticks and they wish to learn how. With the encouragement of the teacher, the entire class learns a new skill that is unique to Ling Sung's culture. The story could stir up excitement in students to learn from each other and welcome new ideas and perspectives along with learning about Ling Sung's Chinese culture and traditions.

*Crow Boy*- Japanese

Author: Taro Yashima

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Viking Press, 1995

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

This is a story of a boy in Japan with learning styles different from his classmates and a teacher who understands his needs. With feelings of isolation and rejection, students can relate to feeling out of place at some point in his/her life. This story is geared towards younger children, but could also be beneficial for upper elementary students struggling with identity and relationship. The art presents the mood of the text in a way that establishes similar traditions in Japanese art.

*How My Parents Learned to Eat* – Japanese and American

Author: Ina R. Friedman

Illustrator: Allen Say

Grade: Kindergarten-4<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Houghton Mifflin, 1984

Focus: Identity &amp; Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Reading, Social Studies

A Japanese girl meets an American sailor and they both attempt to learn each other's customs and culture. This story could be used to demonstrate what great things can happen when recognizing and appreciating other people's backgrounds while also learning about your own. This book could supplement a history unit by portraying positive relationships between American armed forces and people they encountered during service.

*My Name is Yoon*- Korean

Author: Helen Recorvits

Illustrator: Gabi Swiatkowska

Grade: Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Berryville Graphics 2003

Focus: Identity and Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Reading, Social Studies

A story about a young girl from Korea adjusting to life in America. At first afraid of her new surroundings at school, the book ends happily with Yoon forming great relationships with her classmates and teacher. The award-winning illustrations capture the emotions throughout the book. This a phenomenal book for the first day of school or helping a foreign student adjust to his/her new surroundings. Students could also participate in a project to learn more about one another's home or background, foreign or not.

*Our Home is the Sea*- Chinese

Author: Riki Levinson

Illustrator: Dennis Luzak

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: E. P. Dutton, 1988.

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Reading, Social Studies

This book shines a light on the complex yet tranquil life in Hong Kong. About a boy who is told by parents to go to school to become a teacher but all he really wants is to live on the sea and become a fisherman. This would be a great addition to a unit on individuality and following one's heart or the similarities between children all over the world.

*Suki's Kimono*-Japanese

Author: Chieri Uegaki

Illustrator: Stephane Jorisch

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher: Kids Can Press Ltd. 2003

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Foreign Language, Reading, Social Studies

A spunky Japanese girl is proud to wear her kimono to the first day of school. The day ends in a spontaneous dance performance and shows readers how important and fun it can be to just be yourself. Interesting to note, this book is different from most identity-themed in that the main character does not question her cultural differences in this American school. Younger students would especially love this because of the “show-and-tell” element of wearing or bringing something to school that is of importance to show friends. Japanese words are also present throughout the story.

*When My Name was Keoko* –Korean

Author: Linda Sue Park

Grade: 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>

Publisher/YOP: Clarion Books, 2002

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English, Foreign Language, Reading, Social Studies

A story about a Korean family during World War II that faced oppression and oftentimes torture. Told by a brother (age 13) and sister (age 10), the historically accurate novel shares with readers what it was like to grow up during such a trying time. For older students, this is a seminal example of reading from a different voice than textbooks. The portrayal of World War II as seen through the eyes of a child and young adult is informative and inspirational.

### **Hispanic/Latino Literature**

*Adelita*- Hispanic/Latino

Author: Tomie DePaola

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Putnam Publishing Group, 2002

Focus: Relationship- Spanish/English

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, English/Language Arts, Foreign Language, Reading

The classic Cinderella story with a Hispanic twist and beautiful illustrations. The book shows versatility and relationship between two languages with similarities but also slight differences. The index in the back of the book defines Spanish phrases used throughout. A great book for showing similarities and differences in Spanish and English language and seeing the classic story in a different light.

*Esperanza Rising*- Mexican

Author: Pam Muñoz Ryan

Grade: 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Scholastic Inc.

Focus: Identity and Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English, Reading, Social Studies

A 13-year-old girl goes through the death of her father and a journey with her mother from Mexico to America to live a very different life than she is accustomed to. A story of a young girl's upbringing in the 1930's offers the reader a glimpse of hope in the midst of many struggles. Written for older students, this book would be great for students to read of historical elements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century from a perspective that is not found in textbooks.

*Felita- Puerto Rican*

Author: Nicholasa Mohr

Illustrator: Ray Cruz

Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Puffin, 1999

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English, Reading, Social Studies

A Puerto Rican girl named Felita moves into a new, unfamiliar neighborhood with her family. Leaving her friends, she is thrown into the process of making new friends while also growing up at a very confusing time. Geared towards an age where many developmental changes are taking place, this book can be useful for students to relate to and realize that they are not alone.

*From the Bellybutton of the Moon/Del Ombligo de la Luna-Mexican*

Author: Francisco Alarcón

Illustrator: Maya Christina Gonzalez

Grade: 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Children's Book Press, 1998

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, English as Second Language, Foreign Language, Reading, Social Studies

A bilingual text that tells the history of Mexico through unique shape poetry. A humorous depiction of the famous poet's childhood memories in Mexico. This book could be used as a model of how one could create a story-like poem about his or her childhood memories and how they might be similar to different from this poet's Mexican childhood.

*Gathering the Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish & English-Hispanic/Latino*

Author: Alma Flor Ada

Grade: Pre-Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: HarperCollins, 1997

Focus: Relationship- Spanish/English

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, English as Second Language, Foreign Language, Reading, Social Studies

This book has poetry about field work and nature's bounty incorporating all letters of the alphabet in both Spanish and English. This book aids in showing students similarities and

differences in both language's alphabets. For use with younger students, this would be a great addition to learning the alphabet in English.

*Shadow of a Bull* – Spanish

Author: Maia Wojciechowska

Grade: 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Macmillan, 1964

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Reading, Social Studies

A young man by the name of Manolo is pressured to become a champion bullfighter in Spain, just like his father was. He later attempts such a sport and comes to find out he does not enjoy it and wishes to become a doctor. This tale emphasizes becoming your own person and seeking out one's own path in life—a matter that students all over the world can relate to. This would be a great addition to a unit on Europe or cultural traditions of Spain.

*Smoky Night* –Hispanic/Latino

Author: Eve Bunting

Illustrator: David Diaz

Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>

Publisher: Harcourt Children's Books, 1994

Focus: Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

Los Angeles riots break out and help a young boy and mother get along with others regardless of background or nationality. Unlikely friendships are a result of a frightening, dangerous night in this beautifully illustrated book that won the Caldecott in 1995. This story could be used to show students how important it is to be open to friendships across cultural borders.

*The Dreamer* – South American

Author: Pam Muñoz Ryan

Illustrator: Peter Sis

Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Scholastic Press, 2010

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, English/Language Arts, Foreign Language, Reading, Social Studies

This fictional biography of the poet Pablo Neruda is a mystical yet saddening portrayal of what life was like in Chile when many indigenous tribes were fighting for independence. With a negative and unsupportive father, "Neftali" as was his original name, finds ways to secretly foster his creativity by working for the town newspaper. This story is helpful in showing students that when following dreams or passions the road is not always easy, but worthwhile.

*Yes, We can!/Si, ¡Se puede!* –Hispanic/Latino

Author: Diana Cohn

Illustrator: Francisco Delgado

Grade: 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Cinco Puntos Press 2002

Focus: Identity and Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, English/Language Arts, English as Second Language, Foreign Language, Reading, Social Studies

This bilingual tale describes the Los Angeles janitor strike in 2000. Told through the eyes of the female janitor's son, readers will see how a motivated boy gets his school involved in the march to help his mother and other under-appreciated workers. Teachers can emphasize teamwork through adversity and the importance of relationships across cultural boundaries.

### **Native American Literature**

*Dancing Teepees: Poems of American Indian Youth* –Native American

Author: Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve

Illustrator: Stephen Gammell

Grade: Pre-Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Holiday House, 1989

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

This book is a compilation of poems about various tribes of North American Indians. Sneve's beautiful portrayal of treasured songs and lullabies will touch the reader and instill a feeling of wonder and fascination about the largely overlooked groups of Native Americans. The poems describe the lives of young Native American children and are paired with excellent illustrations.

*Grandmother's Dreamcatcher* –Chippewa Tribe

Author: Becky Ray McCain

Illustrator: Stacey Schuett

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Albert Whitman & Company, 1998

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Reading, Social Studies

This story tells of contemporary Native American life through a young Chippewa girl named Kimmy. Students will identify with common struggles Kimmy goes through and learn of the dreamcatcher tradition in Native American history. The strong relationship with her grandmother is helpful for the reader to hear of unique cultural aspects of the Chippewa tribe that are passed down from generation to generation.

*Powwow* –Native American

Author: George Ancona

Grade: 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Reading, Social Studies,

Based on the Crow Indian tradition of Powwow dancing, the reader is given a glimpse of life in the rich culture on the Montana reservation. Students will find it interesting that many tribes come together and seem like a very large family as they keep their traditions alive. Much of the book is spent describing the beautiful dresses and dance styles through the exquisite photography of the author, George Ancona.

*Who-Paddled-Backward-With-Trout* –Cree Tribe

Author: Howard Norman

Illustrator: Ed Young

Grade: Pre-Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Little, Brown, 1987

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Reading, Social Studies

A young Native American boy dislikes his name “Trout-With-Flattened-Nose” and goes on a quest to find a new one. Later he comes to find a new identity with a similar, yet different name. This serves as a great read-aloud to students with strong illustrations that explore the many designs and artwork of Cree Indian tribe.

### **Universal Literature**

*Bread, Bread, Bread*- Universal

Author: Ann Morris

Photography: Ken Heyman

Grade: Pre-Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: HarperCollins 1993

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Reading, Social Studies

Through beautiful, vivid photographs, this book shows students the many different types of bread people eat around the world and how each one is special in its own way. Students can learn the importance of accepting *all* types of people and traditions.

*Children Just Like Me*- Universal

Author: Anabel and Barnabas Kindersley

Grade: Pre-Kindergarten- 3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: 1995

Focus: Identity and Relationship

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, Reading, Social Studies

This book provides a glimpse of life of children all over the world. The authors took actual photographs of children in 140 countries (over 2 years of collaboration) and their friends, family, and everyday life. Teachers could use this book to open discussion about similarities and differences of children all over the world or various details depicted through photography.

*Daddy Has a Pair of Striped Shorts*- Universal

Author: Mimi Otey

Grade: Pre-Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990.

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading

Two kids find their father's dress style embarrassing until they realize that what's inside is much more important than outward appearance. Although written for younger children, this book would be helpful as students reach the age of identity struggles and disagreement with parentals.

*Don't Look at Me: A Child's Book About Feeling Different*- Universal

Author: Doris Sanford

Illustrator: Graci Evans

Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Multnomah Press, 1986

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading

Patrick feels uneasy at school because he is not as quick of a learner as his classmates. An encouraging, talking stuffed animal and a grandpa help to show him that progress can be made, one step at a time. This book is different from others in that it tells of the importance in believing in what you are instead of only what others perceive you as.

*Elmer*- Universal

Author and Illustrator: David McKee

Grade: Prekindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1989

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading

Elmer is the only multicolored elephant in the elephant community and he tries so hard to become like the others, but realizes that his strange coloring is an important asset to his population. This book would also be a great one to read with upper elementary as students begin to feel the need to "fit in" when loving oneself regardless is the better option. The fact that the main character is an animal frees the book from *one* culture's restrictions and provides a universal tale for readers.

*Hands Around the World*- Universal

Author: Susan Milord

Grade: 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Williamson Publishing Company 1992

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

This book is a great one to have as a teaching resource as it comes complete with various activities to do to represent cultures around the world. The book takes the reader through one year and sheds light on exciting craft projects, lessons, and topics for discussion.

*How You Were Born* - Universal

Author: Joanna Cole

Illustrator: Margaret Miller

Grade: 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Morrow, 1993

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading, Science

This is an informative book about the eternal question, “where do babies come from?” Various racial backgrounds are present and each reader is bound to feel special while learning about the magic of birth, wherever in the world that might be.

*People*- Universal

Author/Illustrator: Peter Spier

Grade: Pre-Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup> grade

Publisher: Doubleday & Co., 1980

Focus: Identity and Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

Spier’s book focuses on the many different colors we come in and how each person is an asset to a culturally diverse world. His unique way with words allows the reader to see that differences are what make this life interesting. A great read to have students engage in rich discussion of cultural similarities and differences.

*Regina’s Big Mistake*-Universal

Author: Marissa Moss

Grade: Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Houghton Mifflin, 1990

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading

A girl in art class realizes her painting of a jungle is sub-par to her classmates. She gathers her thoughts and ideas and transforms the piece into something special that is unique to her abilities. This book sheds light on doing your best and expressing your own creativity without always comparing to others. For beginning readers, this is an exceptional read for beginning to value one’s unique abilities.

*We All Have a Heritage* -Universal

Author: Sandy Lynne Holman

Grade: Pre-Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup> grade

Publisher and YOP: Culture Co Op. 2002

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: Arts Education, English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

A celebration of various cultures and ethnicities, this story fosters appreciation for every person's heritage. This book could be used to explore the diversity within a classroom and create recognition and celebration of differences. A look at different heritages that stem from places around the world would be exciting for students to learn.

### **Variety of Literature**

*Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* –European

Author: Anne Frank

Grade: 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Doubleday and Company, 1947

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

Since its original publication in 1947, this book has spread all over the world and is a prime example of a first-hand account of a historical period told through the eyes of a young girl. If studying World War II, or simply practicing journal writing, Anne Frank's diary is a must-read for all students regardless of race or gender. All middle school students can relate somehow to the thoughts of a young teenager.

*Iqbal*- Pakistani

Author: Francesco D'Adamo

Translator: Ann Leonori

Grade: 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>

Publisher/YOP:

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

A young adult novel about children working in the carpet and textile factories of Pakistan. Told through the eyes of Fatimah, one of the young girls in the carpet factory, this is a moving account of abusive child labor. Iqbal, a leader in the children's eyes, succeeds in freeing many of the children and gains fame for doing so but is sadly murdered later on in the story. To be read with older students, this book can motivate young adults to fight for what they believe in and never give up in times of strife. Collaboration and friendship through the hard times are strong themes throughout the novel. This book could be an exceptional addition to a unit on the Middle East relating to geography and/or history.

*The Day of Ahmed's Secret* –Egyptian

Author: Florence Perry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland

Illustrator: Ted Lewin

Grade: 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Lothrop, Lee and Shephard, 1990

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading, Social Studies

This book portrays a day in the life of a young boy in Cairo, Egypt and how exciting life can be for children just beginning to explore the world's many facets. A comparison of life in far away Egypt to life in America (or anywhere) would be an interesting and educational activity that could be instigated by this text.

*Waiting for the Rain* –South African

Author: Sheila Gordon

Grade: 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Bantam Books, 1987.

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English, Reading, Social Studies

Two boys in South Africa named Tengo and Frikkie, come from very different backgrounds and cultures, yet find friendship over the fact that they both love farming. They are best friends until later in life when Tengo begins to resent the freedom and privileges Frikkie has because he is white. They both enlist in different sides of the army during the resistance movement. This book would serve as a great comparison to many books published about the United States' civil rights movement in relation to "separate but equal" issues.

### **Literature about Students with Disabilities**

*A Contest*

Author: Sherry N. Payne

Illustrator: Jeff Kyle

Grade: Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Carolrhoda Books, 1982

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English /Language Arts, Reading

In transition from a special education school to a public school, a boy with cerebral palsy enters a fifth grade class where students do not know how to react to a wheelchair. Through a teacher's help and motivation, the boy adjusts and makes helpful, understanding friends. This would be an excellent way to explain the importance of accepting all kinds of people and putting oneself into another's shoes.

*A Very Special Friend*

Author: Dorothy Hoffman Levi

Illustrator: Ethel Gold

Grade: Kindergarten-2<sup>nd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Kendall Green Publications, 1989

Focus: Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading

Two girls become friends even though a communication barrier is present—one of the girls is deaf. Frannie, learns sign language to communicate with Laura and as a result they learn how to overcome obstacles and have fun together.

*The Balancing Girl*

Author: Berniece Rabe

Illustrator: Lillian Hoban

Grade: Prekindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Dutton Children's Books, 1981

Focus: Identity & Relationship

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading

A talented girl named Margaret wears leg braces and finds unique ways to overcome her disabilities and participate fully in all school activities. The fact that the girl is disabled is not the main focus of the book, which is quietly effective. In its portrayal of treating all people equally and focusing on strengths, not weaknesses, this would be beneficial to students with and without disabilities.

*We Can Do It!*

Author and Illustrator: Laura Dwight

Grade: Kindergarten-3<sup>rd</sup>

Publisher and YOP: Checkerboard Press, 1992

Focus: Identity

Subject Area Integration: English/Language Arts, Reading

Five preschoolers with various disabilities are the focus of this book that aims to pursue each individual's uniqueness. This is a great read for students both with and without disabilities because of its emphasis of positive interaction between all types of students.

### **Conclusion**

Research supports the presence of multicultural literature in the classroom as a way to reach diverse populations of students in classrooms today. It is of utmost importance that this literature be representative of all cultural perspectives and contain no biases or false portrayal of historical events in order to provide students with a fair opportunity to create his/her own viewpoints. Through these viewpoints, young students will see his/her community, nation, and world as the unique and authentic place that it is.

Beginning in the early grades, teachers have an enormous responsibility to utilize the inherent diversity that lives in their classrooms. Whether through adapting a social studies lesson plan to include more than one text for evidence or simply having a child share a story passed down through his/her grandparents who farmed in a foreign country that is relevant to the geography curriculum, the efforts are valuable and entirely feasible. By cultivating the diversity of learners inside the classroom, working to shape the educational canon to include multicultural curriculum and strategies, considering student interests, and preparing students for a future through a global learning environment, multicultural literature proves to be not only valuable, but indispensable.

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