

OurChildren®

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Choosing Multicultural Books for Young Children

by Linda A. Santora

Literature should be both a mirror in which children can see themselves reflected and a window through which children can explore the world around them. Books can emphasize that people from diverse groups can play and work together, solve problems, and overcome obstacles. At its best, multicultural children's literature helps children understand that despite our many differences, all people have feelings and aspirations.

Selecting good multicultural children's books begins with the same criteria that apply to selecting good children's books in general: the literary elements of plot, characterization, setting, style, theme, and point of view must be interwoven to create a compelling story in an age-appropriate manner.

Below are some questions to consider when choosing early childhood children's literature.

Story

- ◆ Are the stories interesting to children?
- ◆ Are there various conflicts for children to explore?
- ◆ How are the conflicts resolved?

Characters

- ◆ Do characters represent people from a variety of cultural groups?
- ◆ Do "good" characters reflect a variety of backgrounds?
- ◆ Are females as well as males depicted in leadership roles?

Themes

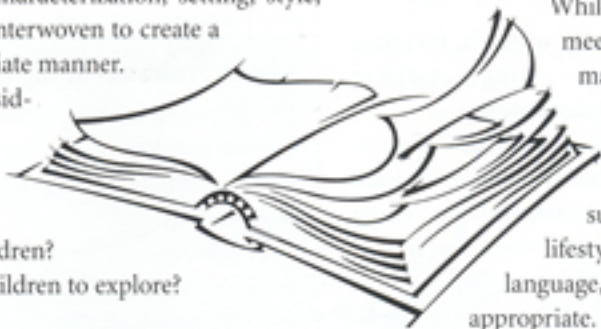
- ◆ Does the story offer children a variety of things to think about, question, and consider?
- ◆ Are values being explored instead of preached?
- ◆ Are there lessons to be learned?

Settings

- ◆ Do the stories reflect a variety of settings?
- ◆ Are urban, suburban, and rural settings represented realistically?
- ◆ Are cultural settings represented realistically?

Other considerations

- ◆ Will the stories encourage discussions?
- ◆ Are children exposed to multiple perspectives and values?
- ◆ Do the stories promote understanding of our diverse society?
- ◆ Are the stories age appropriate so children can understand what is presented?



While every children's book cannot possibly meet each and every standard of excellence, in many instances, the value of a particular book will outweigh those aspects that might be questionable. Caregivers should examine children's books for such things as historical accuracy, realistic lifestyles, believable characters, and authentic language, and should make sure the book is age appropriate. The books chosen should also represent a variety of settings, problem-solving approaches, and themes, and should provide opportunities for children to consider multiple perspectives and values. Multicultural children's books should not speak to a limited group of children; they should speak to all children. **OC**

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