

Multicultural Children's Literature:  
Creating and Applying an Evaluation Tool  
in Response to the Needs of Urban Educators

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**Abstract:**

In this project, research-based criteria were established and a tool for evaluating multicultural children's literature was developed. This tool was then applied to 30 multicultural picture books and 5 multicultural chapter books. Quality and authenticity were determined and an evaluative summary was written for each book. The result is an annotated list of quality multicultural children's literature.

**Literature Review:**

The following review of research and resources focuses on defining authentic multicultural children's literature and appropriate evaluation strategies for choosing authentic literature. The issues and perspectives discussed provide a background for the resulting evaluation tool and annotated bibliography of quality multicultural children's books.

***Defining Authentic Multicultural Children's Literature***

The term "multicultural" has only recently come into usage (Lindgren, 1991; Rochman, 1993) and is variably used to describe groups of people from a nonwhite background, people of color, or people of all cultures regardless of race. Multicultural literature has often been used to show only positive images of minority cultures. However, in its most authentic form it is an area of literature that focuses on the reality of various cultures (Lindgren, 1991; Nieto, 1992; Rochman, 1993). In her research on Puerto Rican children's literature, Sonia Nieto describes her search for "a more balanced, complete, accurate, and realistic literature that asks even young readers to grapple with sometimes wrenching issues" (1992, p. 188). Children's literature used in this study focuses on the cultures of people from a nonwhite background, though the resulting evaluation tool can be effectively used with any culture defined by the user.

In the literature, the authenticity of multicultural books is determined in different ways by different scholars. For some, authentic books include only those written by a member of an ethnic group about that ethnic group, its cultural traditions, and its people (Aoki, 1992; Mikkelsen, 1998; Slapin & Seale, 1992). Nina Mikkelsen (1998) concludes that books about African Americans could only be authentic when written by "insiders;" that African American authors should be the only ones allowed to write literature about their culture. Others believe that the most accurate portrayal of a culture will come from an author writing about her or his own culture, but acknowledge that there are exceptions (Barrera, Liguori & Salas, 1992; Howard, 1991; Nieto, 1992; Sims Bishop, 1992). These exceptions include authors who have lived within the culture they are writing about all or most of their lives regardless of their race (Barrera, Liguori & Salas, 1992; Howard, 1991), those who write based on experience and a growing awareness in our society of other cultures (Nieto, 1992), or those who provide an accurate representation of the culture being portrayed (Hillard, 1995; Yokota, 1993). Junko Yokota (1993) defines authentic literature as that which shows evidence that "the author and illustrator are intimately familiar with the nuances of a culture" (p. 156).

Rudine Sims uses the term "culturally conscious" when evaluating African American children's books for cultural authenticity in her book *Shadow and Substance* (1982). Culturally conscious literature is that in which the author is sensitive to aspects of African American culture and

"consciously seeks to depict a fictional Afro-American life experience" (p. 49). The characters are African American, it is set in an African American community or home, the story is told from their perspective, and the text describes the ethnicity of the characters in some way. Sims found faults, however, even in culturally conscious books, finding differences in books written by members and nonmembers of the African American cultural group. The culturally conscious books written by non-African American authors emphasized different aspects of African American life than did African American authors, and the authentic detail in story and illustration was often lacking in those written by non-African Americans.

Authenticity includes the accuracy and validity of the text as well as of the illustrations (Mikkelsen, 1998; Sims Bishop, 1991; Slapin, Seale & Gonzales, 1992). If the illustrator does not have an accurate picture of the culture he or she is drawing, the result is an inauthentic portrayal of that culture. Beverly Slapin (1992), in her introduction to *Through Indian Eyes*, notes the detrimental effects an inaccurate portrayal can have on a Native American child reading supposedly about his or her culture yet seeing illustrations depicting another tribe, or worse yet, seeing a conglomeration of Native American cultures in one picture.

### ***Why Multicultural children's literature?***

Hazel Rochman (1993) in her book *Against Borders*, explains the overall purpose of multicultural literature. She says,

A good book can help to break down [barriers]. Books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community: not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others. A good story lets you know people as individuals in all their particularity and conflict; and once you see someone as a person - flawed, complex, striving - then you've reached beyond stereotype. Stories, writing them, telling them, sharing them, transforming them, enrich us and connect us and help us know each other. (P. 19)

Researchers and professionals seem to agree about the need for children's literature to better reflect the reality of our pluralistic society. Thus, the books we select for our classrooms need to not only reflect the diversity of the students in the classroom and school, but the diverse reality of the world in which we live. To begin with, every student should be represented, and accurately, in the literature used. Negative images and inaccurate stereotyping of people and cultures in children's fiction books is harmful to students whose ethnicity is being portrayed. Students should be able to see themselves and their lives reflected in the books they read (Aoki, 1992; Slapin & Seale, 1992).

Authentic multicultural literature in the classroom is also necessary in helping students to develop an understanding of diverse cultures, the people and their perspectives (Aoki, 1992; Banfield, 1998; Barrera, Liguori & Salas, 1992; MacCann, 1992; Pescosolido, Grauerholz & Milkie, 1997; Rochman, 1993; Slapin & Seale, 1992; Yokota, 1993). Bernice Pescosolido and colleagues (1997) speak of children's books as cultural objects that are intimately tied to social relations and power shifts in society. "The depiction of race relations to the newest members of society via children's picture books subtly colors children's understanding of status arrangements, social boundaries, and power" (p. 444).

Barta and Grindler (1996) describe how multicultural children's literature can be used to explore bias. Their article entitled "Exploring Bias Using Multicultural Literature for Children" describes ways in which literature can make children more aware of bias and active toward its elimination. Making students aware that there is prejudice and discrimination against differences helps them

to prepare for what they may encounter in the future (or help explain what they have already encountered).

Multicultural children's literature also emphasizes the similarities in experiences across cultures (Barrera, Liguori & Salas, 1992; Barta & Grindler, 1996; Frosch, 1994; Hillard, 1995; Roberts & Cecil, 1993; Rochman, 1993). Learning how people from other cultures do similar things in different ways can help children gain a sense of acceptance and appreciation for diverse cultures (Hillard, 1995). As Rosalinda Barrera and colleagues state in the context of Mexican American literature, "literature about the Mexican American experience is literature about the human experience" (1992, p. 231). In the introduction to her book *Coming of Age in America*, Mary Frosch (1994) describes the purpose behind her anthology of stories as a way to show children that people in all cultures deal with issues of adolescence and "growing up."

### ***Trends in Multicultural Children's Literature***

Those who research authentic multicultural literature agree that, compared to the number of children's books published each year, the number of books focusing on minority cultures is extremely low. Of the few that are published, a small percentage could be considered authentic, or culturally conscious, material (Barrera, Liguori & Salas, 1992; Greenfield, 1986; Hill, 1998; Lewis, 1988; MacCann, 1992; Nieto, 1983, 1992; Pescosolido, Grauerholz & Milkie, 1997; Sims, 1982; Sims Bishop, 1991, 1992; Williams, 1983).

Pescosolido, Grauerholz & Milkie (1997) looked at the history of African American children's literature and found that while the number of children's books portraying at least one Black character (not necessarily of African descent) has risen since 1937, the number of books that focus exclusively on Black life is still incredibly low. There are even fewer books written by African American authors, some researchers estimating between one and two percent of all published children's books (Sims Bishop, 1991).

The truth about other minority cultures represented in children's books is even more discouraging since there is probably more literature focusing on African American culture than any other (Hill, 1998). Nieto (1992) found in comparing three studies from 1972 to 1992 that the number of books depicting Puerto Ricans had decreased considerably, while the quality of the literature had increased slightly.

There is promise in a recent trend toward more minority authors being published (Lewis, 1988; Sims Bishop, 1991). This may account for the increase in quality, but the decrease in quantity still needs to be addressed. There is a need for more minority authors to write for children, and large publishers need to take responsibility for actively seeking them out (Greenfield, 1986; Hill, 1998). Twyla Hill (1998) studied the publishing, marketing and distributing practices pertaining to multicultural children's literature in America. She identified three "gatekeepers" who are at least partially responsible for the paltry numbers of culturally conscious books being published: publishers who do not actively seek minority authors and tend to focus only on the profitability of a book; review journals that select books for review based on what they believe will appeal to libraries and schools; and librarians and bookstore buyers who look to the review journals and large publishers in selecting the books they will include in their collections.

Multicultural children's books have been slowly improving with regards to stereotypes, inaccuracies, and negative portrayals (Barrera, Liguori & Salas, 1992; Nieto, 1992; Lewis, 1988; MacCann, 1992; Williams, 1983). But stereotypes *are* still found in currently published children's books. MacCann (1992) and Magda Lewis (1988) both note that Native Americans are

often still depicted as a generic Indian type, or as helpless and dependent upon benevolent whites.

### ***Developing and Applying Evaluative Measures***

After becoming familiar with the definitions, purposes, and trends of multicultural children's literature, evaluative measures become more important. Being selective about choosing from the small number of multicultural books is crucial. Several researchers and reviewers of children's multicultural literature have laid out criteria they believe to be important in selecting books for the multicultural classroom. I have developed an evaluation checklist for use with multicultural children's books from the works of Day (1994), Sims Bishop (1992), and Slapin, Seale and Gonzales (1992). The checklist was created to help guide its user in evaluating books for stereotypes, negative images of cultural groups, and literary quality. The set of criteria covers the attributes of "quality" children's books *and* "quality" multicultural literature in order to give the user a picture of the ideal book. The checklist follows:

- **High literary quality.**
- **No distortions or omissions of history.** Look for various perspectives to be represented.
- **Stereotyping.** There are no negative or inaccurate stereotypes of the ethnic group being portrayed.
- **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, not oversimplified or generalized.
- **Dialogue.** The characters use speech that accurately represents their oral tradition.
- **Standards of success.** The characters are strong and independent, not helpless or in need of the assistance of a white authority figure. Characters do not have to exhibit extraordinary qualities, or do more than a white character to gain acceptance and approval.
- **The role of females, elders, and family.** Women and the elderly are portrayed accurately within their culture. The significance of family is 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 good rule of thumb: you would be willing to share this book with a mixed-race group of children?
- **Author's and/or illustrator's background.** The author and/or illustrator have the qualifications needed to deal with the cultural group accurately and respectfully, and are most likely a member of the cultural group being portrayed in the story.
- **Illustrations.** The illustrations do not generalize about or include stereotypes of a cultural group and its people. The characters are depicted as genuine individuals. Characters of the same ethnic group do not all look alike, but show a variety of physical attributes.
- **Relationships between characters from different cultures.** Minority characters are 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. They are not those who avoid conflict with and thus benefit the white majority.
- **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. The copyright date of a book may be *one* clue as to the possible biases to be found within it (Day, 1994).

First and foremost, it is important that *any* book chosen for use with children be of high literary quality (Lu, 1998; Sims Bishop, 1992; Yokota, 1993). Because of the limited quantity of multicultural literature, this may be even more important to remember since "there may be a greater tendency to accept poor literary quality just to have *something* in the classroom or library" (Sims Bishop, 1992, p. 48).

If you are looking to influence your students' beliefs about different cultures, look specifically for pluralistic themes within the stories (Lu, 1998). It is also valuable to collect both contemporary and historical fiction to expand students' knowledge. Mei-Yu Lu (1998) suggests consulting local ethnic communities and multicultural resources for suggestions on what to include in a multicultural literature collection.

Sims Bishop (1991, 1992) suggests that those who want to become adept at evaluating literature about different cultures, to read extensively in the literature written by "insiders," those writing about their own culture and experiences. Once immersed in the work of authors and illustrators writing or drawing about their own cultural group, there will be a basis for comparison with books by authors whose ethnicity is unknown.

Aoki (1992) believes that, in evaluating multicultural children's books, one should look for those that fulfill a purpose (see also Yokota, 1993). While one quality book may not address every need, a collection should be formed based on the following criteria. Text and illustrations should reflect reality, attempt to transcend stereotypes, and seek to rectify historical distortions and omissions. They should avoid the "model" (well behaved) and "super" (perfect) minority syndromes and accurately reflect the diversity within cultural groups. She also states (in the context of Asian Pacific American literature) that one should be aware of the changing status of women in society and include books that reflect their current roles. The same argument could be expanded to include women within all cultural groups, and all cultural groups within society.

## Conclusions

This project focused on the characteristics of quality multicultural children's books and how these characteristics can be used practically by teachers and librarians wishing to build a collection of quality multicultural children's books. Educators, with little time to peruse the literature that discusses characteristics of quality multicultural books, or to search bookstore shelves, have a need for a list that can provide the information for them.

Quality multicultural books are difficult to find, even with time to search. The percentage of books with multicultural themes is low, but there are ways to find them. For example, when looking up a specific book, one Internet site provided other authors' names and book titles similar to the current selection. With this information, authors' names and various subjects could be cross-referenced to find additional selections. Aside from this search format, also used

by some public libraries, there was no other way to find books besides searching the bookshelves of libraries and bookstores --a tedious process.

African Americans and Asian Americans appear to have the best representation in children's books compared with other minority groups. There is a wide variety of themes that focus on contemporary African American life and African folk tales (e.g. *In My Momma's Kitchen*, and *In The Time of The Drums*, respectively). Books with Asian American themes include such issues as learning to adjust to a new culture (e.g. *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*) and the problems that arose for Japanese Americans during World War II (e.g. *Baseball Saved Us*). There are also books, though very few, that focus on other Asian groups, such as Vietnamese Americans (*Journey Home*) and Korean Americans (*Halmoni and the Picnic*).

Not as well represented in children's literature are Latino, Hispanic, and Native American cultures. In regards to the Latino and Hispanic cultures, Mexican Americans are better represented in picture books by contemporary authors and artists such as Pat Mora, Carmen Lomas Garza, and Rudolfo Anaya. In this author's searches, other Latino and Hispanic cultures seem to be better represented in chapter books than they are in picture books (e.g. Puerto Ricans in *All For the Better*; Cubans in *Under The Royal Palms*). Most picture books with Cuban, Puerto Rican or Caribbean themes are set in the country of origin. In this book list, Latino and Hispanic picture books set in America are all Mexican American stories.

Books that focus on Native American themes are also lacking. Those with contemporary characters and themes are especially lacking. Native American themes in picture books tend to depict images of an extinct race. That is, there are many books that tell of past Native American heroes and heroines, legends and tales, and that contain poetry that stems from the traditions and beliefs of certain tribes and groups. However, while these books and stories are an important part of Native American life, they send a message that the people and their traditions are a thing of the past. As a result of intensive searches, however, there are several exceptions on this list. One of these is *Powwow*, which depicts an event that takes place annually on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana, one in which Native American people from all over North America attend. Another exception is the chapter book included for this cultural group. *The Heart Of A Chief* tells the story of a boy on a fictional reservation in the late 1990's who faces issues relevant to Native Americans today, such as alcoholism, casinos, and the use of Indian words and names for sports teams.

This project provides for educators a practical tool for evaluating and selecting multicultural children's literature, and a list of books to help start a good book collection. Educators can use the checklist with books they already have, or with books they find on bookshelves or in catalogs in the future.

## **Literature Evaluation**

My main goal with this project has been to gain knowledge of and experience with the issues surrounding multicultural children's literature so that when I begin to build my own collection of classroom literature I will be prepared to evaluate and choose quality books. Another goal, and an added benefit, has been to create a list of evaluation criteria for fellow educators looking to do the same. Because this project has been so personal, there may be some books missing from the list of quality literature for the very reason that I would not wish to use or purchase the book at this time. Also, it cannot be a comprehensive list, if for no other reason than because of time constraints. It is, however, a useful list for starting a collection of quality multicultural

books as I highly recommend each selection. The evaluation tool will serve to assist anyone who wishes to find other books to add to their collection.

Following is a copy of the evaluation tool and an annotated list of the 35 multicultural books focusing on the experiences, lifestyles and issues of Native American, African American, Asian American, and Latino and Hispanic cultures. Books about both Latino and Hispanic cultures are combined into one section. This Latino/Hispanic section is intended to identify areas of the world where the cultures represented are from - that is, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands. It is not within the scope of this project to try and place the specific cultural groups under the correct umbrella group. Doing so would be a difficult and possibly unnecessary task. While the people of a specific ethnic group may identify themselves under one such group, one person within a group may identify him or herself otherwise. This is true for each of the four cultural groups represented in this list. Today, many Black American tend to be identified as "African Americans" regardless of their actual heritage, and Native Americans from different tribes traditionally hold separate beliefs and have distinct customs based on history and heritage.

Therefore, within the four sections of the annotated list, each title is individually labeled with the *specific* cultural group represented in the story. I hope you find this to be helpful, yet non-intrusive on the individual needs and beliefs of the people being represented.

## **African American**

### ***Bud, Not Buddy*** - African American

Written by Christopher Paul Curtis, Chapter book. 1999.  
New York, NY: Delacorte Press

A ten-year-old orphaned boy in 1936 Flint, Michigan sets out to find the man he believes is his father. His mother died four years before and left him only a few hints about a jazz bandleader from Grand Rapids. While this is a story about a boy seeking the family he has never known, it is also a descriptive, and often hilarious insight into the personality of a homeless, motherless, African American boy who has learned how to make it on his own during the Depression. The issues addressed in Bud's thoughts and experiences are sometimes deep and may require explanation to a younger audience. Since it takes place in the 1930's, discrimination and prejudice are woven into the story, but are never the story itself.

### ***I Love My Hair!*** - African American

Written by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley, Illustrated by E.B. Lewis. 1998.  
Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company

A little girl's nightly struggle with a comb turns into a celebration of her family life and heritage. Her mother can style it to look like soft spun yarn or to reflect the rows of vegetables in their garden. Or the little girl can celebrate her African heritage by letting it all go free. The illustrations portray the different expressions and emotions that the little girl has throughout the story. Children will enjoy the individuality of the main character. African American children will see personal characteristics celebrated in a book that all children will love.

### ***In My Momma's Kitchen*** - African American

Written by Jerdine Nolen, Illustrated by Colin Bootman. 1999.  
New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books

This story is a year in the life of an African American family, celebrating family events and momma's everywhere. A little girl describes special events in her family that always seem to happen in her momma's kitchen. Her sister tells the family about her music scholarship; her

aunts gather together to remember, tell stories and make soup; the family gathers for a midnight snack . The characters have true personality in colorful and detailed illustrations that also convey a warm, cozy kitchen where all the special events of the year take place. This is a contemporary story that African American and non-African American children can relate to.

***In The Time of The Drums*** - African American

Written by Kim Siegelson, Illustrated by Brian Pinkney. 1999.

New York: Hyperion Books for Children

Set in the time of slavery, this story is about the freedom of spirit passed down from an old slave woman to a young boy. It is told as a legend but is more than just a story of the past. It is a reminder of how one should live. The language of the book is poetic. While the story itself could stand alone, Brian Pinkney's art could also tell the story on it's own. For some African American people the message of the story could be read as a reminder of their heritage. Yet it is also an inspiration to any child who needs strength of spirit to live through difficult times.

***The Magic Moonberry Jump Ropes*** - African American

Written by Dakari Hru, Illustrated by E.B. Lewis. 1996.

New York: Dial Books for Young Readers

This contemporary story about two sisters looking for friends during the summer months includes a special lesson about friendship and provides a connection between the girls' passion for Double Dutch and their heritage in Africa. Their uncle arrives home just in time from his trip to Africa with a gift for them - two magic moonberry jump ropes that will fulfill the user's wish. Both the main theme of jumping Double Dutch and the underlying importance of family are relevant to children's lives today. The illustrations are detailed and sensitive. Each character has a personality of her or his own.

***The Music in Derrick's Heart*** - African American

Written by Gwendolyn Battle-Lavert, Illustrated by Colin Bootman. 2000.

New York: Holiday House, Inc.

Derrick is a little boy who can't wait for his uncle to teach him to play the harmonica. In the heat of summer, Uncle Booker T. and Derrick tour the town, visit family, and play music. But Derrick must learn that the music doesn't come from learning the notes so much as it comes from the heart. The characters speak in Southern dialect, and the feeling of a close-knit community is conveyed in the text as well as in the colorful illustrations.

***Running Girl: The Diary of Ebonee Rose*** - African American

Written by Sharon Bell Mathis. 1997.

New York: Harcourt Brace & Company

Ebonee Rose is an eleven-year-old who uses her diary to talk about her fears and excitement leading up to the All-City track meet. She expresses her feelings, from anxiety about being the favored winner in her events, to the difficulty of making friends with the newest member of the track team. E.R. also idolizes African American female track and field star of the past and present, and tells readers of the women runners who inspire her. The book is filled with facts and photographs of these stars - Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Flo Jo, Wilma Rudolph and others. This book would be a confidence builder for any African American girl or track and field lover.

**Asian American**

***Baseball Saved Us*** - Japanese American

Written by Ken Mochizuki, Illustrated by Dom Lee. 1993.

New York: Lee & Low Books Inc.



A Japanese boy and his family are moved to an internment camp in the early 1940's. The boy's father decides that they need a baseball field to help pass the time and to bring a sense of normalcy to the camp. Playing baseball seems to lift the spirits of the people, and the little boy is determined to overcome his small size by working hard at becoming a good player. After the war he again works hard at baseball, and despite the prejudice he faces, is respected by his teammates for his playing ability. The author addresses the prejudice Japanese people encountered after World War II, and discusses how to this boy, being called a "Jap" means that the kids "don't like him." The illustrations depict the darkness of the time, but also the hope that came with baseball and the potential for better times. The story should be told with sensitivity to a Japanese child, but would be a wonderful history lesson for all children.

***Be Bop-A-Do-Walk!*** - Asian American

Written and Illustrated by Sheila Hamanaka. 1995.

New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers

Emi begs her father to let her and her friend, Martha, go on a walk with him around New York. They stop at a bakery for treats, walk through Washington Square Park and past the Empire State Building, and stop in at the Museum of Modern Art before heading toward Central Park. While there, they feed the birds and float paper boats that Emi's father makes for them and all the other children at the pond. They then catch the bus home, making paper cranes for everyone on the bus. Children will love the adventure of a walk through New York City with all its tall buildings, though the story tends to jump around a bit. The illustrations are fun and the characters' faces expressive.

***Grandfather's Journey*** - Japanese American

Written and Illustrated by Allen Say. 1993.

New York: Houghton Mifflin Company

The author tells the story of his own grandfather's journey from Japan to the United States, and the desire he and his grandfather share for returning to Japan. When they do take a trip to Japan, they feel like outsiders. Each expresses a love for both countries, and Say talks about how, when in one country, he always seems to miss the other. The story is written as if narrating a family album. The full-page illustrations are personal snapshots of various times in Grandfather's life. It is a beautiful story for any child, but will ring with familiarity for families who may feel at home - and alienated - in two very different countries.

***Halmoni and the Picnic*** - Korean American

Written by Sook Nyul Choi, Illustrated by Karen Dugan. 1993.

New York: Houghton Mifflin Company

Yunmi's grandmother, Halmoni, has just moved to New York from Korea and is finding it difficult to adjust to American culture. Yunmi hopes that having Halmoni chaperone a class trip to Central Park will help her feel more at home. But at the same time, Yunmi is worried that her classmates will not accept Halmoni's traditional Korean dress and the Korean food she has prepared for the trip. However, the kids welcome Halmoni and enjoy the kimbap - rice and vegetables wrapped in seaweed - and Halmoni begins to feel comfortable. Sook Nyul Choi tells a sensitive story of immigration and the difficulty of adjusting to a new culture. Korean American children will enjoy seeing aspects of their culture included in the story, and all children will relate to a desire to belong and the relationship Yunmi has with her grandmother. Dugan's colorful illustrations help tell the story.

***In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*** - Chinese American

Written by Bette Bao Lord, Illustrated by Marc Simont, Chapter book. 1984.

New York: Harper Trophy

The story begins in China with a young girl whose father has just sent for her and her mother to meet him in the United States. Shirley and her mother make the long trip to Brooklyn, New York in 1947 where her father has a job and Shirley begins school. Shirley has to deal with many issues, such as breaking the language barrier as she learns English and learning the traditions of her new country. Shirley works hard to catch up in school, learn how to play stickball, and make friends with neighbors and schoolmates. When baseball starts in April, Shirley develops a passion for the sport and becomes a Jackie Robinson fan. Jackie Robinson's fight to fit into the white world of baseball inspires Shirley. She yearns to fit in, yet still misses her family back in China. Shirley is a sensitive, caring and spunky character who will be loved by all readers.

***Journey Home*** - Vietnamese American

Written by Lawrence McKay, Jr., Illustrated by Dom & Keunhee Lee. 1998.

New York: Lee & Low Books, Inc.

During the Vietnam War and at the age of two, Mai's mother was left at an orphanage. She was adopted and brought to the United States as a child, but is now seeking the identity of her birth parents. On their journey to Vietnam, Mai's mother searches for her family, but Mai must discover the meaning of "home" for herself. A story that will touch the heart of the reader, it may be familiar to some. Others may discover a feeling they have always taken for granted - that of knowing where you come from and where you belong. The illustrations convey the emotion of the journey with warmth and sensitivity.

***Tea With Milk*** - Japanese American

Written and Illustrated by Allen Say. 1999.

New York: Houghton Mifflin Company

As with *Grandfather's Journey*, the author is telling a personal history, this time about his mother's journey from America to Japan around the 1950's. May is a teenager when her family moves back to Japan. She has to attend high school over again in Japan and has a difficult time making friends. She leaves her family's village to move to the city where she gets a job and meets a man who was educated in an English school. He is someone she can relate to. This book tells the story of immigration, but with an emotional twist. Born American, May does not feel she belongs in her parent's country. The other kids in school call her a "foreigner," and Japanese traditions such as matchmaking are unfamiliar. Again, Say provides a story for people who feel they are from two countries. All children can relate to the desire to belong and will enjoy the rich, vibrant illustrations.

***Yunmi and Halmoni's Trip*** - Korean American

Written by Sook Nyul Choi, Illustrated by Karen Dugan. 1997.

New York: Houghton Mifflin Company

Sook Nyul Choi and Karen Dugan team up again for Yunmi and Halmoni's trip to Korea. It is Yunmi's first trip to Korea, and Halmoni's first return since moving to New York to care for Yunmi. Once in Korea, Yunmi is kept busy on outings with her cousins. She is enjoying getting to know them and traveling around Seoul, but longs for a few minutes alone with Halmoni. She is afraid Halmoni has missed her home in Korea and will not want to go back to New York. When she does finally get some time with Halmoni she is assured that Halmoni is only preparing for another year in New York with Yunmi. This story, like the first one, gracefully portrays cross-cultural difficulties and intergenerational relationships. Dugan's pictures of Seoul are detailed and beautiful, though I cannot attest for their accuracy.

**Native American**

***Crazy Horse's Vision*** - Lakota Indian

Written by Joseph Bruchac, Illustrated by S.D. Nelson. 2000.

New York: Lee & Low Books Inc.

Bruchac tells the story of a young Crazy Horse before he becomes a leader for his people. From birth he was believed to be special. People listened to him and followed him. But white men were beginning to change the life of the Lakota people and many were dying. Crazy Horse sought a vision so that he may know how to help his people. Nelson's illustrations are directly influenced by the ledger book drawings of Plains Indian artists in the late 1800's and early 1900's. There is an author's note and illustrator's note at the end of the book that offers the background of the story as well as a detailed description of the illustrations.

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

Written by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, Illustrated by Stephen Gammell. 1989.

New York: Holiday House

Sneve has compiled poems from the oral tradition of North American Indians and contemporary tribal poets. The selections reflect the themes of American Indian youth and represent many different tribes. Some are lullabies, some songs, and some are descriptions of the rites of passage from youth to adulthood. All reflect Native American youth. The illustrations depict the cultures of various tribes and complement the poetry beautifully.

***Gift Horse*** - Lakota Indian

Written and Illustrated by S.D. Nelson. 1999.

New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

Gift Horse tells the story of a young Lakota Indian learning what it means to become a warrior. The story takes place when buffalo were plenty and other tribes were sometimes enemies. The book tells of traditional events that took place before a boy would be considered a man and a warrior, such as killing his first buffalo, joining the other men in the sweat lodge, and going on a Vision Quest. The colorful illustrations are directly influenced by the ledger book drawings of Plains Indian artists of the late 1800's and early 1900's. The author's note at the end of the story places a historical perspective on the text and the illustrations. Both are equally fascinating for all audiences.

***Grandmother's Dreamcatcher*** - Chippewa

Written by Becky Ray McCain, Illustrated by Stacey Schuett. 1998.

Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company

Kimmy, a young Chippewa girl, has been having bad dreams. She is staying with her Grandmother who shows her a dreamcatcher and tells her the story of its origin. Together they make a dreamcatcher for above Kimmy's bed. Kimmy's relationship with her Grandmother is warmly portrayed in both text and illustration. This picture book is one of very few contemporary depictions of Native American life, and the story will speak to all children. Children will relate to Kimmy's childhood fears and find comfort in the solution to her bad dreams.

***The Heart of a Chief*** - Native American

Written by Joseph Bruchac. Chapter book. 1998.

New York: Dial Books for Young Readers

Chris lives on the Penacook Indian Reservation with his grandfather, aunt and sister. During the first half of his sixth grade year he is faced with some tough issues that will bring out his natural strength, determination and leadership abilities. Chris learns to stand up for his people and his beliefs in more ways than one. The story is told from a very personal viewpoint. Bruchac has

sensitively brought fourth issues faced by contemporary Native Americans, a rare perspective in contemporary literature.

***Jingle Dancer*** - Muscogee/Ojibway

Written by Cynthia Leitich Smith, Illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright & Ying-Hwa Yu. 2000.  
New York: Morrow Junior Books

Jenna is a young Muscogee and Ojibway Indian girl who longs to follow in her grandmother's footsteps as a jingle dancer. Since there is not enough time before the next powwow to mail order the tin for her dress, she finds another way to add "voice" to her dress. Smith's note at the end of the book provides a good background for the story as well as additional information about jingle dancing and the Muscogee and Ojibway Nations. The illustrations add a very contemporary feel to the story while also maintaining aspects of Native American culture. All children will enjoy the simple story and the warmth of the pictures.

***Powwow*** - Native American

Written and Photographed by George Ancona. 1993.  
New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers

Informative text and colorful photographs depict a contemporary Powwow that takes place annually on the Crow Reservation in Montana. While the story begins and ends with a boy performing in his first Powwow dance, the rest of the book describes aspects of dress and dance style. Over the years, dancers' clothes have become a combination of past and present traditions and of the traditions of various Native American groups. Not just one tribe or group is represented at the powwow. This story and the annual powwow event both represent how Native American tribes have unified and work together to keep the beliefs and traditions of their people alive.

**Latino and Hispanic**

***A Birthday Basket for Tía*** - Mexican American

Written by Pat Mora, Illustrated by Cecily Lang. 1992.  
New York: Aladdin Paperbacks

This story tells of a young girl looking for the perfect birthday present for her Tía, or great-aunt. While her mother bakes and prepares for the surprise party, Cecelia and her cat search the house. They find wonderful memories and treasures to include in the birthday basket. The story integrates many Spanish words in to the text, though the reading level is for younger readers. Both text and illustrations convey the importance of Cecelia's and Tía's relationship. The colorful pictures appear to be paper cut and pasted to form the images. Children will love the detail of the illustrations, and will find familiarity with the special inter-generation relationship.

***All for the Better*** - Puerto Rican American

Written by Nicholasa Mohr, Illustrated by Rudy Gutierrez. Chapter book. 1993.  
Austin TX: Raintree Steck-Vaughn

Evelina is a young girl when she moves to New York from her home in Puerto Rico. It is during the Depression and money is tight. Evelina lives with her aunt and uncle, who have no children of their own, until her mother and sisters have enough money to come to New York too. During her stay, Evelina finds out that her friends and neighbors are too proud to take the government assistance being offered to them, so she decides to get it for them. In the process, they learn how to help themselves. This is the beginning of the story of how Evelina Lopez Antonetty helped the people of her neighborhood get what they deserved - recognition, a good education, and local businesses. Notes at the back of the book tell of her life accomplishments, including groups she founded that are still active today. This is a story of the success of a young girl getting used to a

new place, as well as of a community working together. All children will enjoy the story line and will also learn about the hardships of being a minority during the Depression.

***Amelia's Road*** - Mexican American

Written by Linda Jacobs Altman, Illustrated by Enrique Sanchez. 1993.  
New York: Lee & Low Books Inc.

Amelia and her family are migrant farm workers, moving from harvest to harvest living in labor camps. Amelia also moves from school to school, never really making friends or feeling that she belongs. One day during apple harvest, Amelia finds a special place. Everyday she visits. Just as she is beginning to feel at home in her special place it is time to move. Amelia must find a way to keep that feeling of belonging. While the story is about a child in a migrant family, all children will understand Amelia's desire to feel that she belongs and will applaud her determination to keep her special place in her heart. The warm illustrations are an added bonus to a sensitively told story.

***Barrio: José's Neighborhood*** - Mexican American

Written and Photographed by George Ancona. 1998.  
San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company

This is one boy's story of life in a diverse neighborhood in San Francisco. It is also a story of the colorful and diverse neighborhood itself. José lives in a neighborhood where people speak Spanish and English, and even Chinese. His elementary school is named after a Mexican American figure. There are murals around the neighborhood depicting the cultures represented in the barrio. Markets offer foods for all types of cooking. Events and festivities also reflect the many cultures found in the barrio. The vivid photographs offer an insider's view of life in the barrio and in José's home. Readers will see inside a different life that is yet very similar to their own.

***Confetti: Poems for Children*** - Mexican American

Written by Pat Mora, Illustrated by Enrique Sanchez. 1996.  
New York: Lee & Low Books, Inc.

This book offers poetry selections focused on Spanish Southwest. Poems have varying themes, such as Mexican food, animal woodcarvings, nature, and one about the Tarahumaras, the indigenous people of northern Mexico. The illustrations are soft, but colorful and follow the theme of Mexico and the Southwestern United States. This is a collection for all children, but Spanish speaking children will enjoy reading the Spanish words throughout and seeing their culture displayed so beautifully.

***The Faithful Friend*** - West Indian

Written by Robert San Souci, Illustrated by Brian Pinkney. 1995.  
New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers

This is a tale of two friends who set out on an adventure, only to be threatened by danger. One learns of evil against the other and must protect his unknowing friend. He eventually gives his life to the friend, but the friend is then given the chance to return the gesture. San Souci combines the best of several versions of this Latin American tale to emphasize a friendship between black and white characters, and to give the story a distinctly West Indian flavor. The resulting story has suspense, romance, and strong ties of friendship. Pinkney's illustrations convey the beauty of the Caribbean and the darkness of the evil that lurks in the forest. Children and adults alike will enjoy the interwoven text and illustrations, and the intrigue and warmth of the story.

***Farolitos for Abuelo*** - Mexican American

Written by Rudolfo Anaya, Illustrated by Edward Gonzales. 1998.

New York: Hyperion Books for Children

Set in a rural Southwest town, a young girl finds a way to cope with the passing of her grandfather. Farolitos, sand filled paper bags with candles in them, are a traditional way of celebrating Christmas for Luz and her family. Luz also uses them in remembrance of her grandfather and begins a new tradition in the small town. The illustrations sensitively depict the bond between Luz and her grandfather, as well as the sorrow felt by the little girl. All children will understand the importance of Luz's love for her grandfather, and will learn a lot from the way she deals with his death.

***Grannie Jus' Come!*** - Panama

Written by Ana Sisnett, Illustrated by Karen Lusebrink. 1997.

San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press

Set in Panama, the story conveys the loving relationship between a little girl and her grandma. Excited about Grannie's visit, the young girl tells her grandmother all the little things she loves about her. The warm dialogue between the girl and her grannie is accentuated by the Caribbean English dialect. The pictures depict the expressive faces of the characters and the bright colors of their emotions. Children will love both the rhythmic dialogue and the detail of the illustrations. At the end of the story, the author writes of her own childhood in Panama and growing up speaking the Caribbean English of her parents. A picture book set in Central America based on the experiences of the author is a rare find. This one will be enjoyed.

***In My Family/En Mi Familia*** - Mexican American

Written and Illustrated by Carmen Lomas Garza. 1996.

San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press

Garza writes about and illustrates aspects of life in her family. Each illustration is accompanied by text in both English and Spanish describing a tradition, event or memory from her childhood. The descriptions are very personal, and the vivid and colorful illustrations include family members and close friends engaged in the activities discussed in the text. The book is a family album for Garza, and is a glimpse into the life of a Mexican American child for her readers. Some readers may find unfamiliar images in the book, but they will also find much familiarity.

***Magic Windows/Ventanas Magicas*** - Mexican American

Written and Illustrated by Carmen Lomas Garza. 1999.

San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press

A book for readers of all ages, Garza's papel picado, cut-paper art, and text describe Mexican traditions, history, and Garza's personal stories. The historical or personal significance behind each piece of papel picado is described in both English and Spanish text. Garza also describes how each piece was cut and where the lines are connected to create a piece that will stay together. The papel picado itself has significance in the Mexican culture as a traditional form of folk art. Garza learned it from her grandmother and uses the pieces in this book to create "windows" to another world. As with her book *In My Family/En Mi Familia*, much of the book's content is personal. Readers will learn from the text as well as connect with it.

***The Red Comb*** - Puerto Rican

Written by Fernando Picó, Illustrated by María Antonia Ordóñez. 1991.

BridgeWater Books

The story takes place in 19th century Puerto Rico where a young girl discovers a runaway slave on her property. Knowing that her father and other villagers will take advantage of the slave by returning her for extra money, the girl gains the help of an elderly neighbor. Between them, they

help the slave girl escape. The issue of slavery is dealt with sensitively, though the village characters address both sides of the issue in their dialogue. The author has used historical documents and folklore to create the characters and describe their actions. The illustrations portray the countryside and the colorful characters with warmth and sensitivity. Children will love the tricks played by the old woman and the expressions on the faces of the characters.

***Señor Cat's Romance*** - Latin America

Retold by Lucía González, Illustrated by Lulu Delacre. 1997.

New York: Scholastic Press

This collection of stories includes six of Latin America's best-known and best-loved folk tales. Juan Bobo is the favorite fool in many Latin American tales, and "The Little Half-Chick" tells of the origin of weather vanes. Animal characters are abundant and some are given human qualities, such as the title character Señor Cat who lives in seventeenth-century Spain. González combined many versions of the stories to create the selections in this book. The stories are the Latin American equivalent of tales such as "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" and "Little Red Riding Hood." Children will enjoy the antics of the characters and the colorful illustrations. There is an informative introduction as well as an illustrator's note at the end of the book.

***Under the Royal Palms*** - Cuban

Written by Alma Flor Ada. Chapter book. 1998.

New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers

Ada tells the story of her childhood in Camagüey, Cuba. Through stories about bats living in the roof of the house, getting lost in the marabú bushes with her cousin, and Uncle Medardo's tragic accident, Ada reminisces about the events and relationships that helped shape who she is today. It is a story that will have readers laughing one moment and crying the next. Readers will empathize with stories similar to their own childhood experiences. The photographs of Ada and her family members make personal connections even stronger.

## [Sample Literature Evaluation Form](#)

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