

ISSUES IN SELECTING MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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There are important issues to consider and criteria to keep in mind when selecting and using multicultural literature in the classroom.

With the increasing cultural diversity of students in American schools today, we as language arts educators face the need to provide literary experiences that reflect the multitude of backgrounds from which the children in our schools come. Multicultural literature can play an important role in filling that need. Students from nonmainstream cultures can profit from having opportunities for understanding and developing pride in their heritage and for building a positive self-concept. In addition, for *all* students, multicultural literature provides vicarious experiences from cultures other than their own; and these experiences help them understand different backgrounds, thereby influencing their decisions about how they will live in this culturally pluralistic world.

Multicultural literature seems to have come into its own these days. A great interest on the part of consumers and library patrons has created a demand for publishers to produce more multicultural literature. Schools are also making multicultural education an emphasized part of the curriculum at all levels. There is much to be applauded as we look at this heightened interest and at the results it has produced for the elementary and middle school. However, such a rise in interest also brings about some reasons for concern and some challenges for using multicultural children's literature in the classroom.

In this article, I focus on one issue related to the uses of multicultural literature in the classroom: the selection of quality multicultural books for children and young adults. I suggest criteria for selecting

such literature, present a compendium of professional resources that can aid teachers in using it, and offer a bibliography of specific titles that meet the criteria for exemplary pieces of multicultural literature. Although it is of utmost importance to include nonfiction in a balanced collection of multicultural books, I have chosen to focus on fiction in this article because fiction can portray cultures in a greater variety of ways. Cultural information can be present in virtually every aspect of a story: the description of the setting, the events in the plot, the actions and words of the characters, and the treatment of the overall theme. Cultural information may be so naturally and truthfully woven into the story that it becomes evident that the author and illustrator are intimately familiar with the nuances of a culture.

This discussion of the selection of quality multicultural fiction for children and young adults begins with a brief historical look at the representation of people of multicultural backgrounds in children's books and an examination of current issues being debated in attempts to define multicultural literature.

Trends in Multicultural Children's Literature: Then and Now

During the 1960s, several individuals were attempting to draw attention to the representation of different cultures in children's books—e.g., Virginia Lacy, Charlemae Rollins, Augusta Baker (Harris, 1992). It was Nancy Larrick's (1965) "The All-White World of Children's Books" in *Saturday Review* that ended up spotlighting the problem. Larrick found that between 1962 and 1964, only 6.7% of children's books had any inclusion of African Americans in illustration or text. A more significant statement was made by the mere 0.9% of books that showed African Americans in contemporary settings. Others have also studied the quantitative trends of ethnic repre-

sentation in children's books, most focusing specifically on the representation of African Americans. Larrick's work was replicated for the time period 1973 to 1975 (Chall, Radwin, French, & Hall, 1975), and it was found that African American representation had significantly increased during the decade. The percentages had more than doubled, with 14.4% of children's books from this period having African American inclusion in illustration or text, 4% of which had contemporary settings. Rollock (1984) stated that for a brief period of time numbers

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increased (perhaps as a reflection of the social consciousness brought about by the Civil Rights Movement); but between 1979 and 1984, she found that a mere 1.5% of newly published children's books reflected any inclusion of African Americans.

There is not a great deal of comparative research data on the representation of other cultural groups in children's books for the period through the mid-1980s (with the notable exceptions of the Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1975, 1976; Nieto, 1983; Schon, 1988; and Sims, 1985). But from the sources just listed, general commentary of those in the field (e.g., Bishop, Harris, Nieto, Schon), and informal surveys of the books being published, it is reasonable to say that the representation of cultures other than African American—e.g., Mexican American, Asian American, Native American—was even less.

Bishop (1991) notes that currently there are causes for optimism about multicultural literature, and multicultural literature has recently become an important part of the consciousness in language arts education. However, a recent study by Reimer (1992) revealed that not all is well when it comes to multiethnic representation in popular booklists used in selecting literature for the elementary classroom or in basal readers. She found, for example, that multiethnic representation was extremely limited among the titles in Trelease's *Read Aloud Handbook* (1989), in the 1989 International Reading Association Children's Choices list, and in a list of recom-

mended reading for elementary students prepared by a former U.S. Secretary of Education (Bennett, 1988), though it was somewhat better in the selections and illustrations in basal reader programs. In addition, Reimer (1992) noted other problems, three of which were: a predominance of Euro-American authors writing multicultural literature from an "outside" point of view, a lack of teacher awareness of and attention to other cultures in the classroom, and a grouping together of certain different cultures as if they were one (e.g., Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, and Cuban Americans lumped together as Hispanics). She also noted the need to broaden the canon of children's literature and the need for publishers to take responsibility for providing multicultural literature. Issues like these are also cited by others who are examining what is being produced as multicultural literature (e.g., Bishop, 1992; Harris, 1992).

Multicultural Children's Literature: The Issues for Today and Tomorrow

In the United States today, there is lack of agreement as to what the term *multicultural children's literature* encompasses. Some refer to American ethnic experiences apart from the Anglo experience; others include experiences from countries outside the U.S. as well. Still others include any nonmainstream experience, such as the Jewish experience, or even Anglo cultural groups such as the Appalachian. For purposes of this article, I use as a working definition of *multicultural children's literature* the following: literature that represents any distinct cultural group through accurate portrayal and rich detail. This definition is inclusive and in keeping with the "multi-" part of the term, "multicultural." I recognize that many use the term to refer only to literature by or about people of color. However, I have chosen to include other distinct cultural groups such as the Jewish and European cultural groups.

One issue for U.S. teachers is making sure that books representing cultures other than mainstream cultures are included in the curriculum, in the classroom, and on recommended booklists. But, beyond the quantitative issue of ensuring such representation, there are other critical matters that language arts educators need to keep in mind in getting beneath the surface of multicultural children's literature. I have chosen to highlight three: defining "cultural group," the need for "culturally conscious" literature, and the importance of an "inside perspective."

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Defining Cultural Group

A major problem in defining “cultural group” is that many times cultures are linked into cultural conglomerates with an umbrella label such as “Native American,” “Asian American,” or “Hispanic American.” Differences among the many cultures within each cultural conglomerate are substantial. For example, Pakistan and Cambodia are both Asian, yet each culture is distinctly different from the other. The life of 11-year-old Shabanu in present-day Pakistan in *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* (Staples, 1989) takes place in a very different world from that of 12-year-old Dara in *The Clay Marble*, set in contemporary Cambodia (Ho, 1991). Shabanu faces decisions and challenges that reflect her life as a daughter of a nomad on the Cholistan Desert. Dara faces her decisions and challenges as a member of a refugee family searching for a way to keep themselves alive, together, and with hope of rebuilding what they have lost in war-torn Cambodia.

Another problem in defining cultural group is that of excluding some cultures. For example, Jewish people feel themselves to be a distinct cultural group, yet in discussions of multicultural literature, they are usually not included. Jane Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic* (1988) is an example of a story based on Jewish religion and history. As Hannah celebrates the Passover Seder and opens the door to symbolize the welcoming of the prophet Elijah, she finds that she has stepped back in time to 1942. Jewish culture is an integral part of the story, and readers are given a view of Jewish religion and history.

Also, the exclusion of European Americans in discussions of multicultural literature denies representation of the distinct cultures of many. Patricia Polacco’s numerous books telling of her Jewish Ukranian cultural heritage meet the criteria for good multicultural literature but again are not typically included in such discussions. Books like *Thunder Cake* (Polacco, 1990) are based on Polacco’s own family, set in Michigan, telling how their Babushka shared with the grandchildren their Russian cultural heritage.

Culturally Conscious Literature

The issue of “culturally conscious” authors and books is raised by Harris (1990). She argues that quality multicultural literature presents cultural experiences in culturally and historically authentic ways. According to Harris, culturally conscious books “provide exceptional aesthetic experiences; they enter-

tain, educate, and inform; and they engender racial pride” (p. 551). Thus, with multicultural literature, evaluation of the piece must include the criteria for good literature, as well as the criteria for cultural consciousness. An example of a book meeting such criteria is Yoko Kawashima Watkins’ *So Far From the Bamboo Grove* (1986), a sensitively told story of a young Japanese girl’s escape from Korea during World War II. Another excellent one is Mildred Taylor’s *The Gold Cadillac* (1987) in which the

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harsh realities of racial discrimination in the American South during World War II are encountered by an African American family driving from Ohio to Mississippi in their new gold Cadillac. In both, the rich details are historically and culturally accurate, and the story itself meets the criteria for good literature.

Inside Perspective

Many authors discuss differences in multicultural literature written from an insider’s perspective versus that of an outsider (see, e.g., Bishop, 1992; Harris, 1992). An inside perspective is one that portrays a cultural group from the point of view of one who is a member of the group. An outside perspective is the portrayal of a cultural group by one who is not a member of the group. An inside perspective is more likely to give an authentic view of what members of the cultural group believe to be true about themselves, whereas an outside perspective gives the view of how others see the particular group’s beliefs and behaviors. This difference in voice determines how readers will perceive the culture depicted.

There is much validity in the argument that writing comes from personal cultural experience. Living within a culture leads to an understanding of the distinctive nuances of the culture. Such a voice speaks as a representative of the culture; cultural details are a natural part of the story. Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard’s stories, *Chita’s Christmas Tree* (1989) and *Aunt Flossie’s Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)* (1991), reflect her experiences of growing up in an African American family. Because they are based on

first-hand experience, the culture is portrayed authentically.

However, there are some authors who successfully write of another cultural group's experiences with a sensitivity gained through extensive research and participation in cultural groups outside their own. For example, Suzanne Fisher Staples, author of *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* (1989), has gained acclaim for the authenticity reflected in this story set in Pakistan, a place where she lived for many years and had first-hand opportunity to gain an understanding of a culture from which she did not originate. Also, Arnold Adoff is known for his culturally accurate portrayal of the African American experiences in books like *Black Is Brown Is Tan* (1973), yet he was not born with that heritage.

On the other hand, being born into a cultural heritage does not give expertise in it if one has essentially lived outside that culture. For example, Asian Americans who have been adopted and raised in a cultural group other than the one in which they were born typically understand more about the adoptive culture. Still others may have been raised within a cultural group, yet have chosen not to identify with it and find it difficult to explain to others what it means to be a member of that cultural group.

Going beyond the issue of whether the author is a member of the culture or not, Barrerra (1992) raises another point about perspective. She maintains that it is important to consider the audience for whom the book was originally intended. She sees differences in author intent and in the nuances of the language used for each of the following: books produced in the USA for American children, books produced in the USA for bilingual children, or books produced in other countries for their children. In particular, she considers Spanish language materials, noting, for example, that books originally published in Spain for the children there use Spanish in a way that varies from the Spanish familiar to children raised with Mexican American Spanish in the United States. This question is not only important in regard to Spanish language materials but also for all materials produced for one audience but used by another.

Criteria for Selecting Quality Multicultural Children's Literature

There is by no means a consensus on the issues about multicultural literature raised in the preceding section. Also, new and important issues continue to be raised. But the discussions in the field have

yielded key points for language arts educators to keep in mind as they review multicultural literature. In this section, I address five criteria for selecting multicultural literature for the classroom. But before addressing them specifically, it is important to remember that the standards for any good literature apply as well to multicultural. For example, the literary elements of plot, characterization, setting, theme, and style should be well developed. (See Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993; Lukens, 1990; or Norton, 1991, for good discussions of these criteria.) Beyond these general guidelines, however, there are specific criteria for selecting multicultural literature. The first criterion, cultural accuracy, serves as the "umbrella" for all others. Without cultural accuracy, a book cannot be considered a quality piece of multicultural literature.

Cultural Accuracy, Both of Detail and of Larger Issues

Cultural accuracy means that issues are represented in ways that reflect the values and beliefs of the culture. Cultural information included can help readers gain a "true" sense of the culture. *Family Pictures*

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(Garza, 1990), for example, depicts a Mexican American family in a photo album style, with pictorial and text details true to Mexican American culture. Many Mexican American readers comment, "This could have been *my* family's album." On the other hand, *The Dwarf Giant* (Lobel, 1991) depicts food being served in a manner only appropriate for being placed on the family altar for ancestral worship, and some illustrations have characters in kimonos worn in a manner only as deceased people are dressed for their funerals. Japanese recognize immediately cultural inaccuracies such as these. In addition to fidelity to cultural factors, there should not be historical inaccuracies such as the biracial marriage in 1950s Mississippi in the story, *The Day Elvis Came to Town* (Marino, 1991). Biracial marriages were illegal in Mississippi during this period.

This criterion of cultural accuracy serves as an "umbrella" criterion. Included within this general criterion are: richness of cultural details, authentic dialogue and relationships, in-depth treatment of

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cultural issues, and the inclusion of members of “minority” groups for a purpose.

Rich in Cultural Details

It is recommended that details from the culture enhance the story in such a way that readers gain a sense of the culture they are reading about. Details can be a natural part of the story, giving insight into the nuances of daily life, rather than appearing as though the purpose of the book is to explain cultural details. *The Girl Who Loved Caterpillars* (Merrill, 1992) has descriptions and cultural details that give readers an understanding of Japan. In contrast, the story *When Africa Was Home* (Williams, 1991) has a child who misses his childhood home and thinks of it fondly, yet refers to it simply as “Africa.” This could lead to a view of a continent made up of distinct cultural groups being regarded as an over-generalized conglomerate.

Authentic Dialogue and Relationships

In *Pacific Crossing* (Soto, 1992), Mexican American barrio brothers go to Japan as foreign exchange students. Both the dialogue and relationships are authentic in the Mexican American context as well as the Japanese context. The story in *Secret City, U.S.A.* (Holman, 1990) about Latinos is acceptable from a literary point of view, but the cultural inaccuracies are unacceptable. The family is nonexistent as a unit, which is not true to Latino cultures. The dialogue in the book is not indicative of how the Latino youth depicted really speak. The multicultural point seems to be that the story is of generic non-Caucasians.

In-depth Treatment of Cultural Issues

There are many issues that are central to each culture. It is important to give these issues a realistic portrayal and explore them in depth so that readers may be able to formulate informed thoughts on them. The war in Cambodia is the setting for *The Clay Marble* (Ho, 1991), the story of how war affects every aspect of the people’s lives.

Inclusion of Members of a “Minority” Group for a Purpose

Characters are to be regarded as distinct individuals whose lives are rooted in their culture, no matter how minor their role in the story, avoiding the practice of including minorities to fulfill a “quota” of sorts.

The examples cited support the need for culturally authentic materials for children to read. If the stated objectives of providing literature that aids students in understanding and developing pride in their heritage and for building positive self-concept are to be met, culturally authentic materials are necessary. In addition, if the intent is to provide vicarious experiences from cultures other than the students’ own, and if these experiences are to help in the understanding of a different background, thereby influencing decisions students will make about living in this culturally pluralistic world, these vicarious experiences must be true to the culture represented. What follows is a bibliography of books which meet these criteria.

A Bibliography of Multicultural Books

This list emphasizes recently published or recently reissued titles. Some older titles not generally well-known are also included. Because a comprehensive list is not within the scope of this article, older and classic works that are more widely known have not been included. However, it is possible to cross-reference other titles by noting the names of authors and illustrators who are producing culturally authentic books for children. Also, because the intent is to introduce a wide range of authors and illustrators, only one work of each author is included unless the author’s works span more than one culture. The annotations that follow each title, when enclosed in quotation marks, are taken from each book’s Library of Congress Cataloging in Press information on the verso of the title page.

The books are in alphabetical order by author, and the cultural group represented is named following the annotation if it is not apparent from the annotation itself. “Multicultural” following the annotation indicates that more than one cultural group is represented.

Adoff, Arnold. (1991). *In for Winter, Out for Spring*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

“This collection of poems, told from the perspective of a young girl, celebrates family life throughout the yearly cycle of seasons.” (multicultural)

Alexander, Lloyd. (1991). *The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen*. New York: Dutton.

“Bearing six unusual gifts, young Prince Jen embarks on a perilous quest and emerges triumphantly into manhood.” (Chinese)

- Anno, Mitsumasa. (1986). *All in a Day*. New York: Philomel.
 "Brief text and illustrations by ten internationally well-known artists reveal a day in the lives of children in eight different countries showing the similarities and differences and emphasizing the commonality of humankind." (multicultural)
- Bruchac, Joseph, & London, Jonathan. (1992). *Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back: A Native American Year of Moons*. Illustrated by Thomas Locker. New York: Philomel.
 "Celebrates the seasons of the year through poems from the legends of such Native American tribes as the Cherokee, Cree, and Sioux."
- Brusca, Maria Cristina. (1991). *On the Pampas*. New York: Holt.
 "An account of a little girl's idyllic summer at her grandparents' ranch on the pampas of Argentina."
- Bryan, Ashley. (1991). *All Night, All Day: A Child's First Book of African-American Spirituals*. New York: Atheneum.
 "A selection of twenty spirituals, that distinctive music from the time of slavery. Includes piano accompaniment and guitar chords."
- Caines, Jeannette. (1988). *I Need a Lunch Box*. New York: Harper & Row.
 "A little boy yearns for a lunch box, even though he hasn't started school yet." (African American)
- Carey, Valerie Scho. (1990). *Quail Song*. Illustrated by Ivan Barnett. New York: Putnam.
 "A retelling of a traditional Pueblo tale in which Quail outwits a persistent coyote."
- Crews, Donald. (1991). *Bigmama's*. New York: Greenwillow.
 "Visiting Bigmama's house in the country, young Donald Crews finds his relatives full of news and the old place and its surroundings just the same as the year before." (African American)
- Cruz Martinez, Alejandro. (1991). *The Woman Who Outshone the Sun/La Mujer Que Brillaba Aun Mas Que el Sol*. Illustrated by Fernando Olivera. Story by Rosalma Zubizarreta, Harriet Rohmer, & David Schecter. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.
 "Retells the Zapotec legend of Lucia Zenteno, a beautiful woman with magical powers who is exiled from a mountain village and takes its water away in punishment." (Bilingual text)
- Cummings, Pat. (1991). *Clean Your Room, Harvey Moon!* New York: Bradbury.
 "Harvey tackles a big job: cleaning his room." (African American)
- Daly, Niki. (1992). *Papa Lucky's Shadow*. New York: Margaret McElderry.
 "With his granddaughter's help, Papa Lucky takes his love of dancing onto the street and makes some extra money." (African American)
- Delacre, Lulu. (1990). *Las Navidades*. New York: Scholastic.
 "A bilingual collection of popular Christmas songs from Latin America, illustrated to depict the Hispanic culture's rich and exuberant holiday celebrations."
- Demi. (1991). *The Empty Pot*. New York: Holt.
 "When Ping admits that he is the only child in China unable to grow a flower from the seeds distributed by the Emperor, he is rewarded for his honesty."
- Dooley, Norah. (1991). *Everybody Cooks Rice*. Illustrated by Peter J. Thornton. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda.
 "A child is sent to find a younger brother at dinnertime and is introduced to a variety of cultures through encountering the many different ways rice is prepared at the different households visited." (multicultural)
- Dorros, Arthur. (1991). *Abuela*. Illustrated by Elisa Kleven. New York: Dutton.
 "While riding on a bus with her Grandmother, a little girl imagines that they are carried up into the sky and fly over the sights of New York City." (Spanish words used within context.)
- Emberley, Rebecca. (1991). *My House/Mi Casa*. New York: Little, Brown.
 In a format of a picture dictionary, words for various items in a house are given in both Spanish and English.
- Ekoomiak, Normee. (1988). *Arctic Memories*. New York: Holt.
 "Text in both Inuktitut and English describes a now vanished way of life for the Inuit."
- Goble, Paul. (1988). *Iktomi and the Boulder: A Plains Indian Story*. New York: Orchard.
 "Iktomi, a Plains Indian trickster, attempts to defeat a boulder with the assistance of some bats, in this story which explains why the Great Plains are covered with small stones."
- Greenfield, Eloise. (1991). *Night on Neighborhood Street*. Illustrated by Jan Spivey Gilchrist. New York: Dial.
 "A collection of poems exploring the sounds, sights, and emotions enlivening a black neighborhood during the course of one evening."
- Haugaard, Erik Christian. (1991). *The Boy and the Samurai*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
 "Having grown up as an orphan of the streets while sixteenth-century Japan is being ravaged by civil war, Saru seeks to help a Samurai rescue his wife from imprisonment by a warlord so they can all flee to a more peaceful life."
- Hamilton, Virginia. (1992). *Drylongso*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
 "As a great cloud of dust moves across the drought-stricken farm, a family's distress is relieved by a young man called Drylongso, who literally blows into their lives with the storm." (African American)
- Havill, Juanita. (1989). *Jamaica Tag-Along*. Illustrated by Anne Sibley O'Brien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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- Jamaica always wants to tag along with her older brother, Ossie. One day, she makes a new friend who is younger and wants to tag along. See also: *Jamaica's Find* (1986). (African American)
- Hayes, Joe. (1983). *Coyote &*. Santa Fe, NM: Mariposa. Fourteen Native American folktales, all depicting coyote with another animal.
- Heide, Florence Perry, & Gilliland, Judith Heide. (1992). *Sami and the Time of the Troubles*. Illustrated by Ted Lewin. New York: Clarion.
"A ten-year-old Lebanese boy goes to school, helps his mother with chores, plays with his friends, and lives with his family in a basement shelter when bombings occur and fighting begins on his street."
- Hoffman, Mary. (1991). *Amazing Grace*. Illustrated by Caroline Binch. New York: Dial.
"Although classmates say that she cannot play Peter Pan in the school play because she is black and a girl, Grace discovers that she can do anything she sets her mind to do."
- Houston, Gloria. (1992). *My Great-Aunt Arizona*. Illustrated by Susan Condie Lamb. New York: HarperCollins.
"An Appalachian girl, Arizona Houston Hughes, grows up to become a teacher who influences generations of schoolchildren."
- Howard, Elizabeth Fitzgerald. (1991). *Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)*. Illustrated by James Ransome. New York: Clarion.
"Sarah and Susan share tea, cookies, crab cakes, and stories about hats when they visit their favorite relative, Aunt Flossie." (African American)
- Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. (1992). *Arctic Hunter*. Illustrated by Lawrence Migdale. New York: Holiday House.
"A ten-year-old Eskimo (Inupiat) boy who lives far north of the Arctic Circle describes his family's annual spring trip to their camp, where they spend several weeks hunting and fishing for food to supplement their diet for the rest of the year and enjoying old traditions."
- Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. (1991). *Pueblo Storyteller*. Illustrated by Lawrence Migdale. New York: Holiday House.
"A young Cochiti Indian girl living with her grandparents in the Cochiti Pueblo near Santa Fe, New Mexico, describes her home and family and the day-to-day life and customs of her people."
- Hudson, Cheryl Willis, & Ford, Bernette G. (1990). *Bright Eyes, Brown Skin*. Illustrated by George Ford. New York: Just Us Books.
"These bright spirited young children enjoy the activities of a typical day of school." (African American)
- Ishii, Momoko. (1982). *The Tongue-cut Sparrow*. Illustrated by Suekichi Akaba. Translated by Katherine Paterson. New York: Lodestar.
"A kind old man and his greedy wife pay separate visits to the tongue-cut sparrow and receive as gifts just what they deserve." (Japanese)
- Johnson, Angela. (1991). *One of Three*. Illustrated by David Soman. New York: Orchard.
"A series of candid reflections by the youngest of three sisters on her daily relationships with her older sisters and family." (African American)
- Joseph, Lynn. (1991). *A Wave in Her Pocket: Stories From Trinidad*. Illustrated by Brian Pinkney. New York: Clarion.
"On the island of Trinidad, Tantie tells the children six stories, some originating in the countries of West Africa, some in Trinidad, and some in her own imagination."
- Kroll, Virginia. (1992). *Masai and I*. Illustrated by Nancy Carpenter. New York: Four Winds Press.
"Linda, a little girl who lives in the city, learns about East Africa and the Masai in school, and imagines what her life might be like if she were Masai."
- Lankford, Mary. (1992). *Hopscotch around the World*. Illustrated by Karen Milone. New York: Morrow.
"Presents directions for playing variations of hopscotch, an ancient game still played worldwide."
- Levitin, Sonia. (1991). *The Man Who Kept His Heart in a Bucket*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial.
"Having once had his heart broken, Jack keeps it in a bucket safe from harm until one day a young maiden asks him to solve a riddle which teaches him the true meaning of love." (African American)
- Lomas Garza, Carmen (1990). *Family Pictures/Cuadros de Familia*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.
"The author describes, in bilingual text and illustrations, her experiences growing up in a Hispanic community in Texas."
- Lowry, Lois. (1989). *Number the Stars*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
"In 1943, during the German Occupation of Denmark, ten-year-old Annemarie learns how to be brave and courageous when she helps her Jewish friend hide from the Nazis."
- MacGill-Callahan, Sheila. (1991). *And Still the Turtle Watched*. Illustrated by Barry Moser. New York: Dial.
"A turtle carved in rock on a bluff over a river by Indians long ago, watches with sadness the changes man brings over the years."
- Mahy, Margaret. (1990). *The Seven Chinese Brothers*. Illustrated by Jean Tseng. New York: Scholastic.
"Seven Chinese brothers elude execution by virtue of their extraordinary individual qualities."
- Martin, Rafe. (1992). *The Rough-Face Girl*. Illustrated by David Shannon. New York: Putnam.
"In this Algonquin Indian version of the Cinderella story, the Rough-Face Girl and her two beautiful but heartless sisters compete for the affections of the Invisible Being."
- McKissack, Patricia. (1992). *A Million Fish . . . More or Less*. Illustrated by Dena Schutzer. New York: Knopf.
"A boy who learns that the truth is often stretched on the Bayou Clapateaux gets the chance to tell his own

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- version of a bayou tale when he goes fishing.” (African American)
- Medearis, Angela Shelf. (1991). *Dancing with the Indians*. New York: Holiday House.
 “While attending a Seminole Indian celebration, a Black family watches and joins in several exciting dances.”
- Merrill, Jean. (1992). *The Girl Who Loved Caterpillars*. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper. New York: Philomel.
 “In this retelling of an anonymous twelfth-century Japanese story, the young woman Izumi resists social and family pressures as she befriends caterpillars and other socially unacceptable creatures.”
- Mollel, Tololwa M. (1990). *The Orphan Boy*. Illustrated by Paul Morin. New York: Clarion.
 “Though delighted that an orphan boy has come into his life, an old man becomes insatiably curious about the boy’s mysterious powers.” (African)
- Morris, Ann. (1989). *Bread, Bread, Bread*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
 A photographic trip around the world, depicting the importance of bread in every culture. (multicultural)
- Myers, Walter Dean. (1991). *Now Is Your Time!: The African-American Struggle for Freedom*. New York: Harper-Collins.
 “A history of the African-American struggle for freedom and equality, beginning with the capture of Africans in 1619, continuing through the American Revolution, the Civil War, and into contemporary times.”
- Pinkney, Gloria Jean. (1992). *Back Home*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial.
 “Eight-year-old Ernestine returns to visit relatives on the North Carolina farm where she was born.”
- Polacco, Patricia. (1992). *Chicken Sunday*. New York: Philomel.
 “To thank old Eula for her wonderful Sunday chicken dinners, the children sell decorated eggs and buy her a beautiful Easter hat.” (multicultural)
- Price, L. (1990). *Aida*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
 “Retells the story of Verdi’s opera in which the love of the enslaved Ethiopian princess for an Egyptian general brings tragedy to all involved.”
- Ringgold, Faith. (1991). *Tar Beach*. New York: Crown.
 “A young girl dreams of flying above her Harlem home, claiming all she sees for herself and her family.”
- Roe, Eileen. (1991). *Con Mi Hermano/With My Brother*. Illustrated by Robert Casilla. New York: Bradbury Press.
 “A little boy admires his big brother and aspires to be like him when he is older.” (Bilingual text)
- Rylant, Cynthia. (1991). *Appalachia: The Voices of Sleeping Birds*. Illustrated by Barry Moser. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
 A description of Appalachia, this book gives a sense of the people—their lives, homes, and belongings—and a strong feeling for what it means to call Appalachia home.
- San Souci, Robert. (1991). *Sukey and the Mermaid*. Illustrated by Brian Pinkney. New York: Four Winds Press.
 “Unhappy with her life at home, Sukey receives kindness and wealth from Mama Jo, the Mermaid.” (African American)
- Say, Allen. (1991). *Tree of Cranes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
 “A Japanese boy learns of Christmas when his mother decorates a pine tree with paper cranes.”
- Smalls-Hector, I. (1991). *Irene and the Big, Fine Nickel*. Illustrated by Tyrone Geter. Boston: Little, Brown.
 “Relates the adventures of a young girl, living in Harlem in the 1950s, on the morning that she finds a nickel in the street.”
- Sneve, Virginia Driving Hawk. (1989). *Dancing Teepees*. Illustrated by Stephen Gammell. New York: Holiday House.
 “An illustrated collection of poems from the oral tradition of Native Americans.”
- Soto, Gary. (1990). *Baseball in April*. Illustrated by Barry Root. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
 “A collection of eleven short stories focusing on the everyday adventures of Hispanic young people growing up in Fresno, California.”
- Soto, Gary. (1992). *Neighborhood Odes*. Illustrated by David Diaz. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
 “Twenty-one poems about growing up in an Hispanic neighborhood, highlighting the delights in such everyday items as sprinklers, the park, the library, and pomegranates.”
- Soto, Gary. (1992). *Pacific Crossing*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
 “When Lincoln Mendoza and Tony Contreras, barrio brothers, go to Japan for the summer . . . , Lincoln discovers what it means to be both Mexican and American and that Mitsuo, his Japanese brother, deserves a place next to Tony as the best kind of buddy a guy can have.” (multicultural)
- Step toe, John. (1987). *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters*. New York: Morrow.
 “Mufaro’s two beautiful daughters, one bad-tempered, one kind and sweet, go before the king, who is choosing a wife.” (African American)
- Strete, C.K. (1990). *Big Thunder Magic*. Illustrated by Craig Brown. New York: Greenwillow Books.
 “Relates how Thunderspirit, a very small and timid ghost, manages to rescue his friend Nanabee the sheep from the zoo.” (Pueblo)
- Takeshita, Fumiko. (1988). *The Park Bench*. Illustrated by Mamoru Suzuki. New York: Kane/Miller.
 “All through the sunny day the white bench in the park provides pleasure for the many people who come by, from the old man taking a walk to the children playing in the park.” (Bilingual Japanese/English text)

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Taylor, Mildred D. (1990). *Mississippi Bridge*. Illustrated by Max Ginsburg. New York: Dial.

"During a heavy rainstorm in 1930s rural Mississippi, a ten-year-old white boy sees a bus driver order all the black passengers off a crowded bus to make room for late-arriving white passengers and then set off across the raging Rosa Lee Creek."

Uchida, Yoshiko. (1991). *The Invisible Thread*. New York: Julian Messner.

"... Uchida, describes growing up in Berkeley, California, as a Nisei, second-generation Japanese American, and her family's internment in a Utah concentration camp during World War II."

Walter, Mildred Pitts. (1990). *Mariah Keeps Cool*. Illustrated by Pat Cummings. New York: Bradbury Press.

"Eleven-year-old Mariah envisions a great summer competing as a diver and planning a surprise party for her sister Lynn, but half-sister Denise proves a cloud in Mariah's sunny summer." (African American)

Yee, Paul. (1991). *Roses Sing on New Snow: A Delicious Tale*. Illustrated by Harvey Chan. New York: Macmillan.

Maylin's father deceives the governor of South China into believing that the father's sons prepared the extraordinarily delicious dish, *Roses Sing on New Snow*. Maylin teaches the governor a lesson about the difference between the Old World and the New when he tries to learn to cook the dish.

Yep, Laurence. (1991). *The Star Fisher*. New York: Morrow.

A move from Ohio to West Virginia in the 1920s makes it difficult for a young Chinese girl and her family. Depicts the struggle of an immigrant family adjusting to a new country.

Yolen, Jane. (1988). *The Devil's Arithmetic*. New York: Viking Penguin.

"During the Passover Seder, Hannah opens a door to symbolically welcome the prophet Elijah, and is swept back in time to 1942, to a Polish village where everyone calls her Chaya."

Yolen, Jane. (1990). *Sky Dogs*. Illustrated by Barry Moser. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

"When horses first appeared to the Blackfeet people, they thought the strange animals were large dogs sent as a gift from the sky."

Young, Ed. (1989). *Lon Po Po*. New York: Putnam.

A Chinese "Red Riding Hood" story in which the wolf comes to visit the home of children who are left at home alone.

Zalben, Jane. *Beni's Little Library: A Jewish Holiday Set*. New York: Holt.

Beni's First Chanukah. 1988.

Happy Passover, Rosie. 1990.

Leo & Blossom's Sukkah. 1990.

Goldie's Purim. 1992.

Zhensun, Zheng, & Low, Alice. (1991). *A Young Painter*. Illustrated by Wang Yani. New York: Scholastic.

"Examines the life and works of the young Chinese girl who started painting animals at the age of three and in her teens became the youngest artist to have a one-person show at the Smithsonian Institution."

Implications for Teachers and Remaining Challenges:

Multicultural children's literature is important for the classroom because it helps children develop an understanding of our increasingly interdependent world. The influence that such literature has on children's awareness of self and others is clear. To help balance this influence, there is a need for more multicultural literature of all types. Nonfiction books may help readers gain factual information about a culture; however, it is fiction that allows us to experience the feelings and thoughts that guide the values and beliefs of our lifestyles. By vicariously living in another culture, we begin to gain an understanding of why people live as they do.

This article has focused on the selection of multicultural children's literature and offers a bibliography of quality multicultural books and professional resources. There are other important issues that need to be considered in using multicultural children's literature in the classroom. For example, a balance of various types of books should be included. One way to categorize multicultural literature is as follows:

Folklore/Legends

Folklore and legends are handed down from generation to generation and reflect a common literary heritage of each culture. The African Anansi stories have such a long history that when Africans were taken to the Caribbean, the stories became one of the most important aspects of Caribbean literary heritage as well. Although Verna Aardema's interpretation of the newest publication of an Anansi tale is presented as a Caribbean folktale, readers will find parallels to other Anansi tales of African roots.

Books about Other Countries—Historical/Contemporary

Rachel Isadora's *At the Crossroads* (1991) and *Over the Green Hills* (1992) are both contemporary stories of life in rural South Africa. They offer a glimpse of life today in another country. On the other hand, books such as *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1989), set in Denmark during the 1930s German occupation, give an historical look at life in another country years ago.

Books about Ethnic Experiences in America—Historical/Contemporary

Jane Yolen's *Encounter* (1992) shows a Taino perspective on arrival of Christopher Columbus, offering an alternative historical perspective of this event. Gary Soto's *Neighborhood Odes* (1992) is a series of odes celebrating the everyday life experiences of a Mexican American growing up in California.

Teachers, when selecting multicultural children's literature for curriculum use, can monitor the collection and attempt to offer a balance of books in the above three areas in order to ensure as complete a

. . . there is a need for more multicultural literature depicting . . . more contemporary situations . . . allowing a look into the current life styles rather than overemphasizing historical heritage.

picture as possible. Furthermore, a balance among genres, including poetry, biography, other nonfiction works, and fiction that depicts a wide spectrum of lives, is highly desirable.

Sims Bishop (1992) classifies books by the degree to which culture plays a role in the story. She identifies these as specific, generic, and neutral. Culturally specific books are those which "illuminate the experience of growing up a member of a particular, non-white cultural group" (p. 44). An example of a culturally specific book is Laurence Yep's *The Star Fisher* (1991), loosely based on the story of his grandmother's immigration to America in the 1920s. Generically American books are ones that "contain few, if any, specific details that might serve to define those characters culturally" (p. 45). *Con Mi Hermano/With My Brother*, by Eileen Roe (1991), depicts a preschool boy enjoying many activities with an older brother. Because such experiences are not specific only to the Hispanic culture, it is considered a generically American book. Culturally neutral books are ones that are not culturally bound, yet depict characters who happen to be of various cultures.

Also, there is a need for more multicultural literature depicting a greater diversity of experiences within each cultural group. More contemporary situa-

tions need to be portrayed, allowing a look into the current life styles rather than overemphasizing historical heritage.

Because teachers select and guide the use of multicultural literature in their classrooms, their attitudes and background play a critical role in the multicultural experiences children have through literature. Thus, responsibility for culturally conscious literary experiences is in the hands of teachers. Teachers themselves must be readers of multicultural literature at all levels. Literature for adults, young adults, and children can help teachers build their own background as they vicariously experience other cultures.

It is difficult to have a depth of understanding of the unique characteristics of various cultures. Teachers can rely on parents and others in the community as resources for determining authenticity of cultural portrayal. In addition, there are written sources of information and various reviews of multicultural literature. A list of such resources is included at the end of this article under the heading "Professional Reference Materials."

Also, although it is important to recognize the uniqueness of various cultures, it is equally important to recognize similarities across cultures. There are basic values and experiences that all cultures share. For example, Mitsumasa Anno's *All in a Day* (1986) is a book that exemplifies both the diversity

. . . although it is important to recognize the uniqueness of various cultures, it is equally important to recognize similarities across cultures.

and the similarities across cultures. Anno's vision for world peace begins with helping children understand the world around them. He attempts to accomplish this by showing how, in one 24-hour period, children all around the world participate in similar kinds of activities—e.g., eating, sleeping, playing, and celebrating New Year's. However, the activities are carried on somewhat differently, depending on the country these children live in. Books such as this one can help children begin to understand the world around them.

A full discussion of issues like these is beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, the recom-

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mended reading list of professional books that follows can help provide more complete discussion.

In many ways, the use of multicultural children's literature in the classroom hinges on selection. For that reason, I have focused on issues to keep in mind when choosing books for the classroom. I have offered criteria for the selection of multicultural literature and provided a list of some of the quality books that adhere to those criteria.

It is hoped that issues raised in this article will be considered as teachers choose books and that the bibliographies provide useful resources. Multicultural books deserve a place in the canon of children's literature, and teachers can take the steps necessary for their inclusion in children's reading.

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