

Why Diversity in Children's Books is Important, A Framework for Cultivating a Multicultural Library and A List of Books Reviewed

by
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Honors Thesis

Appalachian State University

The Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Science
May, 2024

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The Importance of a Multicultural Library

This project was inspired by the recent book bannings and censorship in education bills that have been popping up across the country. I had only heard of a few, but this was not an isolated instance. 137 of these bills have been introduced across 35 states. I knew these bills were bad news, but wanted to look into the research and theory that proves that. Unfortunately, these bills are still a recent phenomenon so there is not much research to be found. I decided the best place to begin was to look at the importance of a multicultural library. Multicultural libraries are important for several reasons. They improve student engagement in reading, improve empathy in students, and tell students they matter. I also wanted to look into how to build a multicultural library and found a set of criteria for evaluating books from the *Essentials of Children's Literature, Ninth Edition* textbook, written by Short, K., Lynch-Brown, C., & Tomlinson, C. These criteria are as follows:

1. Authenticity of cultural beliefs author/illustrator insider's perspective?
2. Accuracy of cultural details (such as food, clothing, homes, speech patterns, etc.)
3. Integration of culturally authentic language
4. Power relationships between characters
5. Perspectives and audience
6. Balance between historic and contemporary views of groups

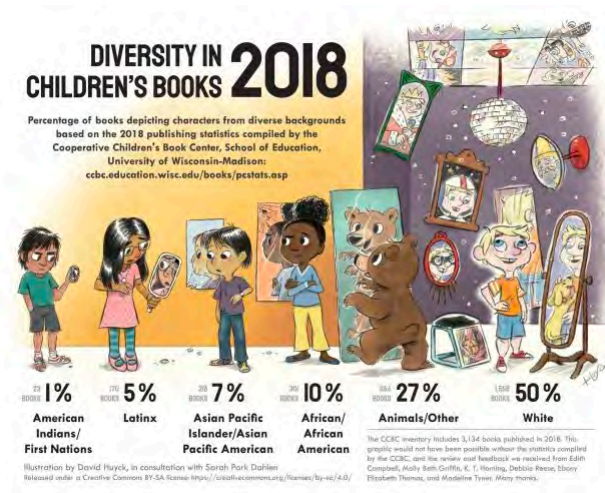
7. Adequate representation of any group within a collection of books.

I've also evaluated some books for a multicultural library, focusing on African-American literature to allow a deep dive. These books include *An American Story* and *The Undefeated*, both by Kwame Alexander, *Black Girl Magic*, by Mahogany Brown, *I Am Every Good Thing*, by Derrick Barnes, *Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me*, written by Daniel Beaty, *Hair Love*, by Matthew A. Cherry, and *Mae Among The Stars*, by Roda Ahmed.

The Importance of a Multicultural Library

Education has always been a tool for liberty. In 1830, an educator at the New York African Free School wrote "What is the first requisite in paving the way for the total abolition of slavery? We should answer, *education*. What is the second? And third? - our answer will still be as before – education." (Educator, 1830). Although it has been nearly 200 years since this was written, and slavery has since been abolished, the idea still rings true. However, equity in education is not "simply rigor or access to all" but includes "teaching and learning that is centered on justice, liberation, truth, and freedom, and is free of bias and favoritism" (Muhammad 2023 p.33) Therefore, children must have access to a library that includes books that focus on "social, emotional, and cultural experiences of previously underrepresented groups of people(Howlett, Young 2019 p.1)" as a main point and not an afterthought.

The image below (Source: Huyck, David and Sarah Park Dahlen 2019) shows that in 2018, more animals were represented in children's literature than "African American, Asian, Latinx, and Native American characters *combined*" (Ferris, 2020)



Indeed, these cultures made up *less than 1/4* of characters in children's books. Diversity in children's literature is essential for several reasons. For white children, books have long since acted as a mirror of their experiences (Bishop 2015). Not only that, but the

abundant representation makes it clear to white children that they can be anything: kings, queens, astronauts, etc. Meanwhile, African-American and other children from historically marginalized communities are so underrepresented that their mirrors are small and often cracked. They don't get to see themselves in the books they read. They do not learn that they can be anything, because they are not taught that. A lack of adequate representation can negatively impact their self-esteem and lead them to believe that they are not valued by society. Not only do young children deserve representation of many different cultures in the books they read, but the representation of each culture needs to be diverse. In a TED talk entitled "*The Danger of a Single Story*", Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie proposes that when there is only one story told about a culture, it reduces the people to flat, one-dimensional beings, robbing them of their humanity.

The idea that books can act as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors was introduced by Rudine Sims Bishop in 2015. Bishop maintained that books can act as mirrors of one's own life, but only if they provide adequate and equal representation. White children can see themselves in many books and learn they can be/do anything. Children from historically marginalized communities/groups, on the other hand, do not have this luxury. However, by specifically cultivating a multicultural library a teacher can help alleviate this. I will go over the criteria for a multicultural library later, but first I want to explain why a multicultural library is important. Firstly, when children see themselves positively represented in the books they read, it positively affects their self-esteem. When children see their language or environment reflected in the stories they can place themselves in the story and internalize the positive message, whether it be about strength, beauty, or intelligence. Not only can building a multicultural library provide mirrors for children who typically do not have access to them, but it can also help children develop empathy towards other cultures. This is especially important because for some children the only time they will encounter people from other cultures is through literature.

Additionally, if a lack of representation sends the message to children that they are undervalued in society, strong and accurate representation would convey to children that they are important. When children see themselves in literature, it engages and interests them. Students engaging with what they read correlates directly to improved reading comprehension and fluency skills. This is essential as research shows that 1 in 6 students who are not reading proficiently in 3rd grade fail to graduate from high school on time. This rate is 4 times higher than students at an age-appropriate reading level.

23% of below-basic readers fail to graduate high school, “compared to 9 percent of children with basic reading skills and 4 percent of proficient readers” (Hernandez, 2011 Para.1). Exposing children to literature that reflects their own identity is especially important for children from historically marginalized groups since the graduation rate of Black and Hispanic students reading below a proficient level is far greater than white students reading at the same level (Hernandez, 2018).

Unfortunately, we live in a time of unprecedented book bannings. According to data drawn from the American Library Association, almost 2,000 unique titles were targeted for censorship from January 1st to August 31st, 2023. In 2022, more books were banned than in the previous three years combined. Alongside banning books, as of January 2021, 35 states have introduced 137 bills that “limit what schools can teach with regard to race, American history, [and] politics” (Gross, 2022 Para.1). Book banning and censorship bills limit access to books as well as content that might be shared or even taught in the classroom. Just as a lack of representation sends the message to children that they are undervalued in society, so do book bannings. Most books being banned focus on issues of race, sexuality, or gender. They target the same children who are already othered by society. These same students are more likely to be bullied as well. According to the BU Center for Antiracist Research, black students make up 15.1% of the total K-12 population, but 37% of all bullied students. Banning books that mirror their own experiences, or provide a window for students with other identities, will only exacerbate the issue.

These laws are normally vague as well, which can lead teachers to second-guess the books they put in their classroom libraries. For example, a law in South

Carolina prohibited the discussion of any topic that would create feelings of discomfort, guilt, or anguish on the basis of political beliefs. This leads to teachers self-censoring content. A nationwide representative survey of 8,000 teachers done by the RAND Corporation found that at least a quarter of those were self-censoring - revising their materials to limit or outright exclude discussions of gender and race. The same study found that teachers of color were more likely to do this than white teachers.

Proponents of these bills and bans cite the potential discomfort of students having to confront shameful episodes of history. For instance, from January 2021-March 2022, 17 states passed bills that banned the discussion and examination of systematic racism in the United States. However, as a librarian responds, "Any discomfort that arises from what we read is outweighed by the possibility of learning. If the book makes you uncomfortable, it's time to consider what it might be trying to teach you and what you are fighting so hard not to learn." - Samantha Hull, school librarian." Hull is not the only one fighting these censorship bills and book bannings. In 2021-2022, a group of teachers in Indiana fought against a bill that would ban "the use of supplemental learning materials to promote certain concepts regarding sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin"(Walker, 2022) and got it pulled from consideration.

There are several ways teachers can navigate the censorship bills and book bannings. Since these censorship bills are often vague and unclear, the best thing for a teacher to do is to contact their representatives at the state level and get clarification. If well-informed about the subject and what is acceptable to discuss and teach, one will be better prepared to tackle difficult topics without breaking the law. Additionally, stay on

top of the banned books list. Many books have been banned but also many books that can be used to create a multicultural library. Look for books that are a good representation of various cultures that have not been banned. This way, teachers can provide students with the representation they need while keeping themselves from facing disciplinary action. Teachers cannot control what books get banned, but if they stay on top of the list, and carefully cultivate a multicultural library using the criteria explained in the next section, they can still provide the best experience for their students.

Criteria For Cultivating a Multicultural Library

In this thesis, I am suggesting a framework for how elementary school teachers can choose books for their classroom library. The importance of an inclusive library has been discussed at length. There are several reasons it is important in a classroom. This includes ease of access to the books and letting the students know the teacher values them. These criteria were adapted from the *Essentials of Children's Literature, Ninth Edition* textbook and written by Short, K., Lynch-Brown, C., & Tomlinson, C. I take no credit for their creation, I am merely explaining them and their importance. There are seven total criteria, each one important in its own right. The list below, taken directly from the textbook, briefly identifies the criteria, and they are explained in the following paragraphs.

8. Authenticity of cultural beliefs author/illustrator insider's perspective?
9. Accuracy of cultural details (such as food, clothing, homes, speech patterns, etc.)
10. Integration of culturally authentic language
11. Power relationships between characters
12. Perspectives and audience
13. Balance between historic and contemporary views of groups
14. Adequate representation of any group within a collection of books.

When looking at books to build up a multicultural library, there are a few guidelines one should follow. First, teachers can ask themselves if the author and illustrator of a book are a member of the community they are writing about. Not only will this increase the cultural authenticity of the book but also “uplift authors from marginalized groups who are writing stories about marginalized characters within that group”(*The importance of #OwnVoices 2023* para.2). Authors writing inside their identity group are less likely to “resort to using stereotypes or inaccuracies”(*The importance of #OwnVoices 2023*) in their novels because they understand firsthand how problematic and harmful they can be. Books can act as mirrors into a child's own life; or as a window into that of others. Children from a dominant social group (in the USA, Caucasian) have never had trouble finding books that mirror their experiences. However, the same cannot be said for children from historically marginalized communities, such as African-American children. When children cannot find themselves in the books they read or when the representation is inaccurate or stereotypical, they learn that the society they

exist in devalues them. Additionally, children from dominant social groups could do with a window into the lives of their peers belonging to other social groups. With racism being a prevalent problem, and people's tendency to auto-segregate (that is, separate into homogeneous groups naturally), a multicultural library might very well be the only place they encounter someone different from them.

One way to discover whether authors are part of the community they are writing about is to do a little bit of research into the authors. One place to look is to read the author's notes when evaluating books. In *Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream For Me*, written by Daniel Beaty, the dad in question disappears one day. On a simple read-through, it might seem as though Daniel Beaty, the author, is perpetuating the stereotype that black fathers don't stick around. However, when one reads his note, one learns that Beaty's own father was incarcerated when he was young and that he wrote this story to address the pain this caused, and to encourage young children going through a similar experience. Another good place to start when looking for books written by people who share an identity with the characters is #ownvoices. This [website](#) lists a variety of #ownvoices books from a variety of identities, including African American, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, LGBTQIA+, and Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses. Although the intention behind #ownvoices is sound, language has started to move away from it to the idea of writing from the perspective of a "cultural insider" (Yao 2022). #ownvoices has become a blanket marketing term so using "cultural insider" and specifying the culture can help teachers be more specific and intentional.

The second step is to look at the cultural details provided in the text and illustrations. Make sure that they are accurate. To be culturally authentic, they must accurately depict “beliefs and values and depict the accurate details of everyday life” (Short, Day & Schroeder 2016) of that specific culture. Children must see themselves accurately depicted in the books they read, as a lack of representation can lead to degradation of self-worth. Additionally, a multicultural library can increase a student’s engagement with reading as they have access to a wide range of interesting topics.

A teacher also needs to make sure that they cultivate a library that covers a range of experiences in a specific culture. The experience of a black family living in the city in the present day will be wildly different from the experiences of a black family living in the country in the 1950s, for example. More than likely, a children's book will only be able to cover one or two experiences, which is why it is important to have a variety of from the culture in question. Some books, such as *The Undefeated* by Kwame Alexander will reference multiple experiences from a group (and historical and contemporary figures in history) but will not have the opportunity to explore any of them in depth, although this does not mean one should ignore the book when building their library.

In *Mae Among the Stars* written by Roda Ahmen, Mae wants to be an astronaut. After telling her teacher this, the teacher responds “Are you sure you don’t want to be a nurse? Nursing would be a good profession for someone like you” (Ahmen 2018). This could be a commentary on gender equality in STEM. It is the experience of many black girls (and girls in general) to be told what they can and can’t do, especially when it

comes to STEM subjects. *Mae Among the Stars* is a great book to use to encourage young girls to chase their dreams, wherever they may lead.

The third criterion to evaluate is whether the book incorporates the language or dialect of a marginalized group. Language and identity are inherently connected. Embedded within language are the values and beliefs of one's identity. Not only that, but it is by using language that one is able to share these values and beliefs with others. To deny someone access to their mother tongue is to deny them parts of their identity. Many African American students speak both what some would call "correct English" i.e. Mainstream English, and "incorrect English" i.e. African-American Vernacular English. These terms do not reflect my thoughts on language, but rather the idea that society and school teach us that "certain dialects and slang words are "improper" and denote a lack of intelligence/refinement" (Garcia, 2015).

This idea is not foreign to April Baker Bell, the author of *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*. In a video with the same title, she shares a conversation she had with black students, who fall victim to the idea that African American Vernacular English (AAVE) uses incorrect grammar, pushing back against this notion, saying that "this is the way we communicate with family and friends"(Baker Bell 2020). Bell also states that language affects how someone interacts with and participates in the world around them. Much like a teacher would include books that represent and integrate the Spanish language for Spanish-speaking students, they should look for books that include African-American Vernacular English. They can find a list of black literature for children and young adults that showcases the connection between black language and black identity at [Black Linguistic Justice's](#) website. The

author of one of these books, *On The Come Up*, Angie Thomas writes “I feel as if I would be doing my readers a big disservice if I didn't address the fact that so often young people are criticized and policed for HOW they speak... we so often tell young people how they should speak instead of listening to what they have to say.” (Thomas). However, AAVE is not required. If a book is a great representation but does not include AAVE, it should not be excluded from a library. That’s not to say the language aspect is not important, but because of the way AAVE is perceived in society, I have only had success finding it in poetry books. If a teacher thinks a book would be a great addition to their library, but it does not meet the language criteria, they should include it anyway.

Fourthly, look at the power relationship between characters in a book. How are problems solved and who is in leadership roles? Just because a book might include representation, does not automatically make that *good* representation. As teachers are cultivating their classroom libraries, it is essential that they carefully examine the power relationships. Make sure one culture isn’t being portrayed as subservient to another culture. Research shows that a lack of empowering representation “can lead to internalized racism, and the reinforcement of systemic racism which impacts Black student experiences”(Ishizuka, Stephens, 2019). This, in turn, leads to “disproportionate juvenile incarceration, [and] lower graduation rates”(Ishizuka, Stephens, 2019) among other things.

Meeting this criterion differs for different books. In books such as *An American Story* by Kwame Alexander, written from the perspective of a teacher trying to help her students understand this horrific history it might show a power imbalance between white and black characters. However, these books can emphasize the resilience and

determination of black people, making it clear to the reader that they weren't complicit in their enslavement or oppression, and that they are in no way inferior to white people.

Teachers must also be careful of representing “white saviors” in the books they collect. The white savior ideology dates back centuries and is the misguided idea that white people “inherently had the knowledge, ingenuity, and skills to solve other people's problems worldwide” (Murphy, 2023). According to Nigerian-American novelist Teju Cole, the white savior complex is not about justice, but rather about “having a big emotional experience that validates privilege”(Ishizuka, Stephens, 2019). Unfortunately, identifying books that perpetuate the idea of white saviors will not always be easy. Take *Horton Hears a Who*, for example. Although it has been referred to as an “allegory advocating equal treatment of all people” (Nel, “Dr. Seuss” p.54), several scholars believe that the Whos represent the Japanese. In the book, the Whos are depicted as small and helpless, and they must be saved by Horton, who represents the white savior.

The fifth thing to look at is the perspective portrayed in the story and the audience it is intended for. Is the story told from the Point of View (PoV) of a marginalized group or is it about a marginalized group told from a non-marginalized perspective, ie, Western European Americans? Take, for example, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This book includes the story of a black man falsely accused of attacking a white woman but is told from the perspective of a little white girl. Although the book focuses on a “child's awakening to racism and prejudice in the American South” (Fine & Foca, 2023), it could have gained much by including the POV of the black man. Although, since Harper Lee was a white woman, she would have needed to be careful not to resort to stereotypes.

Another thing to look at in this criterion is who the story is meant for. Is it meant to provide a mirror for underrepresented groups to see themselves in or a window through which non-marginalized groups learn about marginalized groups? Portraying the perspective of various cultures can help students develop empathy towards people of that culture. When the book allows students to walk a mile in the shoes of another, they learn to appreciate their struggles and this leads to a more interconnected community. On the other hand, when students are not exposed to perspectives of other cultures, it “perpetuates harmful biases and stereotypes, leading to prejudice and exclusion.”(Wacera, 2023)

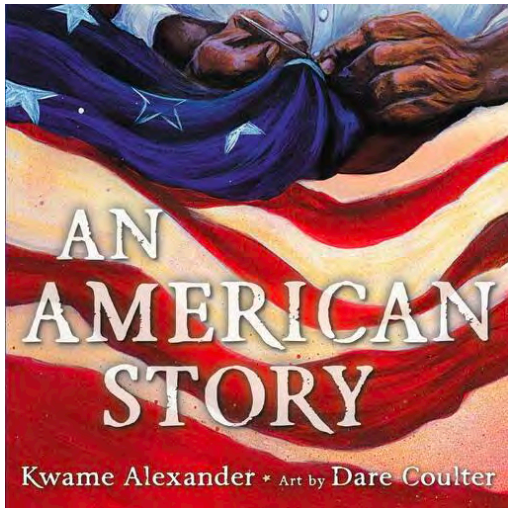
The sixth criterion is balancing historic, contemporary, and casual depictions of specific cultural groups. Teachers should make sure they have books that balance historic ideas, such as slavery or civil rights (such as Kwame Alexander's *An American Story*), with contemporary books that celebrate blackhood and black joy (Jewel Davis, personal communication, October 31st, 2023) (such as *Black Girl Magic* or *I Am Every Good Thing*). Also, look for books with casual blackness. That is, books where the characters are black but that isn't the focus of the book(Jewel Davis, personal communication, October 31st, 2023). An example of this would be *The King Of Kindergarten* or *The Queen of Kindergarten*, both written by Derrick Barnes.

The seventh criterion focuses on providing adequate representation of a culture, being careful to avoid stereotyping and over-representation. Some stereotypes have a basis in truth and have been blown out of proportion by the media. One way to avoid stereotypes is to have a balance of books in your library. For example, if a library features a book such as “*Knock Knock My Dad's Dream for Me*” that includes an absent

or incarcerated father, make sure to include a book such as *Hair Love* that depicts a present black father. Also, avoid representing only one story from a culture. If a library only includes books that depict the struggles of black people, black students will internalize that. Instead make sure to include books that celebrate black joy, such as *I Am Every Good Thing*” or *Black Girl Magic*. Both of these books celebrate blackness, which is an essential idea to include in a teacher’s multicultural library.

Books Evaluated and Approved for a Multicultural Library

I have collected several children’s books, evaluated with the above criteria. While this is by no means an exhaustive list it includes several books I think are essential for any multicultural library. For the sake of brevity, I have only included seven books here, but there are so many great books out there that every teacher should do their own research and evaluation. I intend this list as a way to get started, but teachers will need to finish their library on their own. Additionally, I want to acknowledge my position. I have focused heavily on African-American literature in this thesis, but I myself am white. I have no intention of talking over African Americans and if they tell you something different than I have, please listen to them. However, as any teacher, I will teach many students from different cultural backgrounds. I need to be able to evaluate books for any culture, and that is where the criteria listed above can help.



An American Story written by Kwame Alexander with art by Dare Coulter poses the question of how teachers are supposed to teach slavery. Alexander dedicates the book to “the ones who want to speak the truth, the ones doing the hard and sacred work of nurturing young minds into beautiful human beings ... the teachers” (Alexander 3). He is a poet, educator, author, and producer. He has written over 39 books,

including *Why Fathers Cry at Night* and *The Undefeated*. Dare Coulter is, by her own admission, “the black artist that paints black people”(Coulter). She thinks this is wonderful and her goal in life is to “give life to large and unapologetic depictions of black joy” (Coulter). She has this to say about *An American Story* “ From the fireside tales in an African village, through the unspeakable passage across the Atlantic, to the backbreaking work in the fields of the South, this is a story of a people's struggle and strength, horror and hope. This is the story of American slavery, a story that needs to be told and understood by all of us. A testament to the resilience of the African American community, this book honors what has been and envisions what is to be.” (Coulter).

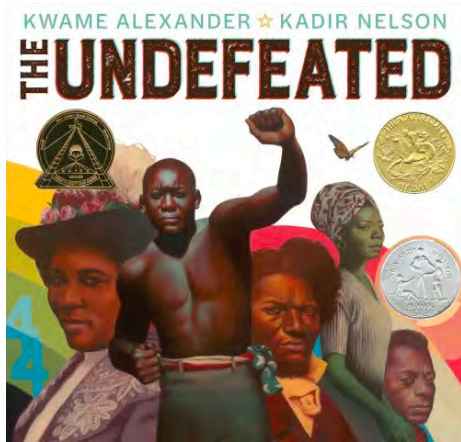
Needless to say, both Alexander and Dare are writing from a #ownvoice perspective.

The illustrations in this book are amazing. Coulter does not shy away from the horrors of slavery. Looking just at the pictures, one understands the story of how Africans were stolen from their home, shipped across the Atlantic to the USA, and made to work. The text is supported wonderfully by these images and can provide even more detail, such as how the slaves weren't paid. However, the texts and illustrations do not

depict slaves as helpless victims. After the first part of the book, in which the teacher laments about how to tell a story about “copper dreams wrapped in iron chains” (Alexander 23) and “working hard for long hours, from can see to can’t. For Free” (Alexander 23), it transitions to questioning how to teach a story about “strength and pride and refusing to be broken” (Alexander 29). This is essential to accurately displaying African Americans during slavery.

The uneven power balance that existed between slaves and masters is not ignored in this book. One spread shows a young black boy “picking cotton and growing sugar under the burning sun” (Alexander 24) while a similarly aged white boy “ate their candy and played tag before school” (Alexander 25). The book also shows a picture of a black boy with a rope around his neck like a collar. However, the book does not present slaves as powerless. Many pages in the middle talk about how they “refused to stop smiling and loving” (Alexander 30) or how they fought back and chased liberty. This book does an excellent job of balancing the inherent power imbalance that exists between slaves and masters while still celebrating the power of the slaves refusing to give up and to stop chasing freedom.

An American Story was written and illustrated by inside voices. It acts as a window into historically accurate ways slaves were treated and ways they resisted slavery. It doesn’t shy away from the power imbalance between slaves and masters but makes absolutely certain to include how slaves resisted and fought back against slavery. In doing so it focuses on more than just the trauma from slavery, although that is definitely a focus as well. All in all, I think it would be an excellent book to include in any multicultural library.



The Undefeated written by Kwame Alexander (see *An American Story*) and illustrated by Kadir Nelson is a poet highlighting several Black experiences. These include the trauma of slavery, the persistence of the civil rights movement, and the unfair treatment of black citizens by white law enforcement. According to his website, “Nelson has illustrated two Caldecott

books and has art in several notable locations including the United States House of Representatives, the Muskegon Museum of Art, The National Baseball Hall of Fame, the United States Postal Museum, and the International Olympic Committee in Lausanne, Switzerland. He has won several awards and has done concept art for Dreamworks *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*”. (The Artist n.d para.2). He has also written several picture books, including *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball*. Both Nelson and Alexander are approaching this book from an insider’s voice.

This book includes both historical and contemporary views on Black Americans. It references several unspeakable events, including slavery, the conditions of the slave ships, and the many Black people who have been killed for being black. However, it also references many Black athletes and musicians. It references the imagination and power of black people. It references specific black athletes such as Wilma Rudolph and Micheal Jordan, and leaves room for future athletes, by saying “the undiscovered” Every person or event referenced in the poem is explained in the back of the book.

Alexander wrote this book for his daughter and her friends, for himself and his family, to remind everyone who reads it to never give up. He quotes Maya Angelou “We

may encounter many defeats but we must not be defeated.” He wrote a poem about enslaved Africans with a fighting spirit, and civil rights leaders encouraging blacks to fight for freedom and justice. He wrote about how “Black. Lives. Matter. About Black. Lives. Matter. About Black. Lives. Matter. Because [they] are Americans. Because [they] are human beings.

The Undefeated is a perfect book to teach black children about their history without getting bogged down in the bad. It can help other children learn about black history, decentering the white perspective. I think this is a wonderful book to include in classroom libraries for upper elementary students.



Black Girl Magic is a poem by Mahogany L. Browne that celebrates the “strength and magic undeniable in all its bloom for all beautiful Black Girls”. Browne is the founder of Women Writers of Color Reading Room, the program director of BLM@Pratt, and facilitates poetry performances and writing workshops all over the country.

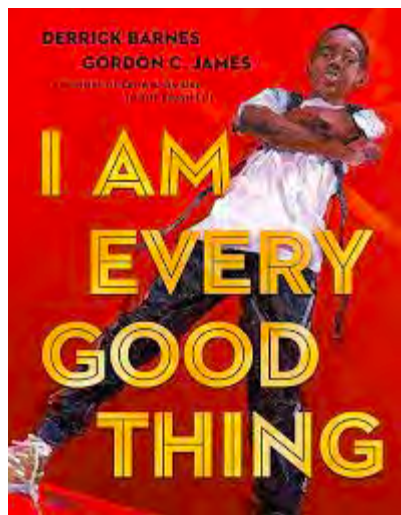
Jess X. Snow, who created art for the poem, is a “non-binary filmmaker, multi-disciplinary artist, poet and educator of the JiangXi Chinese diaspora”(About - Jess X Snow). Although she is not an insider on the black girl experience, her illustrations are beautiful, highlight different features of black girls, and avoid stereotypes. The illustrations also highlight the inner beauty of black girls, with many drawings featuring a dark silhouette, with stars shining on the inside.

Black Girl Magic begins by reiterating what black girls have likely been told by society what they “ain’t ‘posed” to do. It discusses how black girls are supposed to “Carry a nation but never an opinion” (Browne 2016). It ends by rejecting this philosophy, saying “You Black Girl Magic!” and “You are a Black Girl Worth Remembering” *Black Girl Magic* references many famous black women, including Michelle Obama and Viola Davis.

Black Girl Magic is written using what would traditionally be considered improper grammar. Browne uses phrases such as “ain’t ‘posed” and uses the word “nothing” when the “correct” word would be anything. I believe that she does this to highlight the power and strength of the black community. Black Americans are often taught that the way they speak is incorrect or uneducated. By publishing a poem that defies traditional grammar rules, Browne pushes back against this idea.

I think *Black Girl Magic* is an appropriate book for upper elementary to high school classroom libraries. It recognizes the struggle of existing in American society as a black girl and encourages black girls to see the beauty and strength in themselves. The earlier children are exposed to books like this the more confident they will become. Therefore, I think this is a must-have for any multicultural library.

I Am Every Good Thing is a book that celebrates black boy joy. The dedication honors the legacies of black boys who were killed in police shootings. The boy in question has high self-esteem and compares himself to “every good thing that makes the world go round” (Barnes 3). It was written by Derrick Barnes, who has written other books such as *The King of Kindergarten*, *The Queen of Kindergarten*, and *Crown: An Ode To The Fresh Cut*. Gordon C. James, the illustrator, has received awards such as



the Caldecott Honor and a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor. Both the author and illustrator of *I Am Every Good Thing* worked on this project to ensure young black boys would have positive representation.

This book is full of metaphors, comparing a black boy to various things such as the center of the cinnamon roll, tight hugs, and Saturday mornings in the summertime. It shows black boys that they can be or do anything, something that many books do not do. It doesn't include any harmful stereotypes and includes many activities not often

depicted in black children's literature.

This is a great book to have in conjunction with *Black Girl Magic*. While *Black Girl Magic* celebrates black girlhood, *I Am Every Good Thing* celebrates black boyhood. Both are great books to combat the lack of representation of black children, as well as what society tells them they can or can't do. Both books are essential to include in any multicultural library.

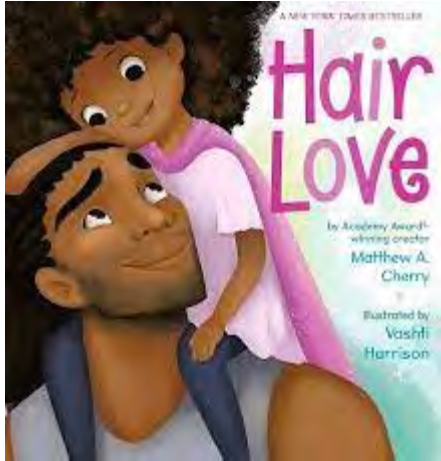
Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me is written by Daniel Beaty and illustrated by Bryan Collier. The story is about a young black boy who wonders why his father disappeared one day. He writes his Papa a letter to ask him (the father) to come home. The father writes back and apologizes for not coming home. He encourages his son to knock down the doors that he could not. Beaty is an award-winning writer, performer, educator, and empowerment expert. In 2012, he founded I Dream, a social justice organization focused on supporting young people to "rewrite the story of race and class



inequity in America” through the use of “the arts, immersive group exercises, and trauma recovery.” Beaty grew up with an incarcerated father and wrote this book to honor the experiences he and other children went through. Collier has illustrated over twenty-five picture books. Among his portfolio are award-winning books such as *Dave the Potter* and *Fifty Cents and a Dream*. He has several awards, including three Caldecott honors and four Coretta Scott King awards.

At first, I was worried that this book perpetuated the stereotype that Black fathers were often absent. I was hesitant to include it in this list. However, in an Author’s Note Beaty reveals that his own dad was incarcerated when he was young. His experience growing up without a father, and his realization that other children were dealing with the loss of a father inspired him to write a story that offers hope that every fatherless child can still create the most beautiful life possible. This book represents the hole that an absent father can leave in a child’s life, even when the father did not leave willingly. Society often looks down on families without fathers. This book gives power to the children in these families, encouraging them to knock down doors their fathers could not.

This book was written by a man who grew up without a father for other children who grew up without a father. It acts as a mirror to any child who has lost a father due to incarceration, divorce, or death. It reminds them that they can still have a beautiful life. I would definitely include this book for multicultural libraries in upper elementary classrooms.



Hair Love is the story of Zuri, a little girl who wants a special hairstyle for the return of her mother. Her father sees this and tries to help. At first, he is unsuccessful but eventually figures it out and Zuri loves the hairstyle. It was written by Matthew A. Cherry.

Cherry is a former NFL wide receiver who has played for several teams. He has also directed music videos, feature films, and short films, including the short film this book was based on. Cherry is

African American and therefore is writing from an insider's perspective. *Hair Love* was illustrated by Vashti Harrison, who wrote picture books such as *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black*. She has several degrees from various universities and is also working from an insider's perspective.

The cultural details surrounding Zuri's hair are accurate. It references many different styles and emphasizes that each is beautiful. It also fights against stereotypes by including an explicitly present father actively engaged in his daughter's life. In the story, he works, takes his daughter to and from school, and cooks for her. He also makes sure to spend quality time with her. This is important because it fights the stereotype that black fathers are not present or engaged in their children's lives. If a teacher includes a book such as *Knock Knock* that features an absent father, they must also include a book like *Hair Love* that shows an explicitly present father.

This book provides a mirror for any daughter who has struggled with her hair, and who needed help from her father to style it. It validates the experiences of children whose primary caregivers are their fathers. It represents an experience that does not

have much representation otherwise. This book is not one a teacher would want to leave out of a multicultural library



Mae Among the Stars is the story of Dr. Mae Jemison, the first African-American female astronaut. It was written by Roda Ahmed and illustrated by Stasia Burrington. Ahmed is the Norwegian author of *Forberedelsen (The Preparations)*. *Mae Among the Stars* is her first children's book. She wrote it because the only books about black female heroes she could find were about Rosa Parks or Harriet Tubman. She started doing research and found out about Dr. Jemison. Ahmed was shocked to learn that neither she nor any of her friends had

known about Dr. Jemison. Since no books were written about her, she decided to write one herself. Burrington is a Japanese-American illustrator. Although she does not share a marginalized identity with Mae Jemison or Roda Ahmed the art in *Mae Among the Stars* does not include any stereotypes about black girls. The art style is not photo-realistic but the images of Jemison are accurate.

In *Mae Among the Stars*, Mae had to overcome many obstacles, such as a teacher who told her that nursing was a good career for someone like her. At first, Mae's reaction is "Of course I believe her - she's my teacher" However, Mae's mother tells her "No one can stop you. Follow your dream" Mae does not let this stop her and eventually becomes an astronaut despite her teacher's discouragement. This represents to young students that those with power over them do not get to tell them

what they should or should not be. This sort of experience is not unique to Dr. Jemison, so including it in a children's book shows African-American children they can achieve their dreams, even if people do not believe in them.

This book is essential for young children who have never seen stories about people who look like them following and achieving their dreams. Black literature is often about the trauma of slavery or the struggles of being black. *Mae Among the Stars* is a crucial book to include in a multicultural library for elementary schools. It encourages black students to follow their dreams and celebrates a figure they likely have never heard about.

As previously mentioned, teachers are beginning to self-censor their classroom libraries. This can lead to a lack of representation in classrooms for historically marginalized groups. Although teachers are rightly worried about facing consequences for including the wrong book in their libraries, I hope this thesis can help them choose representation in this time of censorship and provide a framework for how to do so.