



More Mirrors in the Classroom: Using Culturally Relevant Texts to Increase Literacy

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AGENDA

- I. Mirrors Matter: What research says about the impact of culturally relevant texts on reading and writing development
- II. Book Browsing
- III. Sharing Fantastic Finds/What's missing?
- IV. More Mirrors Action Planning

Book lists, descriptions, and teaching guides for many recommended text selections can be found at

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Brainstorming Culturally Relevant Children's Literature

Picture Books	Short Chapter Book Series	Chapter Books

Visualize this...

MAKING THE CASE: What Research Says About the Impact of Culturally Relevant Literature on Reading Achievement

- **Culturally relevant literature supports emergent literacy**

A critical moment in reading development is the realization that the words in the book describe the pictures. As children begin to participate in storytelling with books, they use their oral language to “pretend read” the story in the pictures, gradually getting closer and closer to reading of the actual words in the text (Heath, 1983; Teale & Sulzby, 1987; Vygotsky, 1978). As children begin to relate their speech to print, *it matters* if the language children are using – some of the words in their home language or the words that children would typically use to describe the story or a particular scene – actually does show up on the page.

- **Culturally relevant literature can increase engagement and motivation for reading**

Many studies have shown that culturally relevant literature increases interest, supports engagement with literature, and can have a significant impact on students’ attitudes toward reading and their self-perceptions as learners (Altieri, 1993; Davis, 2000; Encisco, 1997; Sims, 1983; Smith 1995). In one urban public school serving dual language learners, adding culturally relevant texts to the mix contributed to nearly doubling the frequency of children’s reading (e.g., Brassell, 1999).

- **Culturally relevant texts allow students to use their schema to increase accuracy and comprehension**

A reader’s schema includes a complex network of knowledge, including background knowledge on a topic, knowledge of how individuals typically react in different situations, emotions associated with those experiences, etc. Readers use their existing schema to make meaning from text and integrate new understandings. As a result, when people read culturally relevant texts, they have a richer schema to draw from, and they are able to make better predictions about the text, read more accurately and fluently, and are able to produce more accurate retellings or summaries of the stories. (Adams, Bell, and Perfetti, 1995; Erten & Razi, 2009, Li & Lai, 2012; Lipson, 1983; Steffenson, 1987).

- **Readers respond differently to culturally relevant literature**

Research suggests that when reading texts that are relevant to their experiences students respond differently in their ability to make self-to-text connections, to engage in high levels of critical analysis and evaluation, and to make sophisticated interpretations about characters’ behaviors and motives. (Brooks, 2006; Copenhaver, 2001; Lohfink and Loya, 2010). There is also some evidence that these effects may translate to standardized measures (Smitherman, 1993).

- **Culturally relevant literature supports struggling readers**

Adams, Bell, and Perfetti (1995) describe a “trading relationship” between reading skill and domain knowledge. Strong background knowledge can compensate for weaker reading skills, while strong reading skills can help compensate for less background knowledge. Certainly our goal is that students to be able to apply decoding and comprehension strategies to make meaning from all kinds of texts. But when children are initially learning to read and or are working to develop greater reading proficiency, it may be especially important to choose texts to which students can bring their cultural schema and background knowledge to bear, until they become sufficiently proficient.

Adapted from Fleming, J., Catapano, S., Thompson, C. & Carrillo, S. (2016).

More Mirrors in the Classroom: Using Urban Children’s Literature to Increase Literacy. Rowman & Littlefield.

Some resources for finding high quality multicultural literature

Recommended Publishers

- * Lee and Low (Children's Book Press, Shen's Books, and Tu Books imprints) - leeandlow.com
- Arte Público Press and Piñata Books –artepublicopress.com
- Cinco Puntos Press - cincopuntos.com
- Groundwood Books - groundwoodbooks.com

Distributors focusing on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

- * First Book - fbmarketplace.org (deep discounts for schools serving lower income communities)
- Del Sol Books - delsolbooks.com
- East West Discovery Press - eastwestdiscovery.com
- Lectorum - lectorum.com
- Mantra Lingua - mantralingua.com
- Santillana USA - santillanausa.com
- Star Bright Books - starbrightbooks.org

High interest/low reading level book publishers featuring diverse characters, settings, and content

- Orca Books - us.orcabook.com
- Saddleback - sdlback.com

Some resources for multicultural book lists by cultural group or theme

- Cynthia Leitich Smith's website and Cynsations blog - cynthialeitichsmith.com (many book lists and recommendations for multicultural children's literature)
- I'm Your Neighbor - myyourneighborbooks.org (books representing children who are "new arrivals" to the country)
- Kids Like Us - kidslikeus.org (multicultural and urban children's literature)
- Mitali Perkins' blog - mitaliperkins.com (special focus on books with South Asian characters)
- Pat Mora's Bookjoy - patmora.com (great source for books by Latino authors and illustrators)
- The Brown Bookshelf – thebrownbookshelf.com (featuring children's books written and illustrated by African American authors and artists)

Social Media

- Kids Like Us (@KLUBooks)
- L4LL (@Latinas4LatLit)
- Lee and Low (@LeeandLow)
- We Need Diverse Books (@diversebooks)

Resources for E-Books, Video Book Trailers, Teaching Guides, and other good stuff

- Local Public Library e-book collections – often available for online checkout
- Teachingbooks.net (book trailers, author interviews, teaching guides, etc).
- Open eBooks (an app containing thousands of popular and award-winning titles that are free for children from in-need households) openebooks.net
- Open Library openlibrary.org
- Barnes and Noble Free NOOK e-books (searchable by age)
http://www.barnesandnoble.com/b/free-ebooks/nook-books/_/N-ry0Z8qa
- EPIC Books (via subscription – like Netflix for books) <https://www.getepic.com/>
- Scholastic Book Flix (school subscription)

GETTING MORE MIRRORS INTO YOUR COLLECTION

Action planning - Steps I can take in my own setting right away

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Need support? Let us know if we can help!



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