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Representation of Cultures and Languages in Children's Picture Books

Kristen Neff

Representation of Cultures and Languages in Children's Picture Books

by Kristen Neff

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

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Primary Advisor: Trish Harvey
Content Advisor: Rebecca Brown
Peer Reviewer: Katrina Neff

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A friend shared an infographic *Diversity in Children's Books 2018* by Dahlen and Huyck (2019) (see Appendix A) with me when we had been discussing children's books and trying to make sure my classroom library represented all my students and their home cultures. When I looked into the infographic, it was both shocking and disappointing to see the disparity between different groups, as well as how high a percentage had animal characters being represented over different ethnicity and cultural groups of people. However, I also understood this because of how hard it was for me to find books that matched some of my students' languages and cultures. Additionally, it felt like some groups were still not being represented such as people who are from the Middle Eastern/Arabian peninsula region (Dahlen & Huyck, 2019). As a result, I became motivated to look more into this matter. I wanted to really take the time and think about the characters I was seeing in children's books, and notice which cultures and languages were appearing more frequently within those ethnic/racial groups.

This capstone seeks to answer the questions, *What is the representation of languages and cultures in children's literature in elementary classroom libraries? Which cultures are represented more and which are still being underrepresented in children's picture books?* My reasoning for picking these questions has to do with a study by Dahlen and Hyuck (2019) looking at representation as well as recent data done by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) by the University of Wisconsin-Madison which works to do a yearly assessment of the representation of race in children's literature. However, many of these resources do not have a breakdown looking at cultures

or languages that can differentiate groups of people, though the CCBC has added on more ethnic gorups through the years since the first year they have data from in 1985. This related back to me being an English Language teacher for ELL (English Language Learner) students and wanting students to be able to see themselves in the books I have and well as feel represented and connected to the materials used in classrooms.

Chapter one highlights my own personal experience about representation in books and how portrayals of characters I felt had similarities to me were sometimes missing or negative. The chapter explains the rationale for my research and study about culture and language representation and why these things are important to children's literature.

Personal Experience

There are several factors that led up to my topic choice. The first being that while my nuclear family (parents and siblings) are a monolingual family (only speak English), I grew up with many extended family members who were immigrants or multi-lingual/multi-cultural. My extended family shared their stories, languages, and cultures with my parents, siblings and me. Listening to their stories and how each of them had different cultures and life experiences was always something I loved. This means that even though many of them were white, their cultures and languages would differ from my Midwestern American culture. Additionally, I have learned through family stories that my family members who were Germans from Russia stopped speaking their home language when they moved to America in an effort to better assimilate. There were many reasons for this and yet as a descendant of them, I am saddened by that loss of language and one more way of identifying and explaining my culture. It made me wonder how many other cultures have experienced this same loss or are in danger of experiencing this

loss. I often wonder if things would have been different if the fear of being different would have been accepted.

Professional Experience

I was listening to the read-alouds in elementary school classes, and reading through the books my students read, when I started to think about the characters and cultures they were being exposed to. This got me to start wondering where my students were in the books we read in classes. The stories often did not match my students' cultures or life experiences that they had gone through or were currently going through. It was not that the books were bad, but rather that so many were not really relatable to the students I worked with. I would see books like *Gertie and Gossie* (Dunrea, 2002), *Pete the Cat* (Dean & Litwin, 2008), *Elephant and Piggie* (Willems, 2007), and *Cat Ninja* (Cody & Mercado, 2020). It is not that children's literature written with animals and inanimate objects is not important as they can teach valuable lessons in their stories like inclusion and how to handle differences and feelings. However, these same characters do not allow for children to feel like they are being represented or seen. I remember when I was going through trying to find Cinderella stories from around the world and brought in an Islamic Cinderella, one of my students was so excited to see a character who was wearing a hijab and it started up this amazing conversation with them as a result.

When I worked in a middle school, I was so excited to see books being used in classes that had more diverse characters. The books were a bit more differentiated and would include different styles of writing. It got me thinking about how the books students were interested in and the topics they were fascinated in were rarely seen in classroom literature. Oftentimes, due to budget constraints, curriculum, district restrictions, or a

disconnect of knowing what students were interested in, books that tended to be older did not always meet the interests or levels of the student population. It also got me thinking about what cultures and languages were being represented in books. So many of the books still in schools fall into the stereotypical character who is from a middle-class family, married cis parents, cis-gendered themselves, urban area, and white or of European descent. As an ELL teacher, I see a more diverse student population, but I still wonder about the lack of representation of socio-economic backgrounds for characters, families, gender identification, setting, and cultures or languages.

Rationale: *Positive Representation in Books*

As an ELL (English Language Learner) teacher, I work with students from a variety of cultures and language backgrounds. When I started teaching, I really wanted to have books that represented my students in my classroom so they could see themselves in the classroom literature. I quickly realized that some cultures and languages were easier to find than others. This was followed by a conversation with a friend who was going to school to be a librarian and having a conversation with her about the representation of different cultures within children's literature.

Representation is important in books because it can impact how people feel viewed as well as people's exposure to those who may be different from themselves (Bishop, 1990; Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). The thing to keep in mind though is that poor or negative representation is just as harmful as no representation (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). I personally have a birthmark, and I can only recall one story I read growing up that had a character with a birthmark as well. It was in middle school and it was a play adaptation of Hawthorne's (1843) *The Birthmark*. This was a horror story and it really

stuck with me because the main female character has a small facial birthmark. In the play, a friend points out the facial birthmark as what she sees as a disgusting flaw that she cannot stop looking at. Eventually, the husband is so distracted and disgusted by this small birthmark that he works on finding a way to get rid of it. This eventually leads to his wife's death in his effort to get rid of this flaw as the medicine he makes acts like poison killing his wife. As a middle schooler, to have this be the first time I read another character with a birthmark, it was crushing to feel like my birthmark was a flaw and could make me unlovable. Just as there are consequences for lack of representation, there is danger in having negative representation.

Missing Key Research

Looking through books for my classroom library, one of the things I am seeing is that the studies I am finding of diversity in literature are that most studies are large ethnic or racial groups (White, Black, Asian, Latinx, Native/First Nation, Pacific Islander), but it leaves out some groups as well as does not give a breakdown of those numbers (UW-Madison, *CCBC "Diversity Statistics"*; Dahlen, 2019). For example, of the characters that were identified as Asian, which languages and cultures are being represented? Are some being represented less often than others? Why could this be? I started thinking about these questions as I was looking for stories with Hmong characters to represent the students I am currently working with. However, I realized that the majority of Asian characters in children's literature were of Chinese descent, Japanese descent, or of Korean descent. There are so many nuances to different cultures that are being grouped into one in the larger conversation about diversity and representation of

groups in the literature that we are missing out on seeing who is still missing altogether or is still vastly underrepresented.

Perhaps it feels overwhelming for researchers to categorize the different cultures from around the world in their data. Additionally, breaking down large ethnic/racial categories into smaller cultural categories for data could be seen as hard to define and have a clearset of parameters. It may also be overwhelming for authors to try and represent the large variety of cultures that exist in the United States as a nation of immigrants as characters in stories, but it does not make it less meaningful when a student does feel like they have been represented in some format in a positive way. Part of this also includes thinking about who is writing these stories and their authenticity. The authors who are writing are members of the cultures they are writing about or writing with members of that culture in close contact helping to guide and answer questions so that the story is not made up of guesses, stereotypes, and implicit bias.

Another reason for this is that if all characters look similar or the same it makes people who have differences feel invisible, invalidated, or flawed because they are not seeing themselves in media forms. An example of this could be if all characters are blemish free, have blonde hair, or if all characters in wheelchairs are white. Additionally, having a diverse set of characters in children's books exposes the readers to the many different people that exist in the world and makes children (and adults) more conscious of people who differ from them. A personal example from my life that I experienced was that as I was growing up some of my neighborhood kids started to LARP (Live Action Role Play) in their front yard and the local park. Growing up and seeing this I thought nothing of it, it was just something they enjoyed and did for fun. When people would

drive through our neighborhood though they were sometimes shocked or confused by them if they had never been exposed to people who LARPed. There are so many cultures and people out there that are different from the cultures and people we may identify with, but that does not make them less valid just because they are not what is depicted as *normal* or *mainstream*, and people should not feel ashamed of the cultures they are identifying with.

Context

When I have been doing some of my research into the topic of diversity in children's books most of the groupings have been broader racial or ethnic groupings (White, Black, Latina/o, Asian, Indigenous/Native American), but I have found some of the data that these info graphs or articles are referring to on the CCBC website. However, while the CCBC website says they are gathering data looking at other cultural identifiers, that information is currently not posted on their website, and they only have this data from 2018 onwards (UW-Madison, *CCBC Diversity Statistic FAQs*). I am curious if the CCBC broke down those larger numbers of race/ethnicity into cultural and linguistic identifiers for who is being represented in each racial/ethnic group. For example, when looking at the breakdown of characters who are Asian, is there a breakdown of where they live and what languages they speak? Do they differentiate between cultural groups or linguistic variations? (For example: Chinese could be complicated because you could go with any Chinese minority, as well as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, or Chinese-expat. Each of these would have linguistic variations and cultural differences and different life experiences. The same could be said for the white people who live in any English-speaking countries as the language and culture differ from the United States,

Canada, Britain, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa.). How do you group languages then, do you group them by language or by dialectical differences as well? What of characters from bi-racial, multilingual, or multicultural families, are they counted in each group or put into the one they most look or sound like? Are we still leaving students and people out of being represented in children's books, who is still being forgotten and why is this?

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to look at how language and culture are represented in children's literature and how this breaks down from the larger ethnic or racial groupings. A reason for why I want to work on this is because as an ELL teacher at a Hmong Charter school; where the majority of the school population is Hmong and about 40% are ELL students (Minnesota Department of Education -- 2021). I feel like it is still difficult to find stories and books that represent my students and their culture. I am curious if other cultures are also being underrepresented or unrepresented in children's literature.

The following chapters detail this issue on representation. Chapter two includes a literature review that looks at grounding my research and contextualizing why this topic is important. This will be covered in having a definition of culture, what does it mean when talking about representation, and resources to help teachers. Chapter three details the methods of my research including research paradigm, methodology, and data analysis. Chapter four will reveal the data I will collect from several first grade teachers classroom libraries and look at the cultural representation they have in the picture books students have access to. This data will be broken down into individual classrooms teacher's

libraries, as well as looking at all the classroom libraries as a whole. Finally, chapter five

will review what I have learned, any challenges I came across while doing my data

collection, and next steps for where research on this topic could go in the future.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In this section of the thesis, I review literature to help answer the questions: *what is the representation of languages and cultures in children's literature in elementary classroom teacher's libraries?*, and *Which cultures are represented more and which are still being underrepresented in children's picture books?* I look at and define what is culture and how this differs from the idea of race. I also include why this is important to look at besides just data on race. In addition, I look at representation in children's literature and what studies show about diversity in this media form. Finally, I will be looking at data and websites to help inform teachers how they can better create a more diverse and equable classroom library that represents their students' population as well as cultures that may differ from them and their students.

Cooperative Children's Book Center: CCBC (University of Wisconsin-Madison, n.d.). This source is often shortened to CCBC both on their website as well as in papers that reference it. It is a site and source based out of the University of Wisconsin, and had many of the racial studies for representation within Children's Literature. On the website there is a tab that includes literature resources and diversity resources—both are a great way to access and look for books while getting a better idea about what ways the books are representing other cultures and people. This website and information provided by the University of Wisconsin is a commonly referenced resource when researching diversity in children's literature.

Defining Culture, Race, and Ethnicity in Children's Literature

In order to better understand the data that's examining representation there needs to first be an understanding of what is being assessed in the studies and how they are getting the data. One of the things many studies look at for representation is often representation of race, but that then brings up the question of 'what is race' and how do we know who falls into each category?

Culture

For the purpose of this research, I use Hintz and Tribunella's definition of culture "refer to languages, practices, traditions, rituals, and artifacts that are associated with different ethnic groups or nations, that constitute ethnic or national identities, and that are used to signify racial, ethnic, or national differences" (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 400). Cultures can exist in a wide variety—from political culture, school culture, ethnic culture, linguistic culture, social culture, regional culture, to even pop culture (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 400; Leontiev, 2006). When researching using socio-anthropology articles, many researchers did not agree on the definition of culture and there were debates on how to go forward if that definition needs to have clarification for future studies or if there needs to be a standardized definition (Krause, 2016).

Dominant Culture. Dominant culture refers to what is presented as the group in power—or is most commonly seen in media, whether this is books, tv, movies, ads, or other sources (Adam et al., 2017; Ness, 2019). Adam, Baratt-Purgh, and Haig (2019) found that over the last two decades children's literature mostly presents the world as upper-middle class, heterosexual, non-disabled, English speaking, and male (p. 552). This means that the dominant culture in the US for literature is seen as middle-class,

heterosexual, non-disabled, and English speaking. It also means that those who do not fit into these cultural boxes can sometimes suffer from *othering* or feeling like they are unrepresented. These same observations were also noticed by Hintz and Tribunella, Crawley, and other researchers. It was striking to read about how it is common that as readers and educators we do not always realize underrepresentation until someone points it out or we do not readily fit into any of the categories given (Ness, 2019, pp. 461, 465-468).

Culturally Diverse Literature

Part of the description that arises when talking about "culturally diverse literature" is that,

the definition of culturally diverse literature must move beyond race, ethnicity, and language to include the following aspects: physical and mental disabilities, socioeconomic status, language variations, dialect differences, and religion … various family structures, such as foster families, and sexual and gender identity. (Herman-Wilmarth, 2007, p. 349 as cited in Ness, 2019, p. 460)

These are all important aspects to think about and look for when talking about culture and should be considered when looking at the diversity in literature. Studies about multicultural literature, researchers also acknowledge how multiculturalism can be complicated as the studies can often be based on definitions and guidelines that use ethnicity, cultural groups or color; and that part of the reason so often studies will use race or skin color as an identifying factor is in an attempt to make it easier to define and identify people—versus culture and ethnicity, which are multifaceted aspects and can be

blurred at times (Adam, Barratt-Pugh, & Haig, 2019; Adam et al. 2017, p 90; Bishop 1990).

Race

In examining the current US census data and the description for each racial group on their website, the definition for who qualifies as white is "A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as 'White' or report entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian" (*US Census QuickFacts*, 2020, "White alone, definition"). Part of my issue with this definition is that the experiences of Lebanese, Arabs, and Moroccans are very different from their European-American counterparts. One of the reasons for this difference is often religion-based in these groups. Another detail is that according to the U.S. Census (2020), people who have ancestry from Pakistan would mark themselves as Asian. Additionally, Latino/a do not have a category on the US census data website and would have to choose to have their data counted towards either American Indian or White (*US Census QuickFacts*, 2020; Wang, 2021). I also have concerns about how arbitrary it feels for deciding which regions of the world qualify as being "White" by the US government.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is defined as something that everyone has and is a part of, but also as one of the things that help separate ourselves from others (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 400). While researching, I found it helpful to read that "it is important to remember that the term 'ethnicity' is applicable to not only minority communities of color." (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 400). Moreover, the fact that "we all speak from a particular place,

out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without

being contained by that position" (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 400). So often the

concept of something being *ethnic* seems to result in it be pushed more towards

minorities of nations rather than taken on and discussed by all people—and this can be

dangerous since it can lead to *othering* or distancing and separating yourself from groups

of people for perceived differences (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 400).

     I will be using the definition of culture from Hintz and Tribunella's "different

ethnic groups or nations, that constitute ethnic or national identities, and that are used to

signify racial, ethnic, or national differences" (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 400). One of

the main ways that current studies look at diversity in literature is through the concept of

race and skin color, even though that is at times a bit of an ambiguous concept even when

looking at official documents such as definitions according to census records (*US Census

QuickFacts*, 2020; Wang, 2021). The next section will take this information to start

looking at how these definitions impact the representation of cultures in children's

literature.

Representation in Children's Literature

     Representation is important because this is how readers see both themselves and

others in media formats (movies, books, games, and others). When there is no available

representation of a culture or type of people they can both feel devalued by society and be

negatively viewed by the dominant culture (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). This can also

result in people receiving stigmatized views or *flat* representation of both cultures and the

people who fall outside of the dominant or common culture being presented in the media

(Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003). We cannot focus only on making certain there is more

representation of cultures if the sole representation provided is also negative, or enforcing derogatory stereotypes of cultures. Bram (as cited in Martinez et al., 2019), a children's author, wrote about why diverse books are so important:

> Books take us inside the lives and perspectives of people scattered far and wide—in the times and places in which they live or lived: in their life circumstances; and in their social, economic, racial, gendered, and cultural contexts. In books, people from all times, places, races, and social strata share their take on life and explain themselves to us—in ways, in fact, that they rarely would if we ever met them in person. And that helps us understand ourselves better, too. (p. 2)

History of Representation in Children's Literature

Literature that includes children as characters has been around for hundreds of years, but some argue that *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter marked one of the first publicized children's books with both a blend of pictures and simple language in 1902 (Varedell, 2019, p. 23). While other authors disagree on *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* being the first "children's book", there is an agreement that Beatrix Potter was among the earliest authors to think about their audience and try to make books that appealed, and were better suited, for children to read for enjoyment (Martinez et al., 2019, p. 49; Hintz & Tribunella, 2019). Books written for children then took off in the 1940's with stories like *The Poky Little Puppy* by Jannette Sebring Lowrey and other books published as small Golden Books (Varedell, 2019, p. 23). However, others pointed out that while there were children's literature before 1900's, often characters of color were incredibly stereotyped in negative ways such as in Martha Finley's Elsie Dinsmore (1867) which as

cited in Hintz and Tribunella (2019) "...depicts the slaves as flat characters who speak in dialect and appear only when serving or being spoken to by white characters" (p. 392). This then presents these characters of color not so much as people, but as scenery for the story, and can help build racist ideas in the treatment of people who were not white. In fact, the way characters of color in older literature were portrayed was often done in such a way so as to reinforce the racial hierarchy, stereotypes and thoughts of those times (Bishop, 1990; Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 392).

Martinez, Temple, and Yokota pointed out that picture books made or published before 1930 were mainly from England and Europe. They also noted that between the 1930's and the 1960's there was an increased movement of authors and illustrators coming over from Europe to create books in the United States, which helped to establish a more "solid foundation of American picture books" (Martinez et al., 2019, p. 51). In some ways, this gives credit to literature being predominantly shown from a Euro-centric and Colonialist perspective, in which people who identified as White would be presented in a more positive light compared to other cultures and ethnicities. This is also supported by the fact that until 1965 during the Civil Rights Movement, it is documented that almost all children's books were written for white, English-speaking children, and during the civil rights time there was—as some like to call it—an larger awakening to what the concept of *us* as Americans was; and that this realization led to the Council on Interracial Books for Children whose goal was to provide more authors and illustrators of color in the world of Children's Literature (Martinez et al., 2019, p. 13).

While I did not see statistics of diversity for authors that far back, the Cooperative Children's Book Center (University of Wisconsin-Madison, *CCBC*) has statistics for

1985; and this statistic would support that at least the authors of this time were predominantly identified as white, with only 18 authors or illustrators during that year alone identifying as Black (University of Wisconsin-Madison, *CCBC Diversity Statistics*). This number stayed below 40 until 1989 and did not ascend to 100 until 1995 (*CCBC Diveristy Statistics: Books by and/or about Black, Indigenous and People of Color*, 1985-2001). This can also be seen in publishing companies themselves and who is making decisions about books. In the journal article *What's on Our Bookshelves? The Diversity of Children's Literature in Early Childhood Classroom Libraries* the authors cite a research study done by Lee and Low from 2016 that surveyed workers in the publishing industry. Within the industry, the respondents identified between 77-89% White/Caucasian, 86-91% as straight/heterosexual, and 88-96% nondisabled. While 59-87% of respondents identified as cisfemale, this still continues to show that there is a very large trend on who is making the decisions on books, and how perhaps the lack of representation within the industry itself is also impacting the books that are being selected and published for public consumption (Crisp et al, 2016, pp30). While this isn't taking into account positions of power within the industry or other factors like family, or socialeconomics, it does give a glimpse into the dynamics of those in power and how perhaps because of at least one part of their identity they are not realizing the lack of representation in other areas. It also can impact what they have been exposed to in their own lives and how they would then categorize different cultural topics, this is especially true with things like gender identity, family, and disability which can lead to biased or flat stories that cover these topics.

Historical representation has shown that Western cultures have a tendency to whitewash literature, and how even though the United States has a diverse population it tends to put more weight in the literature of European origins. Even though there may be a wide demographic of readers who are diverse and from a range of different cultures and backgrounds because many authors and employees of the publishing industry fall into the dominant culture of being of European decent/white, this tends to be the books that are published more frequently, as well as have more representation as there are more people who identify this way working in the publishing industry (Crisp et al., 2016). This only goes to prove how important it is that there are books out there for people to see themselves reflected in, but how difficult it can be for these books to get published.

The Importance of Being Seen

A point raised and discussed by many authors is that when people do not see themselves represented in literature they feel invisible, unimportant, and ignored (Adam et al., 2019; Bishop, 1990; Hintz & Tribunella, 2019; Ness, 2019). One important quote on this idea of seeing ourselves in literature comes from Bishop (1990) where she said:

> This availability of books about variations (in) cultural groups becomes important because books are not only mirrors, they are also socializers. They give subtle messages about who and what we value in our society. When children cannot find themselves in books, or when they see themselves presented only as laughable stereotypes, they learn a powerful lesson about how much they are undervalued in the society in which they are a part. (p. 5).

It is clear how important it is to see a vast variety of people represented in literature and media as it helps to both break down stereotypes to see people who are complex and

different, as well as reaffirm the value all people should hold in society. Another way of examining representation was brought up in a study by Adam, Baratt-Purgh and Haig when they referenced a study by Bennett (2018), who mentioned that by using diverse literature we help to "engender a sense of pride in children and affirm their identity, their families, and their communities" (Adam et al., 2019, p. 551).

This concept about having all types of people represented is also presented in another manner by Vardell when they discussed how important it is not just for Black students to see themselves in books, but for students who are not Black to be exposed to these characters and cultures as well, so that they can make connections and understand both the differences and similarities these characters share with themselves and their lives (Varedell, 2019, p. 4; Koss, 2015). In further examination of this idea, other authors have also stressed the realization that when readers see representation of other people who may be of different race, ethnicity, or culture than themselves; that is done in a multifaceted and meaningful way, they can connect and better empathize with them (Crawley, 2017; Crisp et al., 2016; de Bruijn et al., 2020, pp. 413-414; Ness, 2019). In this way having children exposed to a variety of diverse multidimensional characters can help break down stereotypes for children.

Part of the reason why diversity is important in early children's books is because there has been a realization that childhood itself is not a "neutral space" but a place "where children learn how diversity is constructed and valued" (Adam et al., 2019, p. 552). This realization was supported by a study done by Lowery and Sabis-Burns (2007, as cited by Adam et al., 2019) who gave the argument that when children grow up in a mono-cultural environment their concept of other cultures comes from the paper-based

and digital media that they interact with and whatever stereotypes those formats may be showing at that time. This also exists with book bans, as depending on the group advocating for the book ban they may make a library more of a mono-cultural environment. As librarians have pointed out "activists across the country were targeting books featuring discussions of race, gender and LGBTQ identities for removal." (Natanson, 2022, para. 2). By removing these books from easily accessible areas it makes a group more stereotypes and stigmatized on whatever resources are still available and their perspective. Especially in a world where diversity is more common and people are more connected to others who may have different cultures and beliefs, but where these expectations may not be the norm (Szesci, 2012). Unfortunately, these book bans are not as simple as happening in only one area. In a Washington Post article about the book bans they stated "Interviews with librarians in eight states and nearly a dozen districts revealed similar stories that paint what they describe as a bleak picture of their profession, as they fret about and fight against American schoolchildren's shrinking freedom to read." (Natanson, 2022, para. 5). These book bans and restrictions of what literature is available for children are not just happening in public libraries but also in schools. In the Washington Post article on book bans they go on to say:

> School book bans are soaring: Although the vast majority of challenges go unreported, the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom counted 330 incidents of book censorship in just the three months from September to November 2021 — marking the highest rate since the association began tracking the issue in 1990. The questioned texts have mostly been "books about LGBTQ people and race and racism," according to the National Coalition Against

Censorship, and many removals sprang from challenges launched by White,

conservative parents spurred on by pundits. (Natanson, 2022, para. 6).

While there may many reasons to be against a book, banning a book is making that book

and it's subject matter unavailable to all in the community in a ready manner. However,

the fact that the majority of the books being censored are about LGBTQ, race, and racism

is concerning as these are topics that have been a minority culture and voice for a long

time and that are important to have in classroom, schools, and libraries for representation.

Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Doors. Bishop (1990) brought up the concept

that books are not just mirrors to see ourselves reflected in, but also windows to see

people who are different from ourselves, and sliding doors that can open up and better let

us understand each other (pp. 3-5). Which was a concept first brought up by Style in 1988

and how curriculum helps show how literature can help give readers more ways to see the

world much like windows allow us to see outside of where we are (para. 1). This concept

is often referenced in the literature about representation because the idea of seeing

ourselves in literature is such an important concept. Bishop brings up the point that just as

books serve as mirrors for readers to see themselves in, they also serve as windows so

that students can be exposed to cultures that are different from their own. As Bishop

(1990) stated, "If they see only reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an

exaggerated view of their importance and value in the world — a dangerous

ethnocentrism" (p. 7). This concept of ethnocentrism, and how often other cultures are

looked at through both the colonialism and western sense, do not really take into account

the nuances of each culture and the values each one carries. In summary, Bishop (1990)

reminded us that we must choose our literature with purpose:

If we want our children to know what we value, we must present them with

literature that reflects our values. If we believe in the importance of a pluralistic

society, we will present them literature from diverse cultures, reflecting linguistic

variety…(p. 10)

We Need Diverse Books Movement. This organization and nonprofit arose out

of a realization that there is a lack of representation in books that show people of color or

non-dominant cultures. Even just going onto their "about us" page they open with the

statements that their mission is "Putting more books featuring diverse characters into the

hands of all children" and that their vision is "A world in which all children can see

themselves in the pages of a book" (*WeNeedDiverseBooks*, 2021, "About WNDB"). This

is a very telling statement for the vision—in that there is a grassroots movement to push

for all children to be able to see themselves—and serves as a reminder that not all

children may see themselves in books, especially common mainstream books.

Additionally, WeNeedDivereseBooks goes on to define what diversity means to them on

their About Us page, in which they state diversity as "We recognize all diverse

experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender

diversity, people with disabilities*, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities." before

then clarifying more of about the definition of what can be considered a disability such as

a broad definition of disability, which includes but is not limited to physical,

sensory, cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, chronic conditions,

and mental illnesses (this may also include addiction). Furthermore, we subscribe

to a social model of disability, which presents disability as created by barriers in

the social environment, due to lack of equal access, stereotyping, and other forms of marginalization (WeNeedDiverseBooks, "About Us").

The fact that they go on to clarify how diversity can be interpreted and that diversity can cover a multitude of factors shows how complicated representation in media formats can be. Especially when they go on to also clarify what counts as a disability, and how it's not just something that is very physically visual, or based on cognitive or intelligence, but also other barriers that may impact people. Overall, the concepts and message that WeNeedDivereseBooks shares are important as it helps to inform people about what makes things diverse and how representation in books and media can be a positive thing when people see themselves in literature.

Multicultural Literature and Education. Multicultural education is defined by the National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME, 2021) on their website as the

> philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equity, and human dignity. … It affirms our need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world. It recognizes the role schools can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society. It values cultural differences, and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect." (NAME, 2021, "Definitions of Multicultural Education", para. 2)

This definition puts forward the model that schools play a role in making sure that students and staff support cultural differences and that these differences are seen in a positive manner. There is also the fact that culture, and multicultural literature and

education, as a result, is not just about race. Culture is a complex concept that is impacted by things like: race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, language, socioeconomic status, principles, beliefs, and customs (Aragona-Young & Sawyer, 2018, 466; Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 400).

While there is a lot of support around the ideas of multicultural education and embracing students and families of different cultures, there is also some pushback on it as well. One fear that critics have is that "emphasizing multicultural education in the United States may fragment out loyalties and loosen our civic ties to each other" (Martinez et al, 2019, p. 86). This fear of embracing other cultures and people who differ from the dominant culture seems to be rather counterintuitive to the message that the United States likes to portray of a place that is welcoming to immigrants who are searching for their dreams. In fact, Martinez (2019) cited Banks (2000), a supporter of multicultural education who makes the argument that:

> Multicultural education is fully American because the United States is a society founded on the premise of providing justice and the pursuit of happiness for its citizens; therefore, recognizing the culture and potential of different groups is necessary to their pursuit of happiness and justice. Yet in recent times, shifts in political views have created a climate that endangers the positions of immigrants and refugees, and even the rights of citizens that represent diversity. (p. 86)

Overall I agree with the premise and the goal of Banks' statement, however, I feel like the authors' (Martinez et al, 2019) statement on the recent political shift towards immigrants fails to recognize a pattern in American History that tends to be more unwelcoming to newcomers. I think back to American history and the things that may not

have been taught to my generation as much, but are starting to be taught more openly now like: the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Japanese Internment camps of World War 2, and the repeated acts against Native Americans such as the Native Boarding schools where children were punished for speaking their language or practicing their culture. Looking at these parts of history, as well as what is currently happening, there needs to be a realization that as a country, we have done some terrible things. We also need to continue to work on making sure that students feel welcome coming to schools—no matter their culture, and that students who are seen as part of the dominant culture realize their privilege and work towards being a better, more accepting country.

Looking through the literature there is validation in students and readers needing to see themselves in the books that they read. When people see themselves in literature it helps to validate them, their identities, and the things that they have experienced in life (Bishop, 1990; Martinez et al, 2019). Additionally, as a nation of immigrants that has a diverse population, there are many benefits to promoting multicultural education, including helping students be more prepared to interact with the diverse interconnected world they live in (NAME, 2021, "Definitions of Multicultural Education"). Though some argue against this because they fear it may split people's loyalties to countries, I think the good of this education is worth far more, and that this idea of split loyalties by learning multiculturalism belittles people who have grown up and experienced multicultural homes (Martinez et al, 2019). I also think that using this viewpoint when looking at literature can help to better understand the mistakes we have made as a nation, a society, and as people so that we can work together to avoid repeating these mistakes in the future. However, if these negative experiences are not published or written about it

doesn't allow future generations the chance to learn about them, grow from them and make better decisions as a whole. This is also impacted by who is telling the story and from which perspective we are reading our information from.

Authenticity in Children's Literature

Authentic perspectives in children's literature was a topic that I found to be slightly more nuanced than I expected. While reading through articles I found that many authors agreed that there needs to be an understanding of the cultures being written about, so that they are not being misrepresented or represented in only a 2-dimensional manner. However, none of my readings could really agree on the answer of who can write about groups or who makes the call on whether something is *authentic*. Part of this disagreement came from who gets to decide when something is *authentic*—especially if there is disagreement within the community itself. Another was the argument about authors' and illustrators' artistic freedoms and being able to draw inspiration from anything.

Dangers of an "Outsider's Perspective"

While there is little consensus on what makes something authentic writing, there was lots of concern about writers borrowing and taking from other cultures without really understanding the culture. Part of this was because when the dominant culture writes about a different culture it is often done in a manner where they are only taking, and this can easily become cultural appropriation as there is no real exchange of cultures happening (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 406; Keene, 2010). Another area of concern is that if the author does not truly know the culture they are trying to write about they can build the character and this *idyllic* culture on stereotypes and perpetuate stereotypes about

people (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, pp. 406-407). One example that I read discussed white authors who wrote stories against slavery during the civil war/emancipation time. However, Hintz and Tribunella revealed that studies reviewing these books about historical children's literature found that while the stories written predominately by white writers may have denounced slavery, they were in no way promoting the equality between Black and Whites of that time (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 392). As Hintz and Tribunella also brought up, minority groups have experienced a history of exploitation from the dominant culture, and to have parts of it then taken and used for making money from a group that already is coming from a place of privilege can be "frustrating and painful" (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, p. 406).

In an article by Fox and Short (2003), they pointed out that when it comes to the topic of outsiders writing about another culture citing author Woodson's argument

> finds it troubling that this question (about outside(r)s writing authentically about another culture) is typically posed by whites to authors of color and argues for changing the question to examine 'why others would want to try to tell my story.' (p. 11).

Short and Fox continued to write that it is frustrating as oftentimes authors of color are encouraged to only write about their own cultures, and thus do not get the same creative freedoms to write about others as white authors do. Therefore, this idea about who can write about which cultures lead to more questions about the responsibilities of authors and the ways that power and privilege play a role in this idea (Bishop, 1990; Fox & Short, 2003, p. 12; Hintz & Tribunella, 2019, pp. 416-418). The thought that because an author is from a culture not seen as the dominant culture should not limit what they can

write about, but it also means that authors who are not of the culture should use their place of privilege to create works that may not reliably represent the culture or may be a very flat representation of a culture they don't understand.

Author Freedom versus Appropriation

This is a topic that, when reading about it, appeared to be the subject of a very heated and clouded debate. Part of the reason this is such a sensitive topic is due to the fact that there is a clear need to acknowledge the difference in experiences that people of different ethnicities and cultures have in their lives. When an aspect is taken from a culture that is not the dominant culture, but is seen as interesting and then taken and used in a different manner (especially when it was originally used/a part of a culture that was significantly important, or had sacred meaning, and is now being used for a more one-dimensional creative touch, or while combining several different groups into one because they're "similar"), this is the act of appropriation. Keene (2010) pointed out on Native Appropriations that "Inherent in the concept of cultural appropriation is the notion of power" (para. 7). Wood had a similar definition for that, stating "'Cultural appropriation' can be defined as the borrowing from someone else's culture without their permission and without acknowledgment to the victim culture's past" (Wood, 2017, p. 1). Both of these definitions agree that there is power involved in the act of appropriation and taking from a culture that has been marginalized in some manner and that often this act of appropriation is just continuing detrimental stereotypes. As Hintz and Tribunella (2019) explained in the case of literature and stories,

> Though other cases of cultural appropriation and exploitation might be less
>
> dramatic, this basic dynamic typically defines situations in which the member of a

dominant group either retells stories already circulating within another culture or invents stories about that culture and its members. (p. 407)

Historically diversity in literature has always been an issue. We can see that looking back at literature that the freedoms experienced by authors seen to be in the dominant culture are not the same for those from other cultures. This can then impact both on what authors can get published, to what type of characters and stories authors get told they can write. If we argue that there is freedom of creativity for authors, but it is not being allowed to happen with all authors, then is it truly artistic freedom or an excuse for the dominant culture to write and use aspects of other cultures? It's a topic that is important and yet highly sensitive, with no real clear answer as to what is a good answer to this topic other than to work on making sure there is always acknowledgment and respect happening when writing about anything since cultures will play a role in any book.

Sources for Teachers

As a teacher, finding sources and activities that help us to better represent our students and critically think and look at the books in our classrooms is important. Many times finding credible and reliable resources for locating multicultural and diverse books can be challenging. There are occasions when just looking at the cover and reading the synopsis about the book may suggest that the book will be good, but the reader will still end up with a story that results in continuing to perpetuate a narrative that's filled with prejudice and stereotypes.

Sources

There are many sources teachers can use to help themselves look for good children's literature nowadays. While reading through papers it was discovered that there are websites that were repeatedly referenced in different papers like: the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (n.d.), We Need Diverse Books (WNDB) (2021), and TeachingBooks (n.d.). Additionally, several authors (UW-Madison, *CCBC*, 2021; Hintz & Tribunella, 2019; Martinez et al., 2019; *We Need Diverse Books(WNDB)*, 2021; Varedell, 2019) reminded their readers to look at blogs and other sites to try to gain a perspective from readers who may be of that culture and find their take-away on that book. In the case of all these sources, they also provide a starting point of possible websites and blogs to look into for book reviews and recommendations.

Activities

Ness (2019), in their research about new teachers, worked to create awareness around representation in books, and how to practice being more aware of what's still missing. In this project, Ness had participants write a bio-poem about themselves and things that represented and/or were important to them. In group discussions, participants then picked one aspect of their identity to look for in children's literature. Even though many participants were of the more dominant culture (white, middle class, dual parents, cis-family), this activity helped them to look more critically at books and realize that there are still aspects of ourselves that are missing in literature—which can better help teachers who are of the dominant culture understand the need for there to be representation of all people (Ness, 2019).

Be My Neighbor. In the paper by Wasta (2010) they give several different books and at least one activity to do with each book to help promote students learning about the similarities and differences they may share with each other. The book for this particular activity was *Be My Neighbor* by Ajmera and Ivanko (2006) which looked at children and neighborhoods around the world. In this book were pictures of the children, and Wasta encouraged teachers to have students look at the pictures in this book to bring about a class discussion about both the similarities of the neighborhoods and the differences (p. 190). Wasta also encourages the discussion to look into how the geographical location impacts the neighborhoods and activities that these children do (Wasta, 2010, p. 190). By exposing children to other variations of neighborhoods around the world it can create connections and help students relate to people whose lives may be different from their own. Additionally, it gives a more diverse classroom population to have a larger percentage of students feel represented or find way to see people who may either look like them or be in neighborhoods similar to their own. This is why books like *Be My Neighbor* are so important as can help show more diverse cultural representation.

There are many sources out there for teachers to use to help them find books with diverse cultural representations. These include websites such as the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, We Need Diverse Books (WNDB), and TeachingBooks, and many libraries and book blogs. A great activity for teachers to do themselves is to look for a specific culture or aspect of themselves and try to find it in picture books and see how often it comes up or if it's something that now that they are thinking about and looking for they may realize is not being represented (Ness, 2019). Finally, like Wasta (2010) did with their book choice,

teachers can help students make connections by looking for books that show things that are diverse and both different and the same for different people. The importance in both ourselves as teachers and our students in thinking about what we are reading and being able to analyze and make connections to the cultures and representations we see are important as they can help us to realize discrepancies or inequalities that if we aren't analyzing we may not realize are happening.

Conclusion

This chapter helped to create a basis of understanding of the topics and factors related to the research question of this topic of what does cultural diversity looks like in children's picture books and who is still being underrepresented. The chapter defined what culture is, and why representation is important in children's literature. It also goes over the concept of authorial freedom for writing, appropriation, and critical reading to understand how cultures are represented in literature. As the research demonstrated, meaningful representation of cultures is beneficial for all students to be exposed to and there are still many groups of people being underrepresented in literature. In addition, this chapter went over possible resources for teachers to use in their own classrooms to help think of diverse multicultural literature.

The next chapter describes the methodology of this study in order to better understand the representation of cultures in children's literature. I outline the procedure and materials I used in order to collect my data looking at my research question on which cultures and languages are being represented in children's literature and which cultures are still underrepresented.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

The goal of the research for this study was to see the representation of cultures and languages in children's picture books in elementary teachers' classroom libraries. This chapter goes through the research methods I used and the rationale for those methods. I inventoried several grade level teachers classroom libraries looking at representation of picture books that students had access to. It also goes over how the data was selected for study, gathered, and analyzed.

The research questions are: *What is the representation of languages and cultures in children's literature in elementary classroom libraries? Which cultures are represented more and which are still being underrepresented in Children's picture books?* The reason for this is that it is important for students to see themselves and feel seen in the materials in their classrooms. When students do not see themselves or are represented in stereotypes it can have a negative impact on their self-image. Additionally, while the school I did my research at is primarily a school with a large population of students of color, there are positive impacts on all students being exposed to character and cultures that are different from themselves. When there is no data about the books in a classroom library it is harder to understand what steps teachers may need to take for better representation because they do not know what is missing and to what extent the books and representation may be skewed to.

Research Paradigm

To answer the research questions I used a qualitative case study design. Qualitative methods are defined as a study that "rely on text and image data, have unique

steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs" (Creswell & Creswell, 2020, p. 254).

I picked this method because qualitative methods are a "…process where the researcher

gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating,

cataloguing, and classifying the object of study" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, as cited in

Creswell & Creswell, 2020, p. 278). This concept of cataloging text and image data really

makes sense when working with children's picture books as I had to assign codes to what

was appearing in the books as I studied them and the representation of cultures both

within the stories, as well as the characters and settings.

Data Collection

For my research, I went into grade-level teachers' classroom libraries and

cataloged and analyzed narrative picture books. To define a book as being a narrative I

will be using the definition from Brisk "Narratives tell an imaginative story, although

sometimes they are based on facts. … Narratives are structured to be entertaining and to

teach cultural values. … the point of a narrative is how the protagonists resolve a

complication in their lives…" (Brisk, 2015, p. 298). I will be looking at several different

classroom libraries ranging from a new to the field teacher to a teacher who has been

teaching for 10+ years. I cataloged and analyzed what cultures were being represented in

the books from culture (ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, gender, and family) to see the

representation of books students had access to in their own classes to look at and that

teachers could be using for in-class read-alouds (see Table 1.1 in Appendix B).

Data Collection Table

I went into teachers' classrooms and cataloged and collected data on the picture

books in their classroom libraries during prep time and after school. With a spreadsheet to

fill in for each of the following cultural concepts: ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, gender/identity, and family (see Table 1.1 in Appendix B). I also noted how readers knew these things (was it through pictures only, word choice, implicitly given, or explicitly stated). Additionally, I was looking at authors and illustrators to see if there is anything out there on if they are writing about these topics as insiders or outsiders. (See table for collecting culture data in Appendix B)

Interview Questions

Additionally, when I emailed teachers asking for permission to inventory their classroom libraries I had a set of interview questions for them should they agree to allow me access to their libraries (see interview questions in Appendix C). The interview questions were emailed to the teachers so that they could pre-read them and if the teachers were comfortable with the questions and having me inventory their classroom library we could discuss them or they could email back their responses to the questions. These questions were to help better understand the teacher's perspective on their classroom library and the lens they may see diversity with. The questions included how long these teachers had been teaching to see if there is a difference in representation in classroom libraries depending on their time as a teacher. As well as if they thought their classroom libraries represented their students and the teachers' reasoning for thinking that. I also asked about what diversity meant to the teacher to see if they had different interpretations of the word and how that could impact their classroom library. Finally, I asked if books came from their classroom library and if there were any books or topics that they weren't comfortable with having in their classroom.

Setting

The setting for my research was a charter school based in an urban setting in the Midwest that accepts students from all over the metro area including some of the outer suburbs. The school itself is a kindergarten through twelfth-grade school that has been expanding. After looking at the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Report Card, the school that I worked at has a 96.9% student population that is Asian, with 1.9% being two or more races and the smallest student population groups being Hispanic/Latino (0.9%) and Black/African-American (0.4%) (*Minnesota Report Card Enrollment*, 2021). This school also has a student population that has 40.9% identified as ELL (English Language Learners), and about 78% receive free or reduced lunch services (*Minnesota Report Card Enrollment*, 2021).

I looked at children's picture books that were aimed at children who were pre-k through 2nd grade since this was the student population I am working with. The reason I looked at books for this age range was that I really wanted to see the diversity in the books that my ELL students would most likely get exposure to in their grade-level classroom. In addition, I wanted to see if their home cultures and languages were being reflected in the literature around them. Another reason was that there had been research about the role that classroom libraries have for younger children who are in the preschool to early elementary school grades, as well as that picture books help give children the chance to experience their own and other children's cultures (Applebee et al., 1988, as cited in Crisp et al., 2016; Fractor et al., 1993, as cited in Crisp et al., 2016).

The participants were all 1st-grade teachers and all identified as female. Some of the teachers will have ELL co-teachers and had the majority of their class identified as

lower ELL students. This meant that over 75% of their class had screened or tested as level 1 and level 2 ELLs when screened for qualification for services. That meant that students were lacking more academic language and generally struggled more with reading and writing skills, especially complex sentences. Teachers ranged from new to the field teachers to veteran teachers. Most of the teachers came from mono-lingual backgrounds of only English, with one teacher coming from a bi-lingual background where her other language is the same as many of her students.

Participants

I selected 3+ teachers from my school and analyzed their classroom libraries. Participants were classroom teachers in 1st grade. I recruited them from the entire team of first-grade teachers at my school and then from there worked to select 3-4 classrooms trying to get a range of teaching experience with the participants. Once they agreed to be a participant they received a second form with a set of questions asking for some background on them, their classrooms, and their concept of what culture is. My hope was to get at least 3 teachers. One who is new to teaching, one who has been teaching for a couple of years, and one who has taught for more than 5 years. All of the classroom teachers were female and spoke English as at least one of their languages. Three of the teachers were white/European descent, with one being Asian.

Procedure

I picked four teachers who agreed to let me analyze their classroom library's picture books. I sent each teacher an interview questionnaire to get some background information on the teachers and their thoughts on culture (see Appendix C). Teachers then got to choose to answer these questions either in email, or have an in person

discussion after looking through the questions. Once teachers agreed, I would go in either during our shared prep time or after school to work on cataloging and analyzing their picture books.

Next, I had on hand with each classroom library a collection table to fill out, which was set up as a spreadsheet so that I could input and code the information gathered from each picture book (see Appendix B). It included questions about the author/illustrator, the culture(s) of the main characters, and how the reader knew that was the culture, if the culture is unclear but the illustrator shows a particular race that will be taken into account and noted. Additionally, information from the books was coded by the different categories of culturally diverse literature such as the list given by Herman-Wilmarth (2007) cited by Ness (2019) "…beyond race, ethnicity, and language to include the following aspects: 'physical and mental disabilities, socioeconomic status, language variations, dialect differences, and religion … various family structures, such as foster families, and sexual and gender identity" (Ness, 2019, p. 460). After I collected the data about the picture books from each of the classrooms I analyzed how diverse they are as a whole as well as compared to each classroom.

IRB

I submitted documents for IRB documentation and got approval on March 10th, 2022, and received approval from the school on September 27th, 2021.

Data Analysis

I used the data from table 1.1 (see appendix A) to compare and graph the cultural diversity of the classroom libraries, and to see which cultures were being represented in picture books. This also helped provide data to look at what cultures were more dominant

in classroom libraries and thus which cultures were students more exposed to. As well as see if these cultures match up with the school culture itself. Ideally, when looking at the data I would hope to see differences for the different sections of culture being represented so that there is a chance of children seeing themselves represented in a multitude of ways (familial, linguistically, ethnically, and in a sense of socio-economics).

Summary

My research consisted of children's picture books for children pre-k through 2nd grade. This was because this would be the general reading levels for the students. It focused mainly on narrative stories. Analysis of the books was done using a table to fill out with different cultural sections (see appendix A) that were inputted into a spreadsheet to make graphing and calculating easier. Answers to the interview questions (see appendix C) were then coded to help synthesize the data for the data analysis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the representation of different cultures and languages in children's picture books looking to answer the questions: *What is the representation of languages and cultures in children's literature? Which cultures are represented more and which are still being underrepresented in children's picture books?*

The method used is a question matrix that will then get coded for their responses. The next chapter explores and analyzes the data collected in order to learn what cultures are being represented in picture books and which ones are still being left out or underrepresented. This is done by looking at the total number of books in a classroom

library and then breaking that down into categories to see percentages and trends, before

comparing all the classrooms data together overall.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Results

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the data collected from 4 teachers' classroom libraries and look at the interviews with the teachers about themselves and their perspectives on their libraries, looking to answer the research questions: *"what is the representation of languages and cultures in children's literature?"*, and *"Which cultures are represented more and which are still being underrepresented in children's picture books?"*. Each teacher will have their name replaced with a letter for privacy and I will go through analyzing each teacher's library individually before analyzing all the classroom libraries as a whole. I will be assessing these classroom libraries by looking at cultural representation in picture books that students have access to. Originally I was going to also assess for social-economics, family, gender identity, and religion, however, I realized during my collection of data that these areas are a lot harder to assess for or there is not much variety to them (religion does not come up a lot in children's literature). Additionally, these topics are more likely to be influenced by researcher bias as they are rarely explicitly stated and must be interpreted from pictures and the reader's own background which makes them much harder to have a concrete idea of what is being represented if any of those topics are being represented at all.

Teacher A

Interview. Teacher A has been teaching for 6 years. She is the only teacher of color on the grade level team and is a bilingual speaker. She has been co-teaching with an ELL teacher for two years and has taught in several states. When asked if her classroom

library represented their classroom library her answer was that they were not sure about that as many of the books were not books she had bought or brought to the classroom. Teacher A said "there are books in the classroom that students could relate to but the library is not perhaps the best representation of the student population with the students' home cultures being represented". For Teacher A, her definition of diversity was

> I think diversity to me just means like being represented. Everybody's included, whether you know, skin type, or cultural background. It could be you know, I guess having a certain type of disability just overall, you know, everybody feeling like they are welcomed, and that their opinions are heard and that their opinions matter.
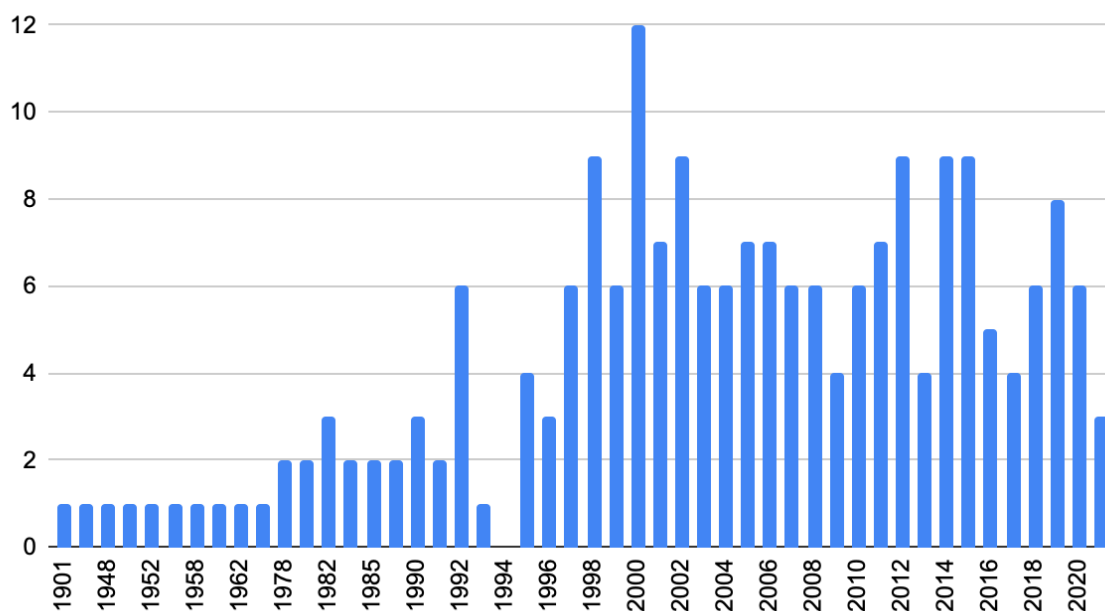
She also stated that with this being a year with different rules and restrictions in place due to the pandemic the classroom library functioned a little differently than it usually did for this teacher. Usually, this teacher had a weekly schedule for groups to go to the classroom library to change books with a specific time for students to look through the books in their book boxes. Because of the pandemic this year it was a bit looser in structure because students were not placed in student groups in order to try and keep them socially distant. Most of the books in the classroom were from the previous teachers who had been in that room, or that the school had supplied. Some books were also from me as my desk is located in this room and students had access to some of my own books. Teacher A also supplemented her classroom as students each had their own iPad and had accounts on Epic! And ReadingA-Z for access to books that they could read or listen to, and she did daily read-alouds from Youtube throughout the year. She said that she really liked Epic! and StorylineOnline as these stories were read-alouds that also included animations

and sound effects that made stories more engaging for students and tended to have students more excited to listen to the stories. Teacher A is comfortable with reading a variety of books to her class, with one of her big criteria being that the stories have to be age appropriate for the students in the class (in this case 6-7 year olds).

   Classroom Library Data. For Teacher A's classroom library of 209 books, 127 of them were from the year 2000 or newer (see Figure 4.1). This means that 61% of the library is within the current century. Of those 127 books, 76 are from 2010 or newer which would out 36% of the books being within the last ten years. Teacher A also had 9 books that are from the last 3 years. I was really impressed by this number as I had been nervous there would be a much higher number of older books in classroom libraries.

Figure 4.1

Books by Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1901	1	1984	2	2000	12	2013	4
1947	1	1985	2	2001	7	2014	9
1948	1	1988	2	2002	9	2015	9
1949	1	1990	3	2003	6	2016	5
1952	1	1991	2	2004	6	2017	4
1956	1	1992	6	2005	7	2018	6
1958	1	1993	1	2006	7	2019	8
1960	1	1994	0	2007	6	2020	6
1962	1	1995	4	2008	6	2021	3
1969	1	1996	3	2009	4	2016	5
1978	2	1997	6	2010	6	2017	4
1980	2	1998	9	2011	7		
1982	3	1999	6	2012	9		

Of the 209 books I inventoried in this classroom, 33.5% of the books had animals as the main characters, this was followed by 18% of the books having white main characters (see figure 4.2). Asian representation was only in 22 of the 209 books at 10.53% of the books, and of those 22 books, 2 had Hmong characters in them that were explicitly shown. Looking at the types of characters overall is even more staggering as 118 books had animal characters which would account for 56.56% having an animal character in the story.

Figure 4.2

Cultures/Ethnicities Represented
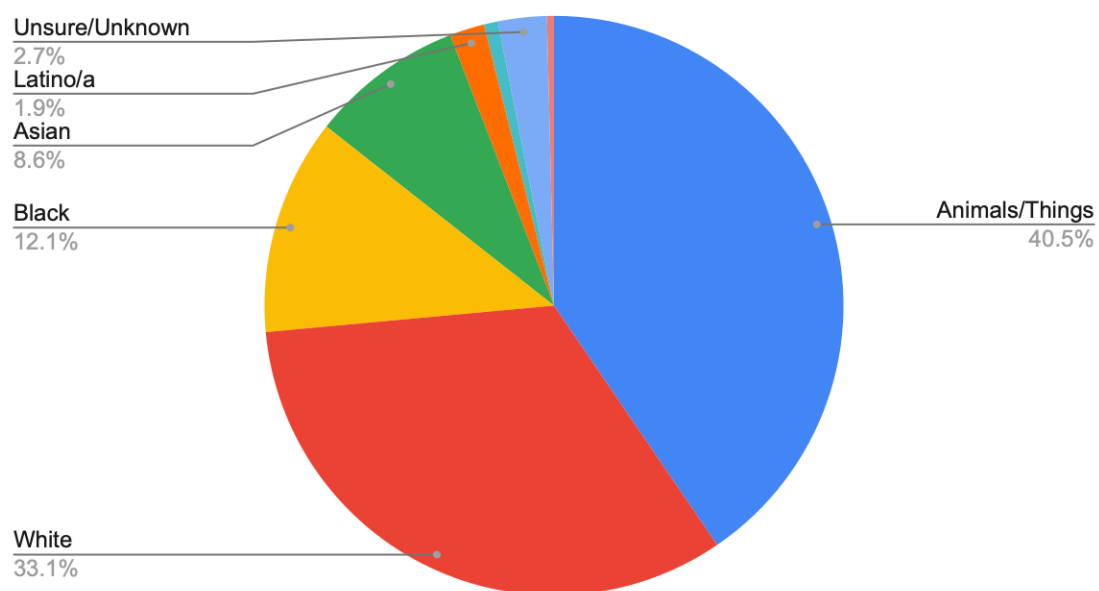
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	104
White	85
Black	31
Asian	22
Latino/a	5
Indigenous/First Nation	2
Unsure/Unknown	7
Middle East	1

From there all the books were in English, though 7 books had other languages included in them (Spanish, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Thai) (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3

Languages Books Use
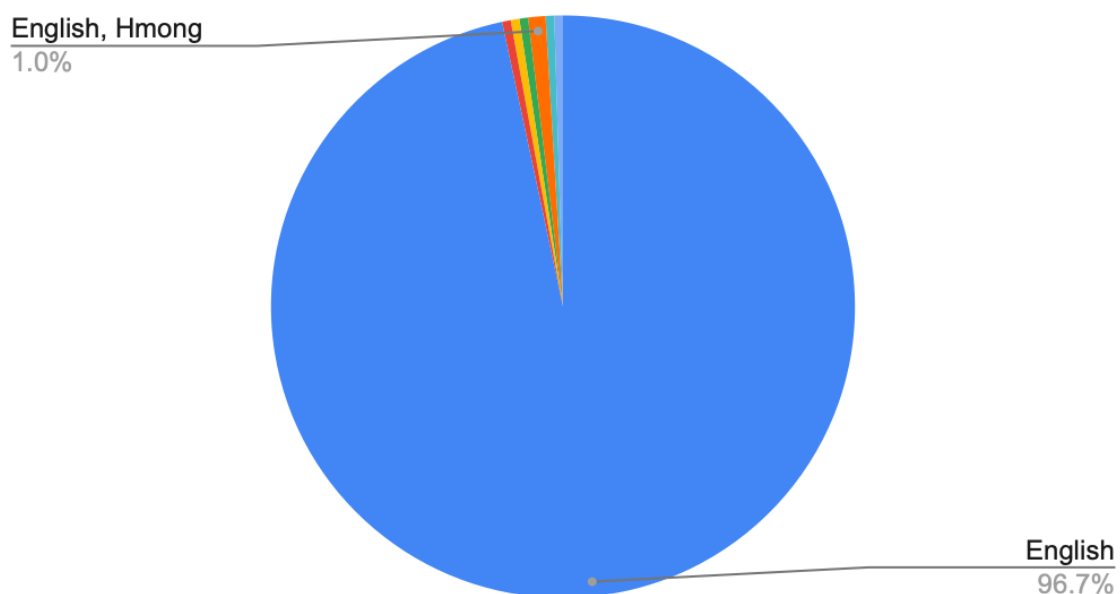
Language	English	English & Korean	English & Vietnamese	English & Thai	English & Hmong	English & Japanese	English & Spanish
# of Books	202	1	1	1	2	1	1

Teacher B

  Interview. Teacher B is a licensed ELL teacher who was on a temporary license for also being a grade level teacher. She has taught for 3 years in the US and 2 years overseas (though they were unlicensed by US standards when working overseas). For Teacher B, she her definition of diversity was
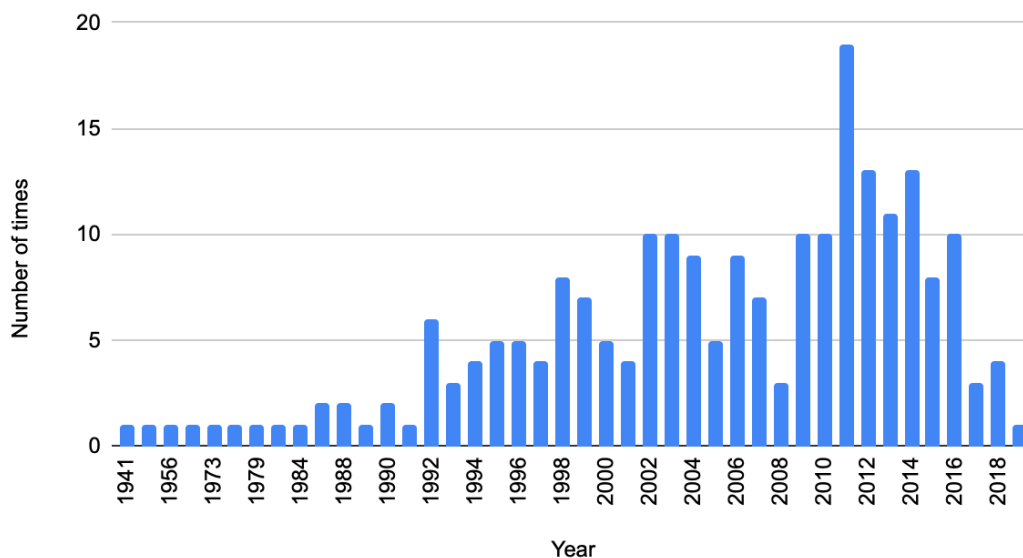
    There's a lot of different aspects to diversity. There's like, like obvious ones like

      racial diversity. Ethnic, cultural, language, diversity. You know, like kind of like

those identities. Things like diversity about your identity, um, diversity and

interests, which I've already mentioned earlier, but like you know, having lots of

different topics for students to read about like, the characters in books are not

always like you know, they're not always just like white kids or white families,

you know, or like, just like moms and dads it could be like a blended family like a

lot, multigenerational. You know, families that don't speak English. You know,

there could be like, like queer families, like families or queer parents like things

like that. Um I also like, I guess, like, diversity of thought, but I also think it is

important, not that the students are like really reading those kinds of books by

themselves like that. Would be something they would hear, like hearing like

different ideas. About a subject or like, different ways to like views the world.

Teacher B did not feel like her classroom library reflected her students' cultures as she

acknowledged that there were no books with Hmong or Karen students in them which

was the majority of her class. She also felt like it did not really represent the languages of

the students. What it did fit more with were student interests. She also said that this year

she did not really have the routine that she has had in classrooms previously with her

classroom library. In previous years, she had a daily schedule for which groups were

going to get to change books, and she said it was easier to find times to use the book

boxes. Sometimes she would use book boxes as a break from iPads, as the students really

enjoyed the reading apps on the iPads (Epic, ReadingA-Z). However, at times the iPad

would become more of a toy than a tool, and students would be playing instead of

spending time with literature in some form. For Teacher B, the books in the classroom

library were also books the school provided or had been left by previous teachers. She

would sometimes supplement with books that were given from when the school library was giving away books as well. This teacher did have some additional books that she would read to students from their own collection and have classroom discussions around, but these books were not down in an area where students could reach them and look/read them on their own. Teacher B also said she had no books that she would be uncomfortable having in their class as long as the books were age appropriate for 6-7 year olds and that they had a chance to look through the books first. This was because she felt like even if the topic was on the heavier side, it could lead to a good classroom discussion and could better help the students understand the world around them.

    Classroom Library Data. Teacher B had a total of 225 books in their classroom library. Of those books, 163 of them were from the year 2000 or newer. This means that 72.44% are from the current century. Of those 163 books, 91 are from 2010 or newer. This would mean that 40.44% are from about the last 10 years. This teacher did not have any books that were newer than 2019. I was impressed as this classroom's library books were not nearly as old as in Teacher A's library which I had inventoried first.

Figure 4.4

Books By Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1941	1	1989	1	2000	5	2011	19
1947	1	1990	2	2001	4	2012	12
1956	1	1991	1	2002	10	2013	11
1960	1	1992	6	2003	10	2014	13
1973	1	1993	3	2004	9	2015	8
1976	1	1994	4	2005	5	2016	10
1979	1	1995	5	2006	9	2017	4
1980	1	1996	5	2007	7	2018	4
1984	1	1997	4	2008	3	2019	1
1985	2	1998	8	2009	10		
1988	2	1999	7	2010	10		

Of the 225 books in Teacher B's classroom library, 149 books had animal, or non-human

characters, which would put that at 66.22% of the books. Within this library, 22 books

had characters that I suspected or identified as Asian, this puts Asian representation at

9.78%. None of these Asian characters were Hmong or Karen. There was 1 that was a

Chinese Immigrant, 1 that was Asian-Indian, and 1 was Japanese American.

Figure 4.5

Cultures/Ethnicities Represented
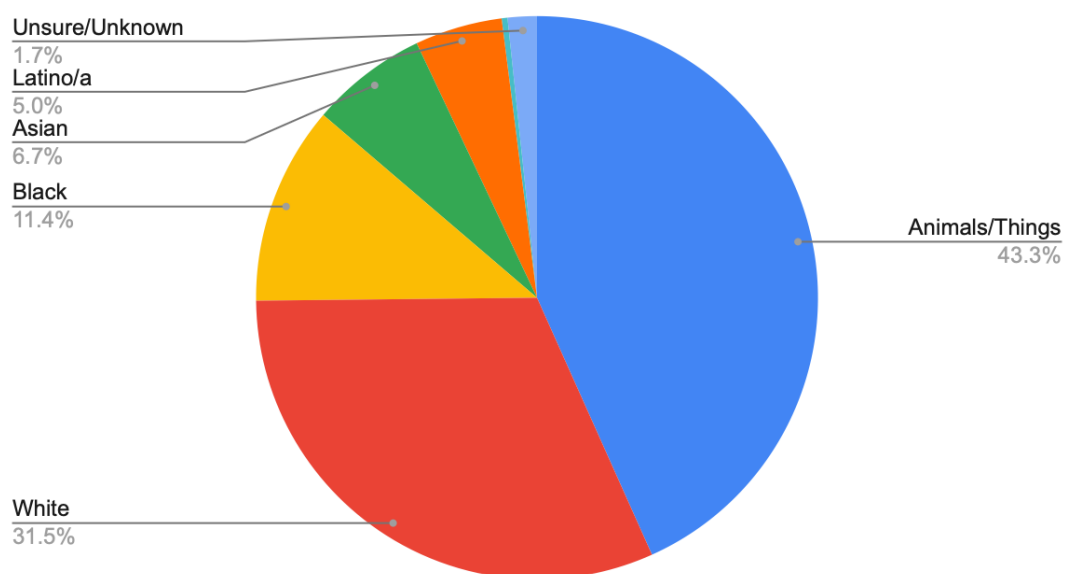
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	129
White	94
Black	34
Asian	20
Latino/a	15
Indigenous/First Nation	1
Unsure/Unknown	5
Middle East	1

All 100% of their library were books in English with no other languages really being

represented.

Figure 4.6

Languages Used in Books

Language	English
# of Books	224

Teacher C

  Interview. Teacher C has been teaching for 2 and a half years, with this year being her first year in her own classroom. She had also previously been working as a reading intervention teacher and had strong skills for how to support struggling readers. Teacher C feels like she should have more inclusive books that speak to her students' cultures. She would like to have more books that are about Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). Teacher C also feels like she has plenty of books that meet student interests and a variety of reading-level books. For Teacher C her definition of diversity was
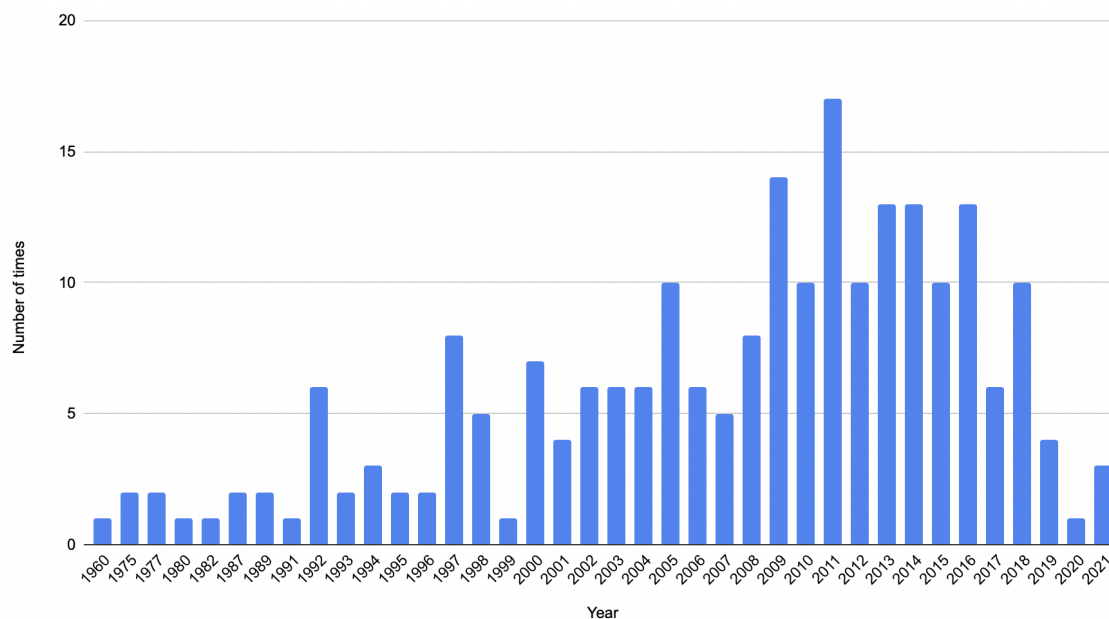
    Diversity to me looks like all the different things that make us who we are as a

    person (gender, language, culture, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, etc.)

Diversity is what makes us all unique and special, so I think it is important to acknowledge those differences, accept them, and continue to educate ourselves on how to be culturally competent to better support our students.

Teacher C has the most structured time for her classroom library with it being during a 40-minute group time for students to rotate and pick new books out as well as read from their book boxes. This teacher also always picks a book from her classroom library whenever she does a classroom read-aloud. Well, many of the books in her classroom library were provided by the school, this teacher has also gotten a large number of books as donations from people who knew she was going into teaching or were books from her own childhood. Teacher C will supplement books by asking the librarian or other teachers for ideas to meet curriculum genres, otherwise, she gets everything online (Youtube, Epic, RazKids, BrainPop Jr.) as that can be a huge help for supplementing stories in the classroom. Interestingly enough Teacher C commented more on the reading level for books not included in their library as she acknowledged that the chapter books on her shelves were probably not the right reading level for students.

Classroom Library Data. Teacher C has 223 picture books in their classroom library. Of these books, 182 are from the year 2000 or newer. This means that 81.61% of their classroom library is from the current century. Of these 182 books, 110 are from 2010 or newer, which would put 49.33% of their books as being from about the last 10 years. This teacher had 4 books that are from the last 3 years, which is pretty impressive to me.

Figure 4.7

Books By Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1960	1	1994	3	2004	6	2014	13
1975	2	1995	2	2005	10	2015	10
1977	2	1996	2	2006	6	2016	13
1980	1	1997	8	2007	5	2017	6
1982	1	1998	5	2008	8	2018	10
1987	2	1999	1	2009	14	2019	4
1989	2	2000	7	2010	10	2020	1
1991	1	2001	4	2011	17	2021	3
1992	6	2002	6	2012	10		
1993	2	2003	6	2013	13		

Looking at character representation, 34.5% of this classroom library had books where the characters were only animals, once adding in all the other varieties of books that included animal characters 127 books had animal characters which put animal characters

at 56.95%. The next largest group were characters that I identified as white making up

43.95%. (These percentages will add up to more than 100, as some of the books have

characters of more than one group depending on the number of characters in the picture

book). Only 26 books had characters that I identified as Asian, and several of those

characters I was unsure about as the only clues were completely dependent on the

illustrations to identify ethnicity. This means that only 11.66% of the characters were

characters I identified as Asian.

Figure 4.8

Cultures/Ethnicities Represented
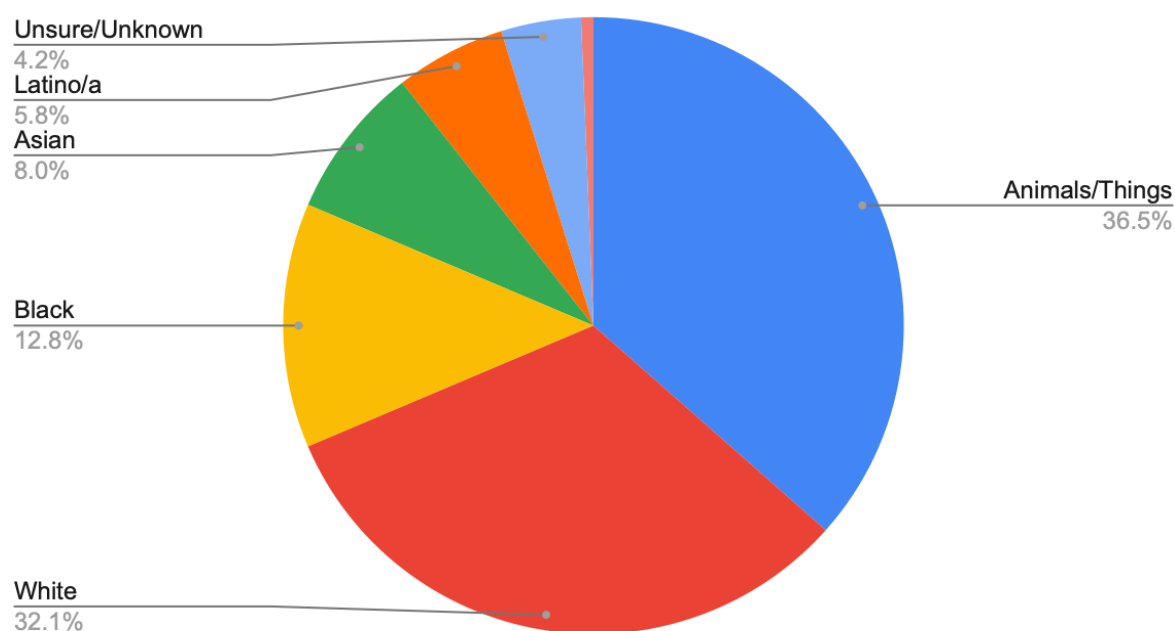
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	114
White	100
Black	40
Asian	25
Latino/a	18
Indigenous/First Nation	0
Unsure/Unknown	13
Middle East	2

Well very similar to Teacher B only 99.1% of their library was English. The other languages that were represented were Korean, and a trilingual book that had the story written in Arabic, English, and Hebrew.

Figure 4.9

Languages Used in Books
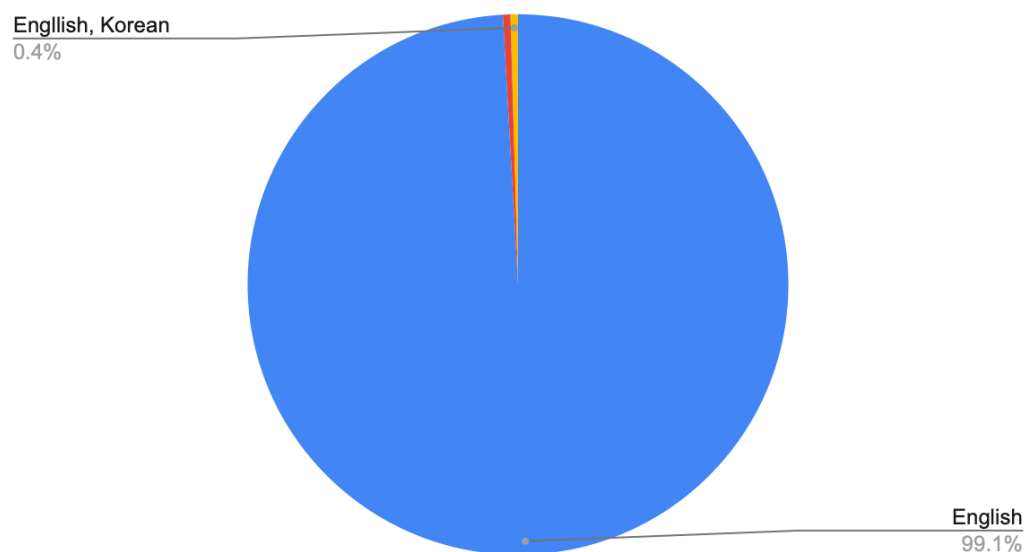
Language	English	English & Korean	Arabic, English, Hebrew
# of Books	221	1	1

Teacher D

  Interview. Teacher D has been teaching for 23 years. She was also in an ELL co-taught setting for the last 2 years. When we talked about if her classroom library represented her students, she said that she did not think it represented her students as most of the books in her classroom library were from old curriculums, things the school had provided, or books she had gotten for super cheap. Teacher D also had a routine for how students would use her classroom library, on Monday students would return their books to a specific spot and 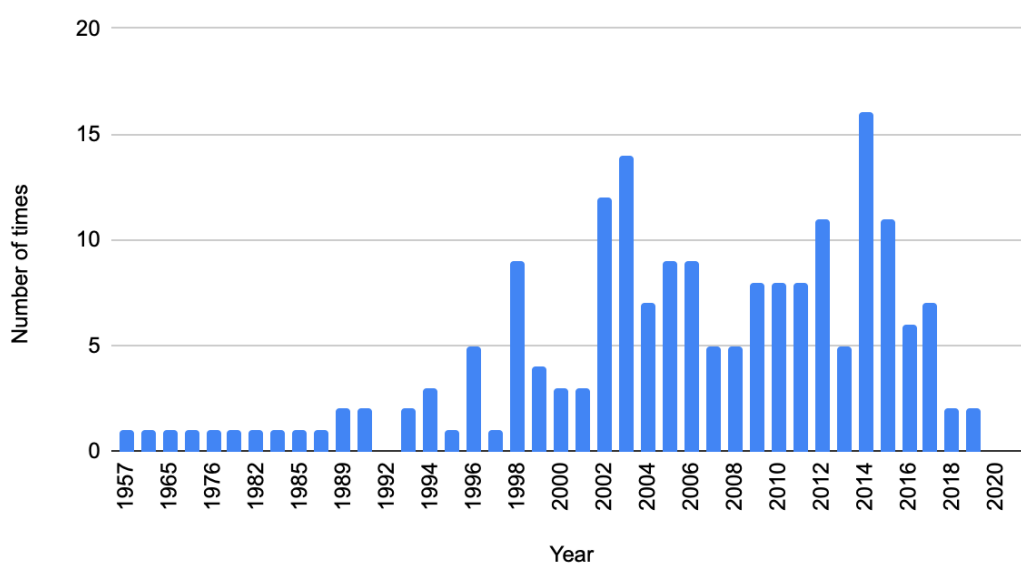then pick 5 new books for the week. Then during the Targeted Instruction time when students are getting pulled into different small groups students look through the books they selected. Because some students struggle with reading Teacher D said it's very important that there are picture books in the classrooms for students to look at and engage with. Teacher D also supplements her classroom library with online resources like read-alouds from Youtube or other sites, and books from the library to read and discuss with the class. Teacher D said that diversity for them isn't quite the school they work in as the students are fairly homogenous, so while the school is largely students of color they are all of one kind of background and culture, though Teacher D said perhaps the home lifestyles are different for each student. Teacher D said the books they would avoid having in their classroom are books that are inappropriate themes and words, as well as avoiding topics of violence.

  Classroom Library Data. Of Teacher D's 189 picture books that I inventoried from their classroom library 151 or 79.47% of their books were from the year 2000 or newer. Of those 76 or 40% are from 2010 or newer. This is right in range for all the

teachers, and mean that just under half of the books were newer and may better represent

hobbies, interests, and the world around them in the books.

Figure 4.10

Books By Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1957	1	1991	2	2002	12	2013	5
1960	1	1992	0	2003	14	2014	16
1965	1	1993	2	2004	7	2015	11
1974	1	1994	3	2005	9	2016	6
1976	1	1995	1	2006	9	2017	7
1978	1	1996	5	2007	5	2018	2
1982	1	1997	1	2008	5	2019	2
1984	1	1998	9	2009	8		
1985	1	1999	4	2010	8		
1987	1	2000	3	2011	8		
1989	2	2001	3	2012	11		

Similarly to other classrooms the largest representation was of animal or thing characters

in stories with animal/thing characters appearing 117 times in the books or 39.1% of the

time. The next largest group was white characters appearing 94 times in picture books or 36.1% of the time. After that the next group was nearly half of the white characters with Black/African American characters coming in at 13.8% of the characters.

Figure 4.11

Cultures/Ethnicities Represented
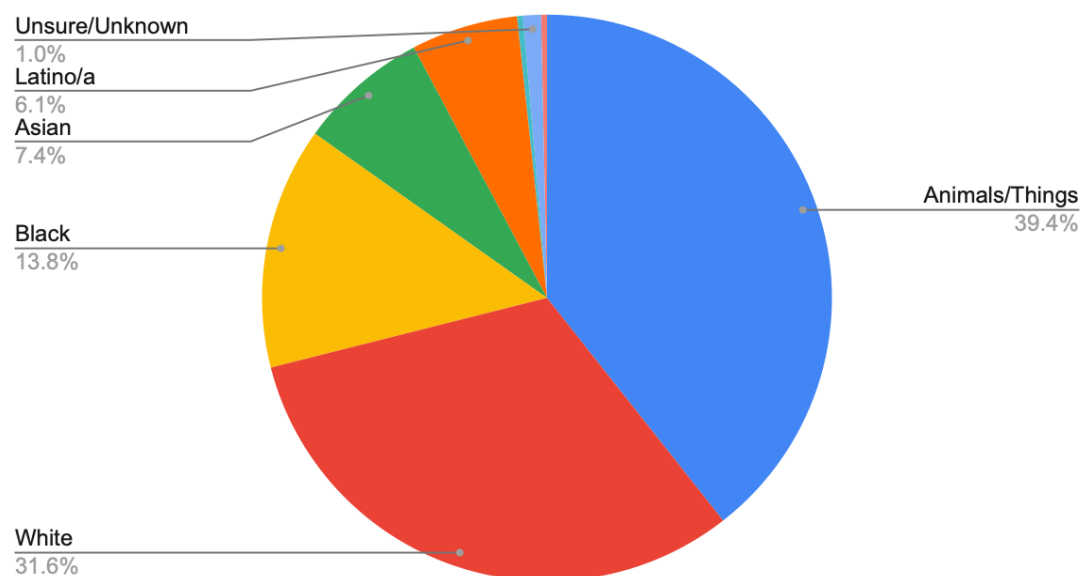
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	117
White	94
Black	41
Asian	22
Latino/a	18
Indigenous/First Nation	1
Unsure/Unknown	3
Middle East	1

All of the books were in English with other languages not really being showcased in any of the classroom library books.

Figure 4.12

Languages Used in Books

Language	English
# of Books	190

Analysis of All Teachers' Classroom Libraries

Looking at the 846 books from the 4 classroom libraries I was impressed that a large percentage of the books were newer than I was expecting with 354 (41.84%) being from 2010 or newer. The largest number of books in the classroom libraries were published in either 2014 or 2011 as each of these years had 51 books that had been published in those years. I had been nervous about how all teachers had inherited these classroom libraries from previous teachers and that the books in the classroom libraries would be older.

Figure 4.13

Books By Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1901	1	1975	2	1993	8	2008	22
1941	1	1976	2	1994	10	2009	36
1947	2	1977	2	1995	12	2010	34
1948	1	1978	3	1996	15	2011	51
1949	1	1979	1	1997	19	2012	42
1952	1	1980	4	1998	31	2013	33
1956	2	1982	5	1999	18	2014	51
1957	1	1984	4	2000	27	2015	38
1958	1	1985	5	2001	18	2016	34
1960	4	1987	4	2002	37	2017	21
1962	1	1988	4	2003	36	2018	22
1965	1	1989	5	2004	28	2019	15
1969	1	1990	5	2005	31	2020	7
1973	1	1991	6	2006	31	2021	6
1974	1	1992	18	2007	23		

I was not surprised by the number of picture books with animal or non-human characters which is a staggering 465 characters in the books totaling 39.8% of the representation. The next largest group was perceived white characters at 374 characters or 32% of the total characters represented. Asian characters were only perceived to have been represented with 89 (7.6%) characters. This is a low number for a school that consists of a majority Asian/Asian American students, and it is a percentage that is consistent with the percentage given in the 2018 study (Dahlen & Huyck, 2019), which had Asian representation in Children's books at 7%. This number is still incredibly low. Additionally, while Dahlen & Huyck's infographic had white students being the most represented in their 2018 study (Infographic 1.1) at 50% and animal characters being the next group at 27%, the four classroom libraries that I researched had these two groups flipped and much closer together. Unfortunately, Dahlen & Huyck's infographic on the representation of Indigenous/First Nation characters was still holding true in the classroom libraries I looked at with this being one of the smallest groups being represented with unfortunately an even smaller percentage than in the 2018 infographic (infographic 1.1) which had been 1% compared to the four classroom libraries which had Indigenous/First Nation characters represented 0.3% of the time.

Figure 4.14

Cultures/Ethnicities Represented
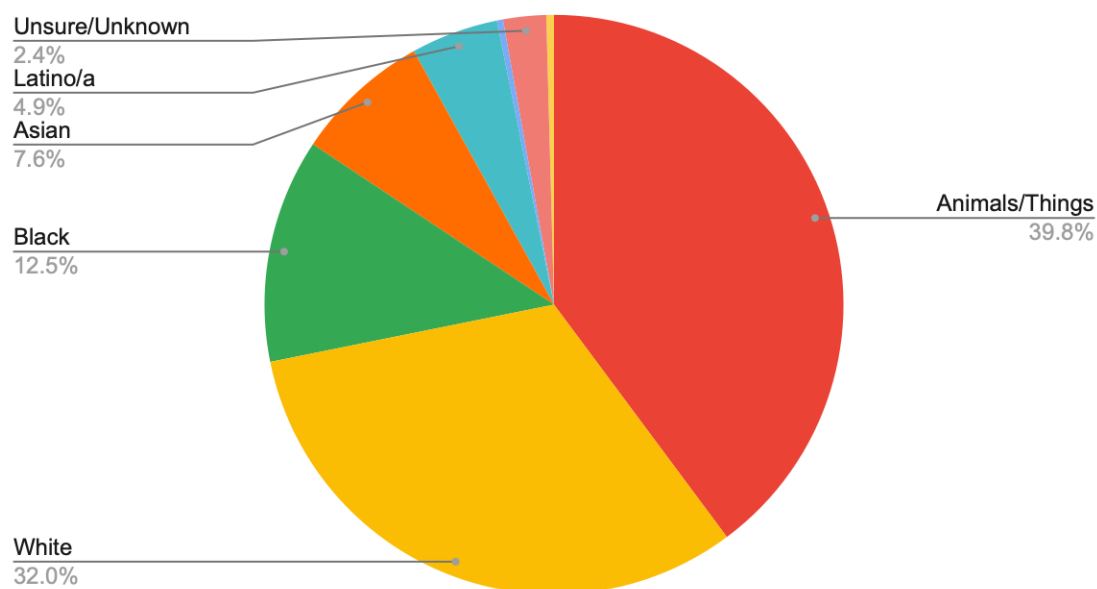
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	465
White	374
Black	146
Asian	89
Latino/a	57
Indigenous/First Nation	4
Unsure/Unknown	28
Middle East	5

Looking at all the languages used in books in the classroom libraries, 98.9% (837 books) are written in English. Of the other 8 other languages, only Hmong showed up more than once, as it was used in two books.

Figure 4.15

Languages Used in Books
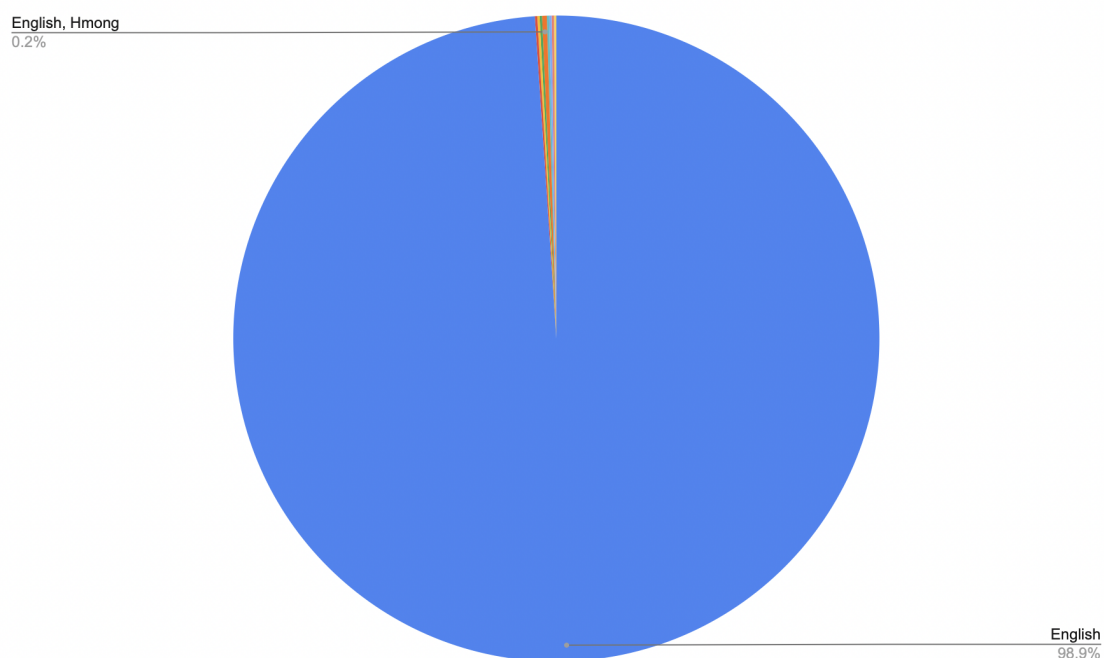
Language	English	English & Korean	English & Vietnamese	English & Thai	English & Hmong	English & Japanese	Arabic, English, Hebrew	English & Spanish
# of Books	837	1	1	1	2	1	1	1

Conclusion

Even within the same grade level at the same school there was variation between how libraries were organized, acquisition of books, and what topics teachers were comfortable with students having access to. Two classroom libraries (Teacher A, and Teacher B) had their classroom library organized by genres. However, even within that grouping style Teacher B's sorting method was more specific of what was in each bin. This came down to access to bookshelves and space available in the classroom for their

library space. Teacher C's classroom library was organized more around topics or interests. So, students in this classroom could look for an interest or hobby in a book and find books this way. In Teacher D's library the books were more orgnaized by reading level, though there was some grouping by interests and series. All 4 classroom's had chapter books separated from the picture books, and had more picture books than chapter books. All four teachers libraries consisted of mainly books from previous teachers, curriculum, or that the school had provided in some way. Only Teacher D mentioned buying books in her interview, and in the case of Teacher C she had added to her classroom library through donations and books from her own childhood. Teachers A and B did not purchase books for their classroom library, though they would sometimes bring in their own books to read to their classes.

Looking through this data there were a lot of variations within the answers teachers provided for topics they were comfortable covering, as well as how they themselves defined the idea of diversity. While they all agreed that diversity included a multitude of things including culture, languages, and family, each teacher had a different way to describe it. Teacher D, who has been teaching the longest was uncomfortable covering books with violence, and Teacher B felt that covering picture books that may bring this topic up in a large group setting could be more beneficial and result in a large classroom discussion. Sadly, there was a connection between what some of the previous research had been seeing and character representation in the classroom libraries that I collected my data from. This will be covered more in chapter five which reviews the results, struggles I may have encountered, and what should happen next.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter, I review what I learned from my data, as well as my major

learnings from my study. I will also go over how my data and learnings connect to the

literature, any limitations I encountered, and how I will share my data with others.

Looking back that the data I collected in chapter four I want to see how this data

compares to the literature and how this relates back to my research questions: *"what is*

the representation of languages and cultures in children's literature?", and "*Which*

cultures are represented more and which are still being underrepresented in children's

picture books?". I will give several major learnings I had and how these connect to the

literature.

Major Learnings

I found the research to be really interesting in that some of the results matched my

expectations, but others were different from how I expected them to go. There are five

major learnings that resulted from this study.

First, while I was not surprised by the high percentage of animal/thing characters,

and white characters, I was surprised that the animal characters were a higher percentage

than the white characters. Especially when compared back to *Diversity in Children's*

Books 2018 by Dahlen and Huyck (2019) (see Appendix A) where they had White

characters nearly double the percentage of animal characters. I was disappointed that the

Asian characters were a much smaller percentage when looking at these classroom

libraries especially when for the setting of my data over 50% of the school population is Asian.

Second, it was also surprising that so many picture books do not explicitly give an ethnicity to the characters in the book. Third, I found that readers have to infer this information from pictures, with very few cultural differences appearing in the background to help differentiate the cultures of the characters. Also, other cultural groups are a lot harder to identify in children's picture books since these books rely so heavily on pictures and less on words giving background information, that sometimes readers' interpretations of cultures may vary depending on their own background knowledge and experiences, which can lead to a lot of bias and research error. I also understand why at least in the case of children's picture books representation analysis' focus more on skin color, as this is one of the easier categories to notate and collect data on.

A fourth conclusion was that another possible way for teachers to make literature more diverse and inclusive is to use devices, apps, and websites to supplement their classroom libraries. Unfortunately, I did not have the ability to inventory the books that students had electronic means of accessing as this would have been too monumental a task to try and do. This does not make that access any less important though as it gives students more variety of choices that just the books in their classroom, and also can be helpful for students who struggle to read to still be able to interact with books and those topics. Using these apps and other resources is a newer thing for these teachers, and is mainly accessible because the school has become a school that has 1 iPad for every student.

Lastly, in the case of diversity, while all the teachers agreed that diversity involves race and ethnicity but from there the answers became more varied. Some answers included home life, disabilities, interest and hobbies, and languages. Most of the teachers themselves did not know what books they really had in their own libraries and what cultures were being represented, or underrepresented. This was brought up with Teacher D who mentioned that she has never intentionally thought about the representation in her library.

Looking through these learnings and what I learned from my study I saw an importance for the importance for culturally relevant and diverse books, and that there is still room for growth. I also saw how with earlier books, especially picture books it gets a bit more complicated as readers and educators need to infer more information about character cultural backgrounds. However, this is also a topic that teachers hadn't really discussed or for the teachers I worked with had brought up for them to think about and take the time to assess and critically look at the libraries.

Revisit Literature

There were several pieces of literature I kept thinking about while I was collecting data and seeing the books in the classroom libraries. One was the infographic from *Diversity in Children's Books 2018* by Dahlen and Huyck (See Appendix A) and how this related to the data and percentages I was finding in the classrooms, such as how different races/ethnicities are disproportionately represented in children's literature and how I did see this to be true in the classroom libraries I looked at. I also thought a lot about what Bishop (1990) said:

This availability of books about variations (in) cultural groups becomes important

because books are not only mirrors, they are also socializers. They give subtle

messages about who and what we value in our society. When children cannot find

themselves in books, or when they see themselves presented only as laughable

stereotypes, they learn a powerful lesson about how much they are undervalued in

the society in which they are a part. (p. 5)

This is connected with what I was seeing in the classroom libraries and when looking at

the picture books, while knowing how important the picture is to the story I struggled as

concepts and representation in the pictures were unclear, muddy, or extremely vague.

There were times when the characters may be represented as having a certain skin tone,

but the characters and setting felt so generic that these characters could have been of any

skin tone without this impacting the story. It felt oftentimes like cultures and other

aspects of life were being forgotten in the effort to have characters' skin tones be diverse

and in that forgets the different struggles that may impact different communities.

Additionally, looking back at the definitions of race and ethnicity from the

literature and how according to the US Census Bureau that white is "A person having

origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It

includes people who indicate their race as 'White' or report entries such as Irish, German,

Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian" (*US Census QuickFacts*, 2020, "White

alone, definition"). While I still feel like this is too large a grouping for skin color and

does not give enough differentiation for cultures, I realized that in many children's

picture books that I was looking at there was no way for me to differentiate if the white

characters were German, Moroccan, or Lebanese unless there were other cultural markers

to help clue me in about this. The same could be said for ethnicity and how while Hintz

and Tribunella quoted Sollors as saying "we all speak from a particular place, out of a

particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being

contained by that position" (Hintz & Tribunella, 2019), when this is not explicitly stated

in a book it is hard to truly pinpoint the ethnicity a character has. This vagueness in

character identity can lead to a place where sometimes the only defining factor is the skin

color, but if that was changed it wouldn't really impact the character or the story.

   While many of the teachers when giving their definition of diversity included

things like culture, identity, family, or gender, only one of them ever mentioned

disabilities. This connects back to WeNeedDiverseBooks own statement on what

diversity means to them on their About Us page, in which they state diversity as "We

recognize all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native,

people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities*, and ethnic, cultural, and

religious minorities." before then clarifying more of about the definition of what can be

considered a disability such as,

> a broad definition of disability, which includes but is not limited to physical,
>
> sensory, cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, chronic conditions,
>
> and mental illnesses (this may also include addiction). Furthermore, we subscribe
>
> to a social model of disability, which presents disability as created by barriers in
>
> the social environment, due to lack of equal access, stereotyping, and other forms
>
> of marginalization. ("About us")

Seeing how diverse disabilities can be and the large spectrum they can cover it was

surprising that only one teacher touched on the topic of disabilities when talking about

diversity. This leads me to question if this is a next step that needs to be discussed and for there to be a conversation over what things are labeled as a disability and that sometimes these are things people may not see or expect to be labeled as a disability.

Teachers figuring out what books and topics to have in classroom libraries can be challenging in many ways. Part of this comes from an idea of authenticity and who gets to decide on that, which is a hard concept even within cultural groups. As well as what books and topics parents are comfortable having their children read. While having a diverse classroom library is the goal so that all children have reflections of themselves, there is importance in critically reading the books that go into classroom libraries to see how the cultural representation is being done in a positive and meaningful way.

Limitations

There were several limitations that happened during my research. One was that a teacher who had verbally agreed to be one of my participants early on left the school to work at another school prior to when I started to collect my data. This was a limitation for me because going into this I knew that this teacher bought a lot of her own books for her classroom and had a large and fairly diverse classroom library. However, when she left she took her books with her and it shifted the classroom from being a cotaught classroom to having an ELL teacher with a special exemption license for the year. This did end up being really interesting as the ELL teacher agreed to still have me collect data from her classroom library, but it was an unexpected change in who I had been planning on having participate.

Another limitation was that I had planned to collect more data about social-economic representation, family representation, gender representation, and

religious representation. However, these were a lot harder to collect as there would be an incredible amount of bias to my categorization of these since in picture books these are almost always more implicitly done with the pictures and could be categorized differently depending on readers' own background knowledge and experiences, or they were topics that were never really brought up that I could readily identify, such as in the case of religion. So, well this is a topic I really wanted to look at, in the end, I felt like any data I collected on these would be biased by my own background and experience and not a fair representation of what was being shown in the picture books.

Sharing results

Results will be shared on Hamline University's Digital Commons, as well as the data will be provided back to the teachers who participated in the study so they can see the current representation of their picture books.

Areas for Future Research

There is plenty of area for growth in this research field. It would be good to continue to research and inventory all types of books in classroom libraries just to keep track of what we are representing in our classroom and make sure that all students are able to see themselves in the books they have access to. Additionally, having a study do a more in-depth look at a variety of cultural factors and getting several different perspectives so that the data can be as unbiased as possible on cultural factors including socioeconomics, gender identity, families, and even belief systems would be amazing to see if these areas are being represented or if certain areas are being ignored or pushed down still. Unfortunately, with the current book bans that have been happening more frequently again (Natanson, 2022), there is a chance that the progress we have made on

diverse books may stagnate, decline, or even that we will see how that lack of exposure to not only our own culture but a variety of cultures is so important to our ability to empathize with and better understand a variety of perspectives. While there are older culturally diverse books, there's also an importance of making sure any classroom library has a large selection of books, and for the future it would be good for teachers to be able to get help so that they can continue to add new books which can be more relevant to students, more equitable, and more culturally diverse.

Conclusion

This study has been incredibly helpful for me to better understand the gaps in classroom libraries for representation, but also the discrepancies between who is being represented. Looking through these books it was still hard for me to find representation of the students I work with as an ELL teacher. Though the percentages had shifted from the 2018 infographic (see Appendix A) so that animal and white characters were closer and that white characters were no longer 50% of the characters. However, most of the other percentages on this infographic (see Appendix A) weren't very different, other than African American/black characters being 2% higher. There are clearly cultural groups that are being incredibly underrepresented in classroom libraries, and these cultural groups were all for people of color. This means that since the school I was looking at is mostly students of color they will not see reflections of themselves very often in their classroom library's literature.

I think that going forward there is always room for growth in this topic. There's also space for there to be more education for teachers looking at their own classroom libraries and at the concept of what diversity means to them. As well as, giving teachers a

way to start critically thinking about representation and looking at books with the ability to see what is being represented and thinking about if it positive or negative representation (Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003). In addition, by collecting my own data and looking through picture books I realized how difficult it can be to identify cultures outside of race and ethnicity because of how implicit cues can be and how a reader's own experience may impact their perspective.

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Appendix A

Infographic of *Diversity in Children's Books 2018*

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Appendix B

Data collection table on cultures represented in picture books

Table 1.1

Book Title	Year Published	Author	Illustrator	Cultures									
				Ethnic	Implicit/ Explicit?	Language(s)	Implicit/ Explicit?	Socio-Economic	Implicit/ Explicit?	Family	Implicit/ Explicit?	Identity/Gender	Implicit/ Explicit?

Appendix C

Questionnaire Matrix for participants

Questionnaire 1

A. Are you comfortable with me looking at and analysing your classroom library?

   If teachers answer yes to this they will receive the following questions:
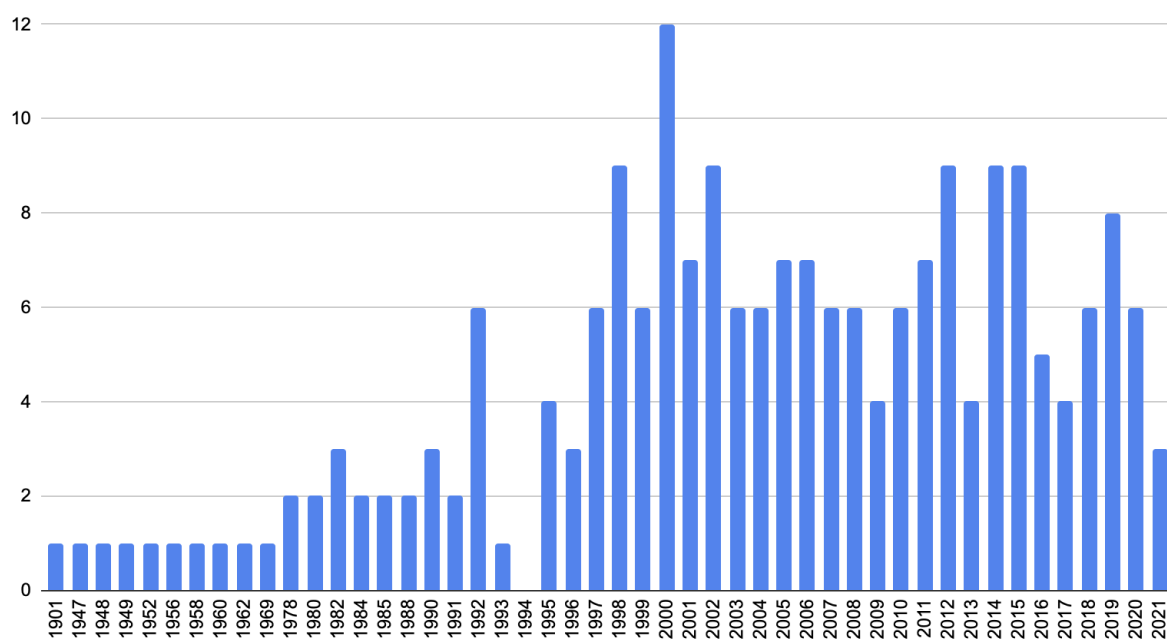
   1. How long have you been teaching?

   2. Do you think your classroom library represents the students of your class? Why?

   3. How do you use your classroom library?

   4. Where do the books in your library come from? (Do you buy any books for your library?)

   5. Do you supplement books for your classroom library at all? Where do those books come from?

   6. What does diversity look like and mean to you?

   Are there any books that you would not include in your classroom library, if so why not?

Appendix D

Classroom Libraries Data

Figure 4.1
Books by Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1901	1	1984	2	2000	12	2013	4
1947	1	1985	2	2001	7	2014	9
1948	1	1988	2	2002	9	2015	9
1949	1	1990	3	2003	6	2016	5
1952	1	1991	2	2004	6	2017	4
1956	1	1992	6	2005	7	2018	6
1958	1	1993	1	2006	7	2019	8
1960	1	1994	0	2007	6	2020	6
1962	1	1995	4	2008	6	2021	3
1969	1	1996	3	2009	4	2016	5
1978	2	1997	6	2010	6	2017	4
1980	2	1998	9	2011	7		
1982	3	1999	6	2012	9		

Figure 4.2

Cultures/Ethnicies Represented
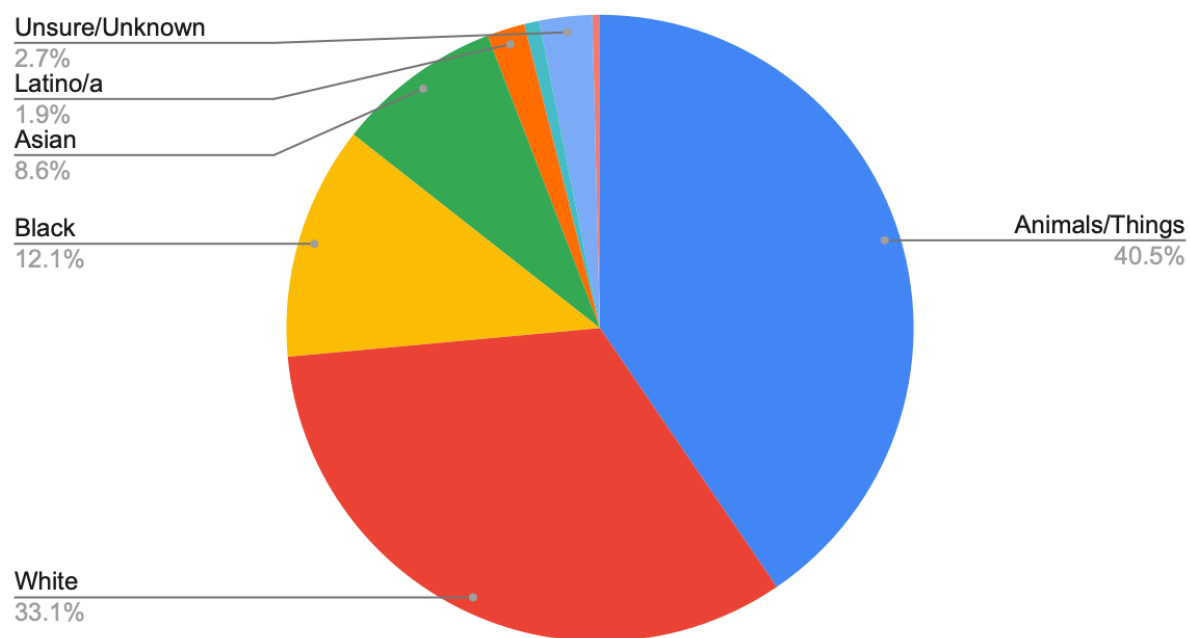
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	104
White	85
Black	31
Asian	22
Latino/a	5
Indigenous/First Nation	2
Unsure/Unknown	7
Middle East	1

Figure 4.3
Languages Used in Books
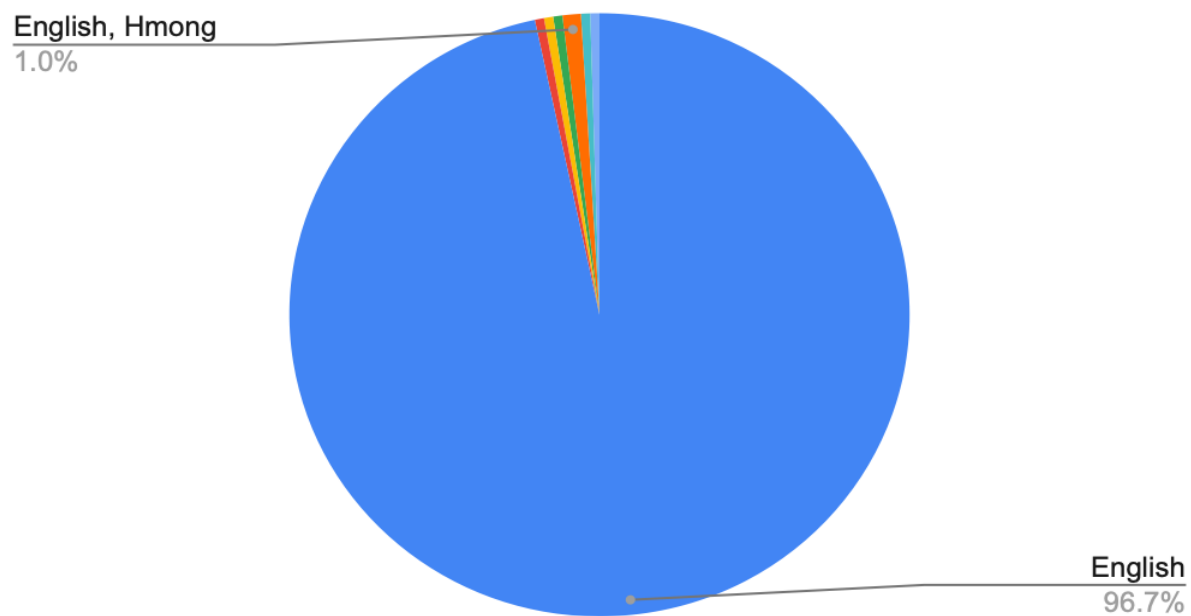
| Language	English	English & Korean	English & Vietnamese	English & Thai	English & Hmong	English & Japanese	English & Spanish
# of Books	202	1	1	1	2	1	1

Figure 4.4

Books By Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1941	1	1989	1	2000	5	2011	19
1947	1	1990	2	2001	4	2012	12
1956	1	1991	1	2002	10	2013	11
1960	1	1992	6	2003	10	2014	13
1973	1	1993	3	2004	9	2015	8
1976	1	1994	4	2005	5	2016	10
1979	1	1995	5	2006	9	2017	4
1980	1	1996	5	2007	7	2018	4
1984	1	1997	4	2008	3	2019	1
1985	2	1998	8	2009	10		
1988	2	1999	7	2010	10		

Figure 4.5

Cultures/Ethnicies Represented
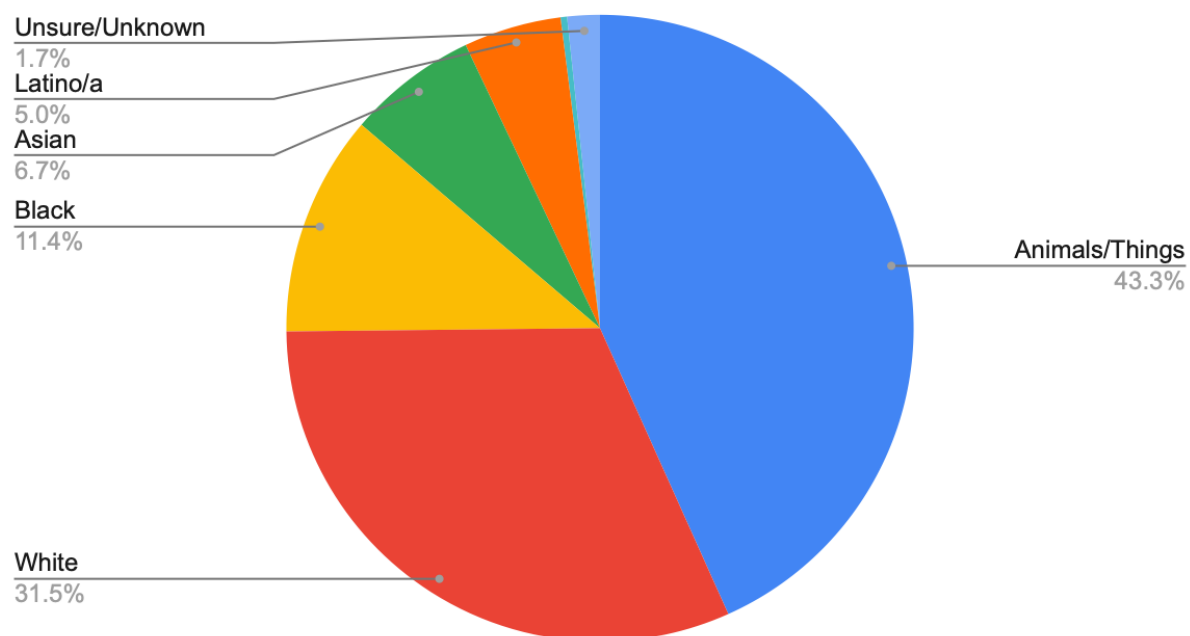
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	129
White	94
Black	34
Asian	20
Latino/a	15
Indigenous/First Nation	1
Unsure/Unknown	5
Middle East	1

Figure 4.6
Languages Used in Books

Language	English
# of Books	224

Figure 4.7

Books By Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1960	1	1994	3	2004	6	2014	13
1975	2	1995	2	2005	10	2015	10
1977	2	1996	2	2006	6	2016	13
1980	1	1997	8	2007	5	2017	6
1982	1	1998	5	2008	8	2018	10
1987	2	1999	1	2009	14	2019	4
1989	2	2000	7	2010	10	2020	1
1991	1	2001	4	2011	17	2021	3
1992	6	2002	6	2012	10		
1993	2	2003	6	2013	13		

Figure 4.8

Cultures/Ethnicities Represented
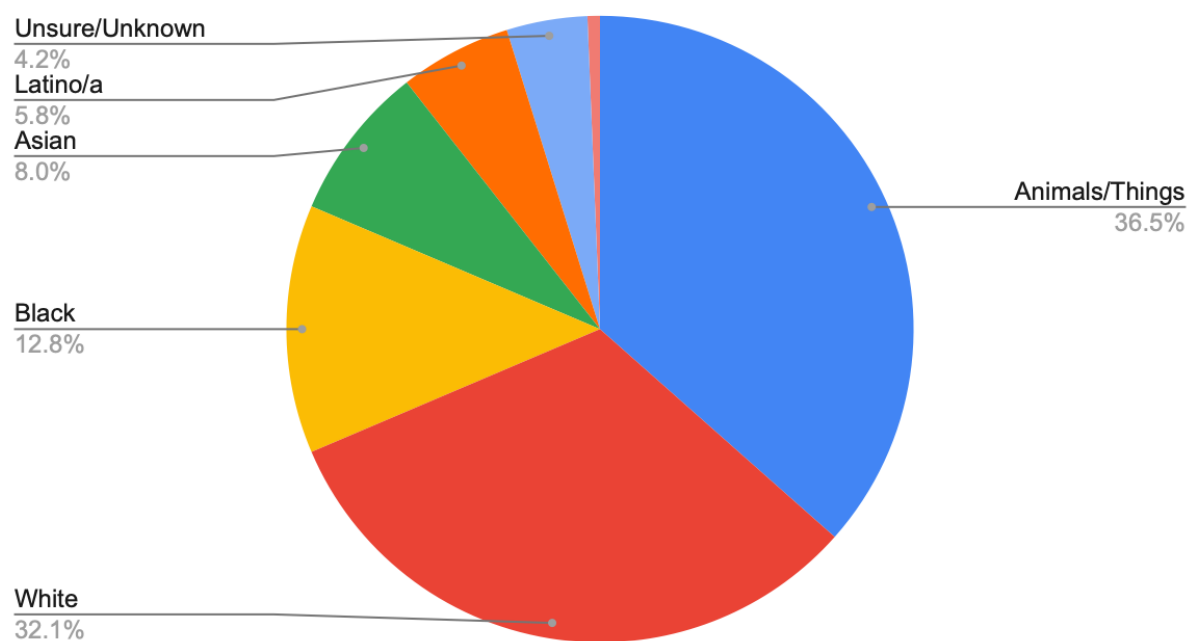
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	114
White	100
Black	40
Asian	25
Latino/a	18
Indigenous/First Nation	0
Unsure/Unknown	13
Middle East	2

Figure 4.9
Languages Used in Books
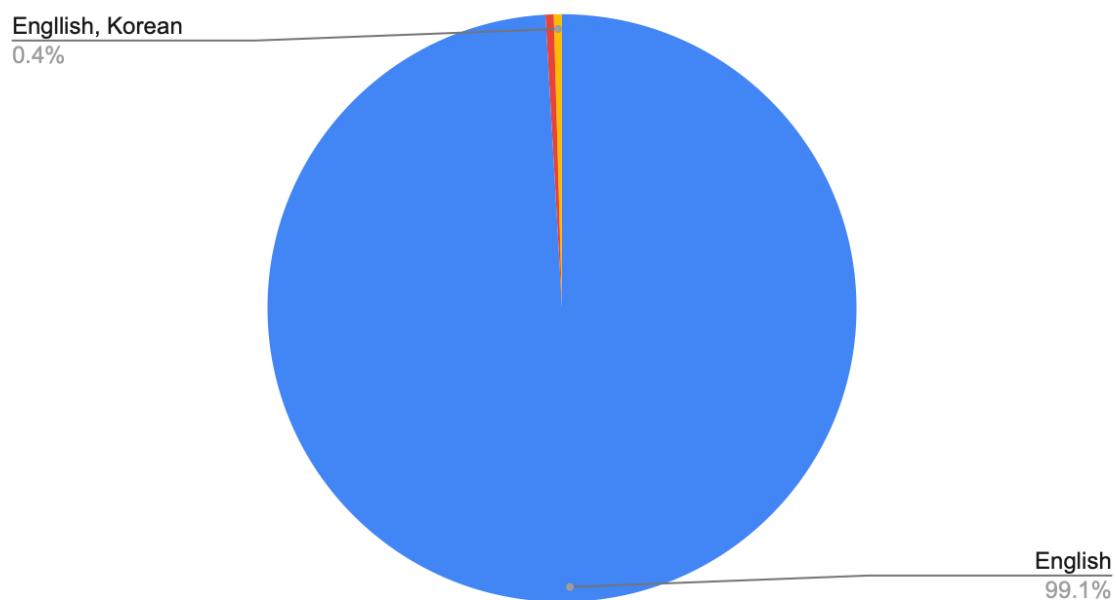
Language	English	English & Korean	Arabic, English, Hebrew
# of Books	221	1	1

Figure 4.10

Books By Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1957	1	1991	2	2002	12	2013	5
1960	1	1992	0	2003	14	2014	16
1965	1	1993	2	2004	7	2015	11
1974	1	1994	3	2005	9	2016	6
1976	1	1995	1	2006	9	2017	7
1978	1	1996	5	2007	5	2018	2
1982	1	1997	1	2008	5	2019	2
1984	1	1998	9	2009	8		
1985	1	1999	4	2010	8		
1987	1	2000	3	2011	8		
1989	2	2001	3	2012	11		

Figure 4.11

Cultures/Ethnicities Represented
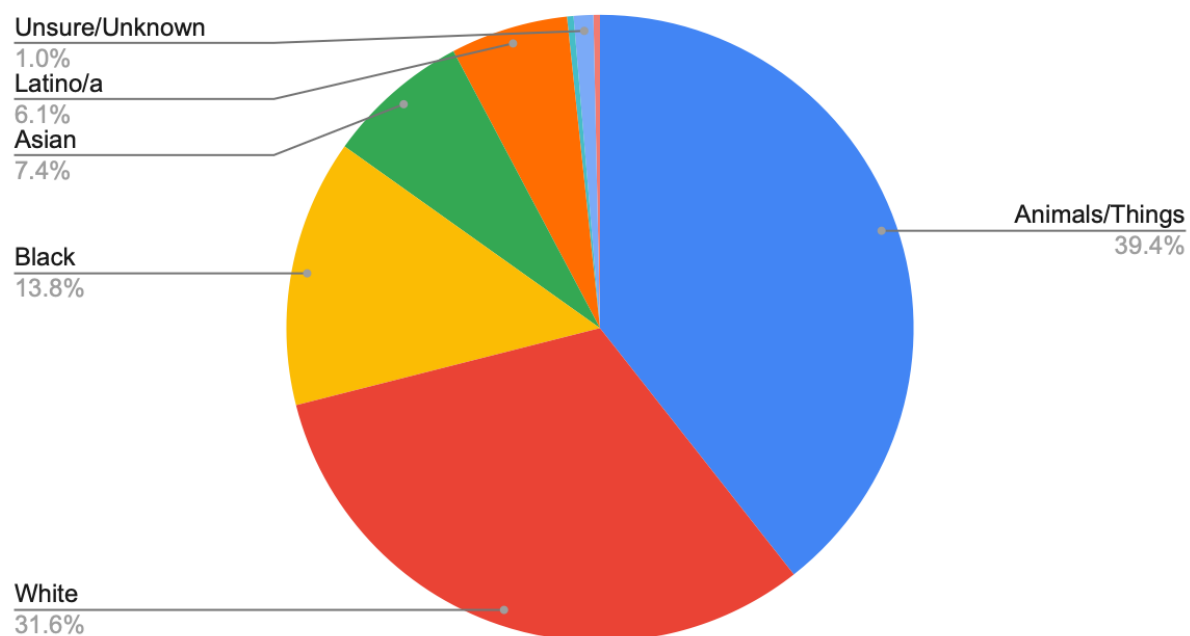
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	465
White	374
Black	320
Asian	89
Latino/a	57
Indigenous/First Nation	4
Unsure/Unknown	28
Middle East	5

Figure 4.12

Languages Used in Books

Language	English
# of Books	190

Figure 4.13

Books By Year Published

Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books	Year	# of Books
1901	1	1975	2	1993	8	2008	22
1941	1	1976	2	1994	10	2009	36
1947	2	1977	2	1995	12	2010	34
1948	1	1978	3	1996	15	2011	51
1949	1	1979	1	1997	19	2012	42
1952	1	1980	4	1998	31	2013	33
1956	2	1982	5	1999	18	2014	51
1957	1	1984	4	2000	27	2015	38
1958	1	1985	5	2001	18	2016	34
1960	4	1987	4	2002	37	2017	21
1962	1	1988	4	2003	36	2018	22
1965	1	1989	5	2004	28	2019	15
1969	1	1990	5	2005	31	2020	7
1973	1	1991	6	2006	31	2021	6

1974	1	1992	18	2007	23		

Figure 4.14

Cultures/Ethnicities Represented
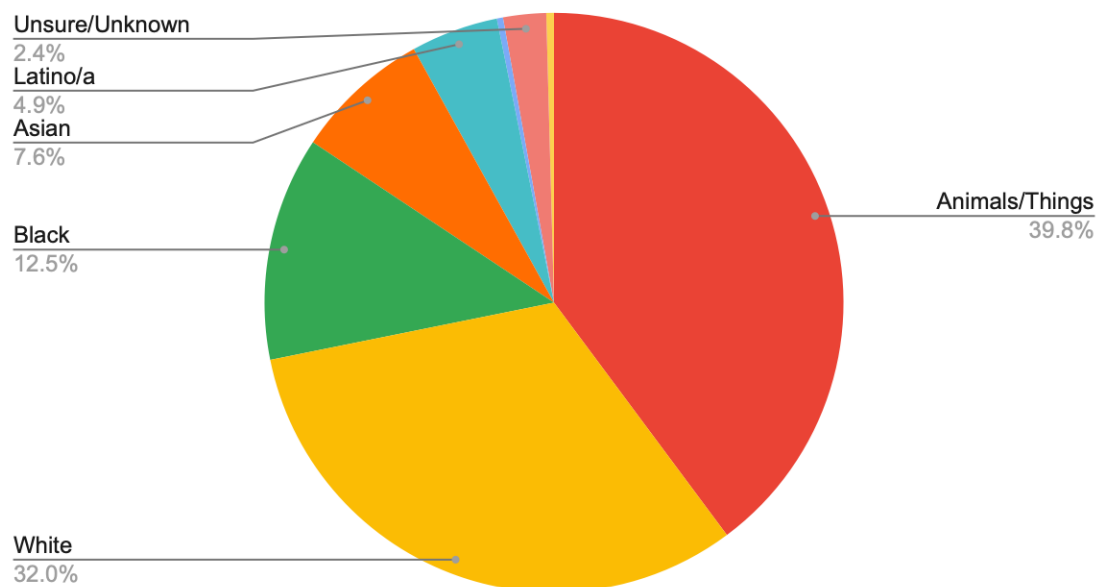
Ethnicity/Race	Count
Animals/Things	465
White	374
Black	146
Asian	89
Latino/a	57
Indigenous/First Nation	4
Unsure/Unknown	28
Middle East	5

Figure 4.15

Languages Used in Books

Language	English	English & Korean	English & Vietnamese	English & Thai	English & Hmong	English & Japanese	Arabic, English, Hebrew	English & Spanish
# of Books	837	1	1	1	2	1	1	1