



EQUITY AUDIT: LIBRARIES AND LITERATURE

Use the criteria below to assess your book collections for inclusivity, equity, and bias.

Setting Observed: _____

Date of Observation: _____ Observer(s): _____

1. Representation & Omission

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Look for positive, affirming representations of different groups of people (race, ethnicity, social class, physical and cognitive ability, gender identity, sexuality, family structure, body type, religion, age, languages). B. Asset-based vs. deficit-based framing: Who is helping, saving, and fixing, and who is in need? Who is proud, and who is pitied? C. Look for omission within marginalized groups. For example, are the issues facing the trans community subsumed under those facing cisgender gay men resulting in distortion, erasure, and/or further marginalization? D. Normalize Difference. Make sure that the books with Black characters in your classroom aren't all about slavery or sports, the books with Asian people aren't all about Japanese internment camps or Chinese New Year, and books that include people with disabilities aren't all about difference. | <p>Findings:</p> |
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2. Accuracy

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Check for accuracy in representations of different cultures and lifestyles. B. Are they oversimplified or do they offer genuine insight into the character? C. Check for quaint, cutesy, or exotic depictions. D. Is one person from the group presented as having admirable qualities while all the others of the group are stereotyped? (tokenism) E. Do all people within a group look stereotypically alike or are they depicted as genuine individuals with distinctive features? F. Is the portrayal of each group authentic? For example, are Native people from one group | <p>Findings:</p> |
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| <p>shown wearing the hair styles, clothing, or jewelry of another tribe?</p> <p>G. How are recent immigrants and people from the same ethnic group who were born in the United States portrayed?</p> <p>H. Does the book portray diversity among Asian people, or are they all lumped together, ignoring differences in ethnicity, time of immigration, generations of life in the United States, and location of origin as well as the fact that some groups have been in conflict with each other at various times over thousands of years?</p> | |
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3. Affirmation and Self-Worth

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| <p>A. Are there messages in the text that limit or damage any child’s aspirations or sense of self-worth?</p> <p>B. Are groups of people presented in permanent, negative ways? For example, are overweight people presented as lazy, women presented as subservient, or people learning to speak English presented as deficit?</p> <p>C. Are certain groups valued more than other groups?</p> <p>D. Look for books that portray individuals as having unique aspirations, capacities, strengths, weaknesses, interests, values, goals, lifestyles, and beliefs.</p> <p>E. Look for books that perpetuate stereotypes or diminish the social-emotional wellbeing or sense of belonging of students, particularly those who experience oppression.</p> | <p>Findings:</p> |
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4. Language

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| <p>Look for:</p> <p>A. Harmful terms used to label people, define people through a deficit lens, or reduce people to a condition they experience (slave vs. enslaved; poor vs. experiencing poverty)</p> <p>B. Gender binary language: boys and girls, ladies and gentlemen, his or her, etc.</p> <p>C. Androcentric (male dominant) language: guys, forefathers, fellow, brethren, manpower,</p> | <p>Findings:</p> |
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| <p>mankind, firemen, manmade, chairman, etc.</p> <p>D. Value-laden connotations with the word <i>white</i> and whiteness (beauty, cleanliness, innocence, virtue); and the word <i>black</i> or dark (evil, menacing, dirty)</p> <p>E. Affirming, current terminology (BIPOC, IBPOC) and outdated, violent, inaccurate, or affirming terminology (colored, n-word, non-white, minority)</p> <p>F. Use of words like “crazy,” “bipolar,” “schizo,” “insane,” “suicidal,” “psycho,” to exaggerate a mood, state of mind, or behavior</p> | |
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5. Author/Illustrator Background

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| <p>A. Analyze the biographical data available about the author and illustrator. If they are not a member of the group they are depicting, is there anything in their background that would indicate their authority on the topic?</p> <p>B. Is the author using terminology or details specific to a culture or group other than their own? If so, why is the author telling someone else’s story?</p> <p>C. Are illustrations accurate and authentic?</p> <p>D. What qualifies the author or illustrator to deal with the subject?</p> <p>E. Look for tokenization of sacred symbols or objects</p> <p>F. Look for cultural appropriation</p> | <p>Findings:</p> |
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6. Storyline: Sense of Justice

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| <p>A. Whose interest is the protagonist serving?</p> <p>B. When characters from marginalized groups are centered, are they admired because their actions benefit those in power?</p> <p>C. To gain acceptance and approval, do people with non-dominant identities have to exhibit extraordinary qualities?</p> <p>D. Do concepts of justice and heroism address issues of social inequity?</p> | <p>Findings:</p> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> E. Do storylines avoid serious conflict with dominant culture? F. Are protagonists defined according to the struggles for justice appropriate to their group? G. Is assimilation a goal? Are marginalized characters rewarded for becoming more like dominant culture? | |
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7. Storyline: Relationships Between People

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Who has power? Who is in leadership roles? Look for patterns. B. Do BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ folks, women, older people, or people with disabilities function in subservient roles? C. Do girls and women have strong friendships with each other or do their relationships to males to define them? D. Are certain identities exaggerated and presented as a problem or joke, while others are presented as normal and desirable? E. Does one group pity, save, or talk down to another? | <p>Findings:</p> |
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8. Storyline: Resolution of Problems

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. How are problems conceived, presented, and resolved in the story? B. Are the conditions facing oppressed groups represented as symptoms of systemic inequity, or blamed on individuals? C. Does the storyline encourage passive acceptance of inequity, or active resistance against it? D. Are problems faced by marginalized people resolved through the benevolent intervention of a dominant character? E. Who is in need of saving or fixing? Who are the heroes? | <p>Findings:</p> |
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9. Role of Women and Females

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Are the achievements of girls and women based on their own initiative and work, or are achievements due to their appearance or to their relationships with males? B. Are females of all ages presented as problem solvers with a life of their own, or is their role in the story only as a support for male characters? C. Are they afraid of things like mice, spiders, or snakes? D. Do they have to be rescued by a male character? E. Is it assumed that female characters will marry and bear children? F. Is there an emphasis on describing the physical appearance of female characters? G. Are positive female characters portrayed as "beautiful" and negative female characters portrayed as "ugly"? H. Are older or unmarried females portrayed in a negative manner? I. Are the images of females of all ages "prettified"? | <p>Findings:</p> |
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This tool draws upon the work of:

Bishop, R. S. (2008). Free within ourselves: The development of African American children's literature. *Education Review*.

Bishop, R. S. (2003). Reframing the debate about cultural authenticity. *Stories matter: The complexity of cultural authenticity in children's literature*, 25-37.

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Day, F. A. (1999). *Multicultural voices in contemporary literature: A resource for teachers* (1st ed.). New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Lee & Low Books (2017). *Classroom Library Questionnaire*. Retrieved from https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded_document/408/Classroom-Library-Questionnaire_FINAL.pdf

Lin, G. (2016, March). Windows and Mirrors on Your Child's Bookshelf. In TEDx Conference (Vol. 18).

Seale, D., Slapin, B., & Gonzales, R. (1995). *How to Tell the Difference: A Guide to Evaluating Children's Books for Anti-Indian Bias*. Oyate Publishing.

Teaching Tolerance www.teachingtolerance.org

Dr. Rebecca Haslam (revised Dec 2020) www.seedtheway.com/resources

