

**Windows and Mirrors**  
**A Content Analysis of Diversity in the Common Core Text Exemplars**

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### **Abstract**

As diversity in the United States student population increases, children's literature should be reflective of that growing diversity. A descriptive content analysis was conducted to analyze the gender and racial diversity of the main characters/people within the fourth and fifth grade stories and informational texts included in the Common Core Text Exemplar (CCTE) list. The CCTE list provides recommended texts for schools that have implemented Common Core Standards. Elements used to infer racial and gender identities in the texts were also analyzed. Results indicated that White male characters and people were overrepresented and other racial and gender groups were underrepresented, which is not representative of the current US public school student population. Additionally, some elements used to infer racial and gender identities highlighted negative stereotypes portrayed in the texts. Suggestions are made to update the CCTE list to match the current racial and gender diversity of the US student population.

## **Windows and Mirrors: A Content Analysis of Diversity in the Common Core Text Exemplar List**

The diversity within the student population is ever increasing in the United States and therefore, representation within children's literature should be reflective of that increasing diversity (Kelly-Howard, 2021). While diversity can refer to numerous human differences, this study will focus mainly on racial and gender diversity. Gopalakrishnan (2011) defined multicultural (or diverse) children's literature as "literature that is by and about diverse populations and includes different perspectives" (p. 29). In the context of this study, diverse populations refer to underrepresented racial and gender groups. To emphasize the importance of diverse literature, Bishop (1990) argued that books can either serve as a window or a mirror. Books that serve as mirrors are books where the readers see themselves and their experiences reflected or represented. Bishop (1990) expressed that the experience of seeing oneself reflected in books is empowering and can help to affirm the reader's place in the world. On the other hand, books that serve as a window allow students to receive a glimpse into people and cultures that are different from their own. Bishop (1990) later added to this idea by explaining that books that act as windows can also become sliding glass doors by allowing the readers through their imagination to become immersed in another world. In a sense, they step into someone else's shoes. Those books are especially important for readers from the dominant culture. If those from the dominant culture only see reflections of themselves in the literature they read, they will be provided with an inaccurate representation of the world they live in, which can over inflate their self-importance (Bishop 1990). Due to the critical need for readers to be exposed to both books that serve as mirrors and windows, this study will specifically analyze the racial and gender representation within books used in elementary education.

Educators in particular need to be cognizant of the diverse literature used in education because many students receive the most exposure to books at school (McNair, 2016). In the United States, most states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which were implemented in 2010 and “outline specific skills in English language arts and mathematics, and seek to bring national cohesion to the K-12 instructional core” (Greer, 2018, 100). Since the initial implementation, some states have repealed or made revisions to the CCSS, but there are still 41 states (as well as the District of Columbia and four US territories) that are currently implementing them (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021). As part of the CCSS, in 2013 the Common Core Text Exemplar (CCTE) list was released to support teachers and schools that had implemented the Common Core curriculum (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2013). Most of the texts included on the list were not required to be used, but rather they were intended to serve as a model for the kinds of texts that teachers should use in their classrooms. When creating the list, the quality, breadth, and text complexity were considered (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2013). Diverse representation was not listed as one of the criteria considered when selecting the texts for the list.

Although the texts on the Common Core Text Exemplar list are not technically required to be used in classrooms, following the initial release of the list, some school districts appeared to have treated them as such. Moss (2013) explained that many school districts believed that the books on the list would become a basis for what was included in national assessments, which is why they quickly rushed to buy the books. Some publishers even used these books as templates for what they included in their educational textbooks. Following the initial release of the list, many literacy educators were concerned about various aspects of the book recommendations on the list (such as the lack of diverse representation) because of the potentially broad impact it

could have on the types of books used in schools (Moss, 2013). Therefore, given the wide implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the role of the CCTE list, it is critical that the texts included reflect the student population so they can act as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.

### **Theoretical Framework: Reader Response Theory**

According to Rosenblatt (1982), the Reader Response Theory describes reading as a transactional process in which meaning is developed. That transaction is influenced by the text as well as the reader and their experiences. In terms of diversity, this theory suggests that the diverse representation (or lack of diverse representation) within the children's literature, as well as the identity and experiences of the readers, may influence the transaction that occurs when reading. Due to this, when selecting books to use in schools, there is a critical need to be conscious of both the identities of the students as well as the representation within the texts.

Rosenblatt (1982) argued that for an effective, positive reading transaction to occur in which meaning is created, the reader must be actively engaged. Some research has indicated that diverse racial and gender representation within books may impact book preferences and can increase the interest and engagement of student readers (Hardy et al., 2020; Sims, 1983; Sailors & Kaambankadzanja, 2017). Reading interest and engagement are positively correlated with reading comprehension and achievement, which is one reason why these findings are significant (Barbar and Klauda, 2020). As an example of this, Hardy et al. (2020) used a single case design to examine the relationship between preschool students and the protagonist's race in children's books. Interestingly, the students most often preferred books when the protagonist shared their same racial identity. This study suggests the race of the protagonists in children's books may impact the book preferences of students. Similarly, Sailors and Kaambankadzanja (2017) also

studied the impact of providing books with culturally authentic and non-stereotypical racial representations to students in Malawi. They found that when students were presented with books that were more culturally relevant as well as ones that featured accurate, high-quality illustrations and stories that drew on the students' prior knowledge and experiences, the students were more engaged and excited about reading. Sims (1983) conducted a similar study that analyzed the response of a ten-year-old African-American girl to the children's books she read. Some of the factors that influenced the study participant's interest and engagement in the books she read were the portrayal of similar personal and cultural experiences and the inclusion of strong, Black female characters that she could identify with (Sims, 1983). Interestingly, the study participant specified that she liked girls that were strong, active, and clever. This is a striking contrast to the stereotypical portrayals of female characters in children's literature who are often represented in more supporting and passive roles. This indicates that while solely having more characters from diverse gender identities is important, it may be more impactful if the characters are portrayed in non-stereotypical ways.

Rosenblatt (1982) also explained that when people read, they often apply their preconceived notions or frameworks of a topic to help them understand the text. However, if the ideas expressed in the text do not fit into that framework, it can sometimes cause the reader to revise it. As an example of this phenomenon, Nhundu (2007) found that when girls in Zimbabwe were presented with children's literature that provided non-stereotypical female role models and characters who had what were considered non-traditional occupations for females, it increased the desire of the female students to pursue more non-traditional career occupations. This implies that presenting texts that contained non-stereotypical female models may have caused the girls to revise their frameworks and preconceived notions surrounding gender roles, which demonstrates

the power that texts can have in breaking stereotypes. However, many texts can just as effectively promote negative stereotypes. Many educational and literacy experts have argued that books can often act as socializers and are powerful tools that can transmit social values, messages, and stereotypes (Bishop, 1990; Boyd et al. 2015). Through the books they are exposed to, children learn what and who is valued in society. When books do not represent the racial and gender identities of children or when the representations are portrayed in a culturally unauthentic way, they not only perpetuate negative stereotypes, but they also teach children that they are not valued in their own society which could lead to a negative reading transaction (Bishop, 1990; Thomas, 2016; Boyd et al., 2015).

Overall, if more positive reading transactions that foster interest and engagement can be achieved by including children's literature that counters stereotypes and consists of characters and people from diverse racial and gender identities, it is critical that educators take this into account when selecting the books used in schools. Therefore, in alignment with the two factors of the reading transaction (i.e., the text and the reader) highlighted in the Reader Response Theory, this study will specifically analyze the racial and gender representation within books included on the Common Core Text Exemplar list as compared to the racial and gender demographics of students in the United States.

### **Review of the Literature**

There is a multitude of research surrounding racial and gender diversity in children's literature, and most researchers have concluded that there is an overall lack of such diversity within children's literature. For example, this lack of racial and gender diversity can be seen across award-winning books, read-aloud recommendations, and in classroom libraries (Koss and Paciga, 2020; Koss et al., 2018; Koss and Johnson, 2016; Fullerton et al., 2018; Crisp et al.,

2016). Previous research has also found a lack of racial and gender diversity specifically within the texts included in the CCTE list as well which will be further explained in this section (McCaffrey, 2014; Gomez-Najarro, 2019; Möller, 2013).

### **Common Core Text Exemplar List**

In response to the concerns raised by literacy educators regarding the diverse representation within the Common Core Text Exemplar list, McCaffrey (2014) and Gomez-Najarro (2019) analyzed the racial and gender representation within the stories (fiction texts) included in the Common Core Text Exemplar list. After analyzing the kindergarten through first grade and the second through third-grade stories, McCaffrey (2014) and Gomez-Najarro (2019) respectively found that overall people of color and historically marginalized groups were sorely underrepresented or were represented in culturally inauthentic ways. They also found that while females were represented, they often assumed supporting and stereotypical gender roles. For example, females (as compared to males) were not often the main protagonist, and they were mainly presented in nurturer roles (e.g., wives and mothers). However, McCaffrey (2014) and Gomez-Najarro (2019) also analyzed the intersection of race and gender and noted that within the limited representation of females, there were rarely people of color represented. These studies also noted that there was no representation of characters who identify as non-binary.

Möller (2013) also analyzed the Common Core Text Exemplar list, but Möller specifically analyzed the racial and cultural representations within the kindergarten through fifth-grade informational texts (nonfiction books). Möller (2013) drew very similar conclusions to McCaffrey (2014) and Gomez-Najarro (2019). While there were some diverse racial and cultural representations in the informational texts, overall the representation was still very



limited. Within those diverse racial and cultural representations, there were a few excellent examples in terms of cultural authenticity, but there were many that had very negative, stereotypical, and/or culturally unauthentic representations as well. Overall, the results of these studies are concerning and highlight the issues related to racial and gender diversity within the Common Core Text Exemplar List.

### **Inferring Racial and Gender Identities in Texts**

While the studies explained above highlight the lack of diverse representation within children's literature, they also beg the question of how the racial and gender identities of the characters and people within the books were determined. When people read, they are consistently making inferences to help them understand the text (Oakhill, et al., 2015). The racial or gender identity of the characters in books may sometimes be explicitly stated, but it is often left up to the reader to infer. This invokes the question of whether there are specific elements included in stories that are commonly used to infer a particular race or gender. The elements included in the texts and the identity of the reader, may impact the inferences about the racial and gender identity of the characters and people in the texts. The elements used to infer race or gender may also be indicative of gender and racial stereotypes or cultural inauthenticity. For example, Nilsson (2005) conducted a content analysis of studies that analyzed Hispanic representation, and it was noted that in books that portrayed characters from Puerto Rico, the characters were often portrayed with very similar physical characteristics, living in typically large urban ghetto communities, and with low-level jobs that require limited education such as factory or domestic jobs. These portrayals are stereotypical and not culturally authentic, but they may imply that elements such as physical characteristics, where a character lives, and the type of job they have are elements used by the reader to infer the racial identity of the character.

In terms of gender, some researchers have found that readers often have certain perceptions about the gender identities associated with role names (i.e., a surgeon is generally associated with males) and pieces of clothing or biological characteristics (i.e., wearing a tie is often associated with males) which is why those elements are frequently used to make inferences about gender (Garnham, 2002). However, Garnham (2002) found when a character was introduced with a role name that is typically associated with one gender, but was then contradicted by a piece of clothing or biological feature that does not align with the gender assumed from the role name, there was often a mismatch in the reader's mind. This phenomenon also occurred when the reader was presented with the piece of clothing or biological characteristic prior to the role name. However, this study did not account for people that identify as non-binary, transgender, or non-conforming and did not consider the impact that may have on how gender is perceived. McCaffrey (2014) and Gomez-Najarro (2013) also noted that within texts from the Common Core Text Exemplar list, characters frequently were presented with stereotypical gender roles. The findings from these studies may indicate that due to preconceived and often stereotypical notions of how different genders should be represented, readers may use those elements to infer gender when reading, whether those inferences are correct or not.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although the kindergarten through third-grade fiction books on the Common Core Text Exemplar list have been analyzed, there is a lack of in-depth analysis on the recommended fourth and fifth-grade stories (Gomez-Najarro, 2019, McCaffrey, 2014). Therefore, this study will specifically analyze the fourth and fifth-grade texts to address this research gap. Also, while Möller (2013) analyzed the racial and ethnic diversity within the informational texts for kindergarten through fifth grade, gender representation was not analyzed. This study fills this gap

by analyzing the gender representation within the fourth and fifth grade informational texts along with the racial representation. There also does not seem to be research that directly compares the demographics of characters and people in the CCTE list to more recent demographics of students in the United States. Additionally, while numerous researchers have analyzed the diversity within children's literature, the elements from the texts that were used to determine or infer the racial and gender identity of the characters were not analyzed formally. Formally analyzing the elements that are used to make those inferences may provide unique insight into how readers interpret the racial and gender identities when reading.

Addressing these limitations will provide a clearer picture of the diverse representation within children's literature in educational settings as well as insight into how readers make inferences surrounding the racial and gender identities of characters. The elements used to infer race and gender may also be indicative of stereotypical portrayals. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to expand upon the current research on the diversity within the Common Core Text Exemplar list (Gomez-Najarro, 2019; McCaffrey, 2014; Möller, 2013) by specifically analyzing the texts for grades four and five while also comparing the representation within them to the current demographics of students in the United States. This study will also attempt to provide insight into how race and gender are inferred when reading. Specifically, my research questions are:

1. What is the racial and gender representation of the main characters and people within the stories and informational texts for grades four and five on the Common Core Text Exemplars list?
2. How does that representation compare to the racial and gender demographics of students in the United States?

3. What elements are included in the texts to help the reader infer the race and gender of the main character(s) or people?

In sum, it is important to analyze the books included in the Common Core Text Exemplar list to determine if the representation in those books matches the growing diversity of the US student population. If CCTE texts do not represent the students who are reading the texts, students may be robbed of the opportunity to see themselves mirrored in children's literature and to see windows into the lives of other people and cultures (Bishop 1990; Thomas, 2016). Looking through the lens of the Reader Response Theory, it is also important to analyze the diverse representation within the texts and how that representation compares to the identities of the students because it may be indicative of the type of transaction that will occur when students read (Rosenblatt, 1982). Using texts with diverse representation in schools has the potential to increase student reading engagement which may lead to a more positive and effective reading transaction (Hardy et al., 2020; Sims, 1983; Sailors & Kaambankadzanja, 2017). Analyzing the elements used to infer racial and gender identities is also important because it may be an indicator of stereotypes and cultural authenticity in the books.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a descriptive content analysis research design. According to DİNÇER (2018) a descriptive content analysis "aims to reveal the pattern(s) of a theme in frequencies or percentages to present an overall case and does not allow detailed inferences" (p. 178-179). A descriptive content analysis is a flexible design that utilizes elements from both qualitative and quantitative research designs. This research design allowed for analysis and subjective interpretation of the texts included on the Common Core Text Exemplar list. As the texts were

analyzed, quantitative patterns about how often characters and people from different races and genders are represented were identified, as well as more qualitative patterns related to how readers may infer those characteristics as they read based on elements included in the text. When reading the texts included on the list, elements from the text as well as illustrations and/or photographs required subjective interpretation which is why a qualitative approach was needed. However, the qualitative findings were converted into frequencies and percentages for quantitative analysis. Due to these reasons, the descriptive content analysis was an appropriate research design for this study.

### **Researcher Positionality**

As a future elementary school teacher, I want to ensure that the literature I use in my classroom is reflective of the students I teach. However, as a White, cisgender female I recognize that I come from a place of privilege. While in school, I was consistently exposed to books that included White cisgender characters. As I have grown older, I have realized that I did not often have the opportunity to see a window into the lives of people and cultures who were different from my own, or I was presented with books that contained culturally unauthentic or stereotypical representations. My identity and experiences may have impacted how I viewed and understood the texts that I analyzed in this study, which is why I attempted to acknowledge and “bracket” my biases in a study journal. Overall, my hope is that this study may be one small step towards changing the literature that children are exposed to in schools today so that it will be more representative of the student population.

### **Data Sources**

This study specifically analyzed the texts for grades four through five listed in the Common Core Exemplar List (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2013). Only the texts

from the stories (fiction texts) and informational texts (nonfiction texts) sections on the list were included. In total, 10 stories and 19 informational texts were analyzed. In terms of inclusion and exclusion criteria, only stories that included human main characters were included. Any non-human characters (including anthropomorphized characters) featured in the stories were noted and then excluded. Regarding the informational texts, only texts that featured historical figures or specific groups of people (e.g., racial, cultural, religious, etc.) were included. Books that solely focused on a non-human topic (such as the scientific study of weather, animals, electricity, etc.) were excluded. However, the scientific texts were included if they incorporated a human narrator or specifically discussed a scientist or historical figure. Only single-volume texts were included. Multi-volume texts on the list were excluded. The characteristics of the main characters or people that were specifically coded for were their racial and gender identities. Publicly available data from the U.S. Department of Education (2018) that describes the racial and gender demographic information of students who attend public schools in the United States was also used in the study. That data acted as a comparison to the racial and demographic data of the main characters and people in the texts on the Common Core Text Exemplar list.

## **Procedures**

When analyzing the texts a combination of deductive and inductive coding as described by Thomas (2006) was used to code for the race and gender of the main characters in the text, as well as the elements used to infer the race or gender of the character or person. As the stories and informational texts were analyzed, the code form was marked with ones and zeroes. Ones indicated that the text had the said criteria (i.e., If the main character is a male, it will be marked with a one). However, if the text did not contain the criteria it was marked with a zero.

This study defined the main character as the character that is featured most prominently and that the story centers around. More than one main character could be coded for in each text. Regarding the informational texts, the main people or groups were also defined as the people or groups that the informational text features the most prominently and that the text centers around. People can refer to historical figures or narrators within the text. Groups refer to people mainly featured in the text that share a common identity (e.g. cultural, racial, religious, etc.). Chapters within informational texts that each focused on distinct or different topics and sets of people were each coded as a separate text. More than one person or group could be coded for in each informational text. However, if the text had more than three main characters, that text was excluded. To code each main character or person in the texts, the cover images and illustrations or photographs were analyzed. The included summary (if applicable) was also read and a brief initial scan of all the texts was conducted to determine if the text met the inclusion criteria. Following this procedure, the first two chapters and the last chapter of the book were read if the text was a chapter book. All prologues, epilogues, and author's notes were read if included. If the text was not a chapter book, then the first five pages and last five pages were read. However, if an informational text only included information about a historical figure or person in a particular chapter or page, that chapter or page was read. If the text was 10 pages or less in length, then the entire text was read and analyzed.

Below is a description of the coding system used for race and gender, as well as the elements used to infer the race or gender of the main characters.

### ***Coding for Gender***

This study used a deductive coding approach when coding for gender. The main characters or people in the texts were coded into four different categories, male, female, other

gender identity, and group. The other gender identity category encompassed all characters and people that did not identify as a cisgender male or female (e.g., non-binary, transgender, and non-conforming). If a text featured a main group of people that had multiple gender representations, then the text was coded under the group code.

To code for the elements used to infer the gender of the main characters, a deductive coding system was prepared. However, inductive coding was also used as necessary while analyzing the books. Table 1, also part of the codebook, describes a list of the a priori codes. More than one element could be coded for when analyzing the texts because many of the texts contained more than one element to infer gender.

### ***Coding for Race and Ethnicity***

This study also adopted a deductive coding system used by Koss and Paciga (2020) to code the race/ethnicity of the main characters and people in the books. The racial and ethnic categories included are White, Black, Latinx, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Island Born, Middle Eastern, Multiracial, or unknown. I will refer the reader to Koss and Paciga (2020) for specific definitions of each racial and ethnic group.

Regarding elements used to infer the race of the character, Table 2 is the basis of the codebook and explains the list of the a priori codes, meaning the deductive codes selected prior to data analysis that were used. More than one element could be coded for because most of the books contained more than one element to infer race. As new patterns related to the research question emerged, inductive coding was also used as necessary while analyzing the books.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the coding, the frequency of each category was calculated and was also converted to percentages. The data was then analyzed to identify patterns related to gender and



racial representation along with the elements used to infer that representation. Pivot tables were also used to analyze the intersections between racial and gender representation as well as to analyze the patterns between the elements used to infer race or gender and their respective gender or racial frequencies. The frequencies and percentages of the gender and racial diversity within the texts were then compared to the demographic data of students who attend public schools in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure the dependability of this study, examples of codes are provided to demonstrate that each code accurately describes the phenomena analyzed in the texts. As mentioned when describing my positionality, I also “bracketed” and acknowledged my biases by recording them in a study journal. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) expressed that it is important for researchers to explore and “become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions” in order to reduce how my bias influences the results of the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that once researchers become aware of their prejudices and assumptions, those prejudices and assumptions can then be “bracketed or temporarily set aside so that we [the researchers] can examine consciousness itself” (p. 27). The practice of bracketing my biases increases the credibility of the study.

### **Validity and Reliability**

This study also employed interrater reliability. Interrater reliability “is a measure for the extent to which two or more raters of the same behavior or event are in agreement with what they observed” (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Dezell, 2019, p.109). To establish interrater reliability, a second coder analyzed some of the data. The second coder analyzed two randomly selected stories and two randomly selected informational texts. All discrepancies within the coding were discussed

and resolved. To reduce threats to internal validity, attempts were made to ensure that all variables are clearly defined. This helped to increase the replicability of the study.

## **Results**

This section will explain the major patterns and results for each research question based on the coding of the texts. In terms of the stories, all 10 texts listed in the Common Core Text Exemplar List for grades four and five met the inclusion criteria and 11 main characters were identified in total. In terms of the informational texts, 65 main people and groups were identified as being central to the text. However, nine texts were excluded along with 11 chapters from *Toys!: Amazing stories behind some great inventions*. Most of the texts or chapters were excluded for not containing human main characters/people or for not containing one to three clearly identifiable main characters/people. Appendix C lists the texts and specific book chapters excluded. It is also important to note that the *Toys!: Amazing stories behind some great inventions* book alone accounted for 30 people and/or groups. Due to this, it had a larger impact on the results for the gender and racial representation in the informational texts than the other texts did.

As a clarification, the percentages throughout this section are specific to each genre unless otherwise noted, meaning that they are the percentages of each racial or gender group represented within either the stories or informational texts. Each of the percentages were rounded to the tenths place.

### **Overall Representation in the Texts**

The gender and racial representation found within the stories and informational texts are described in the following sections. Table 3 also details the racial and gender representation within the texts.

### ***Gender Representation***

When comparing gender representation within the stories and informational texts, there are great differences. In terms of gender representation within the stories, 45.5% (5) were female and 54.5% (6) were male. Conversely, in the informational texts, 9.2% (6) were female and 66.2% (43) were male, along with 24.6% (16) represented as groups (e.g., Negro League Baseball Players, Ancient Mound Builders, etc.). While male characters and people were represented more frequently in both text genres, males were substantially more represented within the informational texts. Even without considering the people included in *Toys!: Amazing Stories Behind Some Great Inventions*, males still accounted for 45.7% (16) and females accounted for 8.6% (3), along with 45.7% (16) represented as groups. Of note, there were no characters or people represented from any other gender identity (e.g., non-binary, transgender, or non-conforming) in either genre.

### ***Racial Representation***

In terms of racial representation, White people and characters were the most represented in both the stories and informational texts. Within the stories, 63.6% (7) of the characters were White, and within the informational texts, 67.7% (44) of people were White along with 6.2% (4) represented as groups. Also, within the stories, 18.2% (2) were Black, 9.1% (1) were Asian, and 9.1% (1) were American Indian. There was no representation across the other four racial/ethnic categories in the stories. Within both genres, the groups that were the least represented were Latinx and multiracial groups. Even though the informational texts had greater representation across more racial/ethnic groups than the stories did, the number of people within each racial/ethnic category still only represented a small portion of the total. For example, while the

informational texts did include Latinx, Island Born, and multiracial representation, each only had one person or group represented per category.

The intersection between race and gender was also limited overall. For example, while Black males were represented within the stories, Black females and characters/people of other gender identities were not. Even within the representation of White people, males were represented with the most frequency. Within the informational texts, it is also important to note that of the 21 non-White people or groups represented, 57.1% (12) were represented as groups rather than as individuals. For example, in the *My Librarian Is a Camel: How Books Are Brought to Children Around the World*, Ruurs (2005) highlighted groups from many different countries (i.e., Kenya, Thailand, Zimbabwe, etc.). In *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball*, Nelson (2008) also discussed the Negro League baseball players. While there are individually players mentioned, Nelson mainly discussed the baseball players collectively as a group.

### **Elements for Inferring Gender and Race**

The elements that were used to infer the gender and racial identities of the characters, people, and groups are described below. Table 4 describes the elements used to infer gender and Table 5 describes the elements used to infer race.

#### ***Elements for Inferring Gender***

To infer the gender of the main characters, all of the deductive codes were used throughout the coding process. Table 4 includes all of the deductive codes used. Inductive coding was not required for inferring gender. While it was more common for the gender of the characters/people to be explicitly stated than racial identity was, it still did not occur frequently. Due to this, other elements were mainly used to infer gender. Across both text genres, images

were one of the most common elements used to infer each character's gender. The images were used to infer the gender of 81.8% (9) of the characters in the stories and of 75.4% (49) of the people/groups in the informational texts. If the text included illustrations or images of the characters, they were always used to infer gender.

Gender pronouns were also used to infer the gender of all the characters or people when they were included. For example, gender pronouns were used to infer the gender of all 11 (100%) characters in the stories and for 55.4% (36) of the people in the informational texts. However, it is important to note that unless explicitly stated, hardly any of these elements were used in isolation to determine the gender of each character or person. It was often the combination of various elements that supported the inference of gender identity. For example, people who identify as other gender identities (e.g. non-binary, transgender, or non-conforming) may choose to use pronouns such as they, zie, hir, or sie, but they may also choose to use pronouns like he/him/his or she/her/hers which are typically used by cisgender males and females respectively as well. Therefore, with this in mind, gender pronouns alone were not used to determine the gender identity of the characters or people in the texts.

Textual description was used to infer the gender of 63.6% (7) of the characters in the stories and 67.7% (44) of the people in the informational texts. However, this element was a broad category and therefore had many nuances. Within the informational texts (particularly in *Toys!: Amazing Stories Behind Some Great Inventions*) the profession/role of each character or person was frequently used to infer gender identity. For example, some of the male people were described as Navy engineers, carpenters, video game designers, rulers, explorers, chemists, and other professions that are stereotypically associated with males, especially when considering the time period that the people lived in.

While this did not occur as frequently, textual descriptions of beauty and strength within the stories were also used to infer gender. A few male characters were described specifically in regards to their strength. For example, in *The Black Stallion*, Farley (2008) describes the main character Alec, as having “hard muscles” (p. 4), and in *M. C. Higgins, the Great*, Hamilton (1999) describes the main character M.C. as “muscular and athletic, like his father” (p. 4) and as having a “hard strength and grace” (p.18). Whereas in *The Secret Garden*, when describing the main character Mary (who was identified as female) Burnett (1985), used the phrase “Pretty creature, pretty face, poor beautiful thing” when contrasting Mary’s lack of beauty to her mother’s beauty. Additional elements such as names, gender pronouns, and gender specific language were also used to infer the gender identities of the main characters or people in the texts.

### ***Elements for Inferring Race***

In terms of inferring race, all deductive codes were used except for dialect. However, inductive coding was also used to generate four new codes. Table 5 includes all of the deductive and inductive codes used. The new inductive codes are as follows: outside knowledge, descriptions of other people or characters, traditions/customs, and inferred White. The images were the most commonly used element for inferring the racial identity within both genres. Within the stories, the images were used to infer the racial identity of 81.8% (9) of the characters. Images were also used to infer the racial identity of 78.5% (51) of the people or groups in the informational texts. As with inferring gender, if the text included any images they were always used to infer the racial identity of the characters, people, or groups.

Another common element across both genres was the inferred White element. Often the texts that featured White characters lacked clear descriptions that could be used to infer race.

These texts essentially operated under the assumption that readers would assume that the characters and people would be White as that is the “norm”. Within the stories, this code was used for 63.6% (7) of the characters and 60% (39) of the people or groups in the informational texts. For example, in texts like *The little prince* (Saint-Exupéry, 2000) and *Toys!: Amazing stories behind some great inventions* (Wulffson, 2000), frequently the only indication given of the character or person’s racial identity was an illustration and sometimes even that was not included. There were often not as many textual descriptions, traditions/customs, particular settings, or other similar elements that could be used to infer race like there were when people of color were identified as the main characters or people.

Often the inferred White code was also implied when descriptions of other people or characters were given. These descriptions were given frequently enough that it became a new code in itself in addition to the inferred White code. While there may have been a lack of explicit description of the main characters, the way the supporting characters were described often implied a similarity or difference between the racial identity of that character with the main character. For example, in both *The secret garden* and in *The black stallion* (which both featured White main characters), characters of color were always described by their skin color whereas other side characters who were presumably White were not described by their skin color. In *The secret garden*, Burnett (1985) speaking from Mary’s perspective (the main character) when describing the servants said, “She never remembered seeing anything familiarly but the dark faces of her Ayah and other native servants” (p. 2). In *The black stallion*, Farley (2008) says “Alec saw a dark-skinned man” (p. 8) and continuously referred to this person as the “dark-skinned” every time he was mentioned. In these examples, the skin color descriptions of presumably characters of color and not any of the other side characters (who are presumably

White), gave the impression that characters of color were breaking the “norm”, which suggested a contrast between their racial identity and that of the main character. This element also occurred in books that featured non-White main characters, but in these books description of other characters was used to imply similarity and contrast between racial identities. For example, in *The birchbark house* (where the main character Omakayas was identified as American Indian) Erdrich (1999) in the summary stated that “the chimookoman, white people, encroach more and more on their land” (para. 1). This again implied contrast between the racial identities. However, in *Bud, not Buddy* Curtis (1999) described Bud’s (the main character) mother as a “Negro woman” (p. 222). Using the racial identity of Bud’s mother enabled the reader to also make an inference about Bud’s racial identity because of the similarity that was implied.

Outside knowledge was also used frequently to infer the racial identity of the characters or people. When coding the stories, outside knowledge was used to determine the racial identity of 54.5% (6) of the characters. For example, in *Where the mountain meets the moon*, outside knowledge was used to identify the main character Minli as Asian because Lin (2009) included an author’s note that gave more context about the Chinese folktales that this story was based on. As the reader, I also identified similarities between the setting in the book with landmarks in China, which helped me to infer that if the book took place in China, the main character was likely Asian. Within the informational texts, outside knowledge was used to determine the racial identity of 69.2% (45) of the people or groups. For example, in the “Underground Railroad” article one of the main people included by Buckmaster (2010) was Harriet Tubman. As the reader, I inferred that her racial identity was Black because of the outside knowledge that I had about her.



## **Comparison to Public School Student Demographics**

The following section will describe how the gender and racial representation within the stories and informational texts compares to the demographics of public school students within the United States. Table 6 displays the percentages of each racial and gender group based on the United States (US) and North Carolina (NC) demographics of public school students (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Figures 1 and 2 also display the comparisons between the gender and racial representation (respectively) to the current US student demographics.

### ***Gender Representation***

In the texts, male characters/people were overrepresented while female characters/people were underrepresented when compared to the current student demographics. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), 51.4% of students are male and 48.6% are female. Within the stories, 54.5% of characters were male and 45.5% were female, indicating males were slightly overrepresented. However, within the informational texts, 66.2% of the people were male, 9.2% were female, and 24.6% were represented as a group. This demonstrates that males are more significantly overrepresented in the informational texts. When comparing the gender demographics of texts to gender demographics of North Carolina students (which is where this study took place), results remain about the same - there is an overrepresentation of males. Because the U.S. Department of Education (2018) does not include data on the percentage of students who do not identify as a cisgender male or female, it is not possible to determine how representative these texts are of the national gender demographics of students. However, based on some surveys and news coverage, we can assume that there are children and teenagers in the US who identify as transgender, non-binary, and other gender identities who were not represented in the texts (Moyer, 2022).

### ***Racial Representation***

In terms of racial representation, White characters and people were overrepresented in both the stories and informational texts, while many other racial groups were underrepresented. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), 47.3% of students identify as White, as compared to the 63.6% of the characters in the stories and 67.7% of the people in the informational texts that were identified as White. Without considering *Toys!: Amazing stories behind some great inventions*, White people accounted for 45.7% of the total representation in the informational texts, but other racial groups were still underrepresented. One of the most significant areas of underrepresentation was in the Latinx group. None of the characters in the stories were identified as Latinx, and only 1 (1.5%) group in the informational texts was identified as Latinx. However, 27.2% of the U.S. student population is Latinx, which illustrates a significant underrepresentation of this group (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The U.S. Department of Education (2018) also stated that 3.8% of students identify as 2 or more races. No characters in the stories identified as multiracial and only 1 (1.5%) person was identified in the informational texts, which indicates people with multiracial heritage had limited representation in texts.

Some of the other racial groups such as Black or Asian groups were slightly overrepresented in both the stories and informational texts when compared to the U.S. demographics, but when compared to the demographics of students in North Carolina, Black people are underrepresented. Black students account for 25.3% of the North Carolina student demographics, but only 18.2% of the characters and 10.8% of the people/groups were Black in the stories and informational texts respectively, once again demonstrating the underrepresentation of these groups.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study provide many significant findings regarding the lack of racial and gender diversity within the CCTE list that are largely supported by previous research. Many of the results surrounding the elements used to infer race and gender are also significant because of the stereotypes that they highlight within the gender and racial representation in the texts. The significance of these findings will be explained throughout this section.

### **Lack of Diverse Gender Representation**

The finding that males are overrepresented in the stories is in line with previous research regarding the CCTE list. While previous research did not code for people of other gender identities (e.g., non-binary, transgender, or non-conforming), they did report an overrepresentation of male main characters and an underrepresentation of female main characters in the kindergarten through third-grade stories on the list (McCaffrey, 2014; Gomez-Najarro, 2019). However, to my knowledge, this is the first study to examine gender representation within the informational texts for any of the elementary grade levels. This study found that within the informational texts, males were even more significantly overrepresented which is concerning considering that in fourth and fifth grade, there tends to be a greater emphasis and exposure to informational texts (Job and Coleman, 2016). Especially as students progress across the grade levels, there is an increased expectation to read and comprehend informational texts because they are the types of texts that students will be exposed to most frequently in college and future careers. Therefore, the lack of diverse gender representation found within the informational texts may provide a more accurate view of the gender diversity that students are exposed to due to the increased use of informational texts in grades four through five.

However, the lack of gender representation does not appear to be the only issue. Elements to infer gender were rarely used in isolation, but textual descriptions that provided the roles/professions of the people or characters in the texts were frequently used to infer gender. Many of the roles/professions were stereotypically associated with males or females. This finding is in line with previous research that highlighted how people often make gender assumptions based on role names (Garnham, et al., 2002). While there has been more progress in dismantling some of the stereotypical ideas surrounding gender roles in recent years, it is concerning that many of these texts only portray males and females in these stereotypical roles/professions. This is not to say that it is problematic to portray, for example, men as engineers and women as caregivers, but what is concerning is when they are only portrayed in those ways. This representation may continue to promote stereotypes surrounding gender for both males and females. This type of representation is also concerning because it does not take into account people of other gender identities who may not “fit” into society’s preconceived notions surrounding gender roles. In a sense, these texts demonstrate that there is not only a lack of diverse gender representation, but that there is also an issue of how specific gender identities are represented in those texts. While not every text contained characters or people that were represented in stereotypical ways, it was still an issue that is worth noting. In previous research Nhundu (2007) demonstrated the power that non-stereotypical gender representation in texts can have on motivating specifically young girls to pursue non-stereotypical careers, which is why the way in which characters and people of various genders are represented should be a factor when selecting the texts used in schools.

## **Lack of Diverse Racial Representation**

While not unexpected, another significant finding was the overrepresentation of White characters and people in both the stories and informational texts, especially as compared to the current student demographics. This finding is supported by previous research regarding the Common Core Text Exemplar List as well as award-winning books and read-aloud recommendations (McCaffrey, 2014; Gomez-Najarro, 2019; Möller, 2013; Koss & Paciga, 2020; Fullerton et al., 2019). However, the issue is not only in the overrepresentation of White people, but in the resulting underrepresentation of other racial/ethnic groups. For example, there was a striking lack of Latinx representation within these texts. While other racial/ethnic groups were underrepresented in both the stories and informational texts, Latinx representation was the most limited. This finding is also supported by previous research regarding the Common Core Text Exemplar list. For example, McCaffrey (2014) noted that only two characters in the kindergarten through first-grade stories were identified as Latinx, and Gomez-Najarro (2019) did not find any Latinx representation in the stories for grades two through three. Möller (2013) analyzed the kindergarten through fifth-grade informational texts and while they did not specifically comment on Latinx representation, they stated that the overall representation of people of color was limited. This is concerning because of the significant portion of the current student population that identifies as Latinx, with that representation ever-increasing (Krogstad and Noe-Bustamante, 2021). If teachers are using texts from the Common Core Text Exemplar list or other similar texts, Latinx students and other students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups are likely not being given the opportunity to see themselves mirrored in the texts they are reading. While students need to read books that offer a window into the lives of those different from them, students also need to see themselves and their experiences mirrored in the texts they read.

(Bishop, 1990). However, the lack of diverse racial representation within these texts is not only detrimental to students of color, but also to White students. As Bishop (1990) argued, it may cause White students to develop “a dangerous ethnocentrism” in an increasingly diverse world (p. 15). Also important to note is that similar to gender representation, the informational texts included an even greater overrepresentation of White people than the stories did. This is again concerning considering the greater emphasis placed on informational texts in the upper elementary grades (Job and Coleman, 2016).

Another noteworthy, but unanticipated finding was that within the informational texts most people of color were represented in groups rather than as individuals (e.g., Negro League Baseball players and Keyna natives). Considering that the representation of people of color was limited to begin with, it is striking that the majority of that limited representation was in groups. The group representation within the texts is a prime example of social categorization. Humans naturally categorize people and things into different groups. However, the danger with social categorization is that it can exacerbate the perceptions of differences *between* groups and simultaneously overemphasize similarity *within* groups, which can lead to stereotypes (Strangor, 2014). By portraying people of color mainly in groups rather than as individuals, it sends a message of everyone being the “same” in those groups which can devalue individual differences. While the group representation in these texts is not inherently bad, it is concerning that people of color were most often represented in this way due to the potential stereotypes that it could promote.

In terms of elements used to infer race, the inferred White inductive code is also particularly significant. When White characters or people were portrayed as the “norm” in the texts, it marginalized those who are not White. This representation is striking considering that the

majority of public school students in the US are not White (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). As Bishop (1990) emphasized, texts are often socializers and have the power to convey ideas about who is valued in our society. Therefore, it is essential to be more conscious of the messages conveyed by the texts included in the Common Core Text Exemplar list because of the power they hold.

### **Implications**

One major implication from this study is that if teachers and schools are using the grades four through five texts from the CCTE list, many students of color are likely not seeing themselves mirrored in the texts they read, and simultaneously White students are not seeing windows into the lives of people from different racial identities. Similarly, females and students of other gender identities may also not be represented in texts used in schools either. As explained by the Reader Response Theory, it is essential for the reader to be engaged in the texts and research has indicated that including books with diverse gender and racial representation may increase reading engagement. Due to the lack of diverse gender and racial representation included in the fourth through fifth grade texts, many students may not be as engaged in these texts. Additionally, the analysis of elements used to infer race and gender also implies that these texts may promote both racial and gender stereotypes. This study along with previous research strongly emphasizes the need for an updated Common Core Text Exemplar list to be created that is more reflective of the current US student population and that does not further perpetuate gender and racial stereotypes. If texts from an updated list are then used in schools, it could potentially lead to more positive reading transactions, and may even increase student reading interest, engagement, and in turn comprehension (Hardy et al., 2020; Sims, 1983; Sailors & Kaambankadzanja, 2017; Barbar and Klauda, 2020).

## **Limitations and Future Research**

However, this study is not without limitations. For example, as described by the Reader's Response Theory, reading is a transactional process between the reader and the text in which meaning is developed. Therefore, as the reader of the texts, my personal experiences, biases, and my identity as a White, cisgender, adult female may have impacted how I coded and interpreted the texts. Due to this limitation, it may be beneficial in future research to study how children from diverse backgrounds interpret race and gender in the texts that they read. How a child might interpret these texts may be very different from how an adult reader understands them. Along with this, the elements that children use to infer race or gender when reading may be different from the ones that an adult reader would use. It is also important to note that because only selected pages and chapters were analyzed there could have possibly been additional elements used to infer race or gender that were not coded for. To address this limitation, future research could analyze the texts in their entirety because this may give a fuller and more accurate picture of the elements used to infer gender and racial identities within the texts. Additionally, this study was unable to identify more current research regarding how widely the Common Core Text Exemplar list is used in schools today, meaning that some of the implications regarding the effect that these texts can have on students today may be more hypothetical. Future research could evaluate the continued use and influence of the list in schools today.

## **Conclusion**

This study corroborated many previous research findings and provided a fuller picture of the gender and racial diversity within the Common Core Text Exemplar list. In particular, this study provided many new insights into the gender and racial representation within the informational texts which is important considering the increased emphasis and use of



informational texts in schools today (Job and Coleman, 2016). Considering the influence that this list may have on children's literature in education, there is a critical need to update the list to be reflective of the current US student population. If updated, this list could become a valuable resource for teachers as they select texts to use in their classrooms. However, if an updated list is ever created, this study also emphasized the need to intentionally include characters and people from different gender and racial identities to reflect national demographics. As highlighted by many of the elements used to infer race and gender, some of the representations within the current texts convey stereotypes, which is concerning, and needs to be considered when selecting texts for an updated list as well. Overall, children need to see both themselves and those that are different from them represented in the texts they read because of the immense impact this can have on fostering positive reading transactions.

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**Table 1***Elements for Inferring Gender*

Elements	Definition	Example
Explicitly Stated	The author clearly states the gender of the character.	“Amerigo Vespucci, the man for whom the continents of North and South America are named” (Carlisle, 1992, p. 10)
Name	The name of the character is associated with a specific gender identity.	James is a name commonly associated with males, while a name like Ruth is commonly associated with females (Wulffson, 2000)
Images	The illustration or cover image shows the character or person with physical characteristics or clothing associated with a particular gender.	In <i>Alice’s adventures in wonderland</i> , illustrations are included through the book that show Alice in a dress, with long hair, and traditionally feminine features (Carroll, 1992)
Textual Description	A description within the text of the character/person/group is given. This description could include a physical description (includes clothing) or any other characteristic that helps to imply gender.	In <i>Toys!: Amazing stories behind some great inventions</i> , it was stated that Richard James was a Navy engineer. This career is stereotypically associated with males. (Wulffson, 2000)
Gender Pronouns	Pronouns are used to indicate the gender of the character or person.	The pronouns she/her/hers and he/him/his were used throughout all the texts to infer gender.
Gender Specific Language	Various titles and/or family relationship words are used to convey gender.	“She was their daughter” (Babbitt, 1975, p. 130)

**Table 2***Elements for Inferring Race*

Element	Definition	Example
Explicitly Stated	The author clearly states the racial or ethnic identity of the character.	“The ancestors of today’s southeastern Indian people constructed many mounds out of the earth” (Kavasch, 2003, para. 1)
Name	The name of the character is traditionally associated with a particular ethnic or racial group.	In <i>About time: A first look at time and clocks</i> , Su Song is one of the main people. Su Song is a Chinese name, which gave an indication that his racial identity is likely Asian (Koscielniak, 2004).
Images	The illustration or cover image shows the character or person’s skin color or the character is shown in clothing specific to a particular racial or ethnic group.	On the cover of <i>Bud, not Buddy</i> , it shows an illustration of Bud who looks phenotypically Black (Curtis, 1999).
Textual Description	A description within the text of the character/person/group is given. This description could include a physical description (includes clothing) or any other characteristic that helps to imply race.	In <i>M.C. Higgins, the great</i> Hamilton (1999) states that “M.C. was tall, with oak-brown skin” (p. 4) and “He stood up like a black scarecrow rooted to the spot” (p. 32).
Setting	The time or place of the book correlates to the typical location of a racial or ethnic group. A character or person’s place of origin may also be used to infer their racial identity.	In <i>Let’s Investigate Marvelously Meaningful Maps</i> Carlisle (1992) states that the main person is from Italy and is exploring the Americas during the 1500s. During this time, typically White Europeans were exploring the Americas.
Events	Characters experience certain events specific to their racial or ethnic identity.	In the “Underground Railroad” article, Buckmaster (2010), describes enslaved people in the United States escaping to the North, which implies that these people were Black.



Element	Definition	Example
Dialect	The character's speech is written in a dialect form specific to a racial or ethnic group.	No examples of this were found of this code.
Outside Knowledge	Knowledge outside of the story itself supplied by an author's note, awards given to the book, or other known historical context related to the book is used to infer the racial identity of the main character or person.	In <i>Where the mountain meets the moon</i> , Lin (2009) includes an author's note that explains that the book was based on Chinese folktales, which gave an indication that the main character Minli was likely Asian.
Other Descriptions	Descriptions of other characters or people in the text are given that either imply similarity or contrast between the racial identity of the main character or person.	The following quote implies contrast between the racial identity of Mary (the main character) and her servants: "She never remembered seeing anything familiarly but the dark faces of her Ayah and other native servants" (Burnett, 1985, p. 2)
Traditions/Customs	The text describes traditions, customs, or practices specific to a racial or ethnic group.	In <i>The birchbark house</i> , Erdrich (1999) describes the main character and her family tanning moose hid skin to make moccasins, which is a practice done by American Indians
Foreign Language	The author states the name of the foreign language spoken by the characters/ people or that language is used throughout the book. The text may also state that it was translated from a specific language.	In <i>My Librarian Is a Camel: How Books Are Brought to Children Around the World</i> , Ruurs (2005) states that the Kenyan people speak Kiswahili.
Inferred White	The character or person is assumed to be White because there is a minimal amount or lack of other elements to suggest the character or person's race. In the text, there is an underlying assumption that White is the "default" race.	In <i>The little prince</i> there were hardly any elements included to infer race unlike there typically were in books that featured main characters and people of color (Saint-Expéry, 2000). It did not spend as much time establishing the character's racial identity like books that featured people of color did.

**Table 3***Racial and Gender Representation in the Texts*

	Female		Male		Other		Group		Totals		
	% (n)		% (n)		% (n)		% (n)		% (n)		
Race/Ethnicity	S	I	S	I	S	I	S	I	S	I	Both
White	27.2 (3)	6.2 (4)	36.4 (4)	55.4 (36)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6.2 (4)	63.6 (7)	67.7 (44)	67.1 (51)
Black	0 (0)	3.1 (2)	18.2 (2)	3.1 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4.6 (3)	18.2 (2)	10.8 (7)	11.8 (9)
Latinx	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.5 (1)	0 (0)	1.5 (1)	1.3 (1)
Asian	9.1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4.6 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6.2 (4)	9.1 (1)	10.8 (7)	10.5 (8)
American Indian	9.1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3.1 (2)	9.1 (1)	3.1 (2)	3.9 (3)
Island Born	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.5 (1)	0 (0)	1.5 (1)	1.3 (1)
Middle Eastern	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.5 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.5 (1)	0 (0)	3.1 (2)	2.6 (2)
Multiracial	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.5 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.5 (1)	1.3 (1)
Totals	45.5 (5)	9.2 (6)	54.5 (6)	66.2 (43)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	24.6 (16)	14.5 (11)	85.5 (65)	100 (76)

*Note.* S = Stories, I = Informational Texts; Percentages in stories and informational texts columns are specific to within their respective genres.

**Table 4***Elements for Inferring Gender Results*

	Stories	Informational Texts	Totals
Deductive Codes	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Explicitly Stated	72.7 (8)	13.8 (9)	22.4 (17)
Name	72.7 (8)	75.4 (49)	75.0 (57)
Images	81.8 (9)	75.4 (49)	76.3 (58)
Textual Description	63.6 (7)	67.7 (44)	67.1 (51)
Gender Pronouns	100 (11)	55.4 (36)	61.8 (47)
Gender Specific Language	81.8 (9)	12.3 (8)	22.4 (17)

*Note.* Percentages in the stories and informational texts columns are specific to within their respective genres.

**Table 5***Elements for Inferring Race Results*

	Stories	Informational Texts	Totals
All Codes <sup>a</sup>	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Explicitly Stated	9.1 (1)	3.1 (2)	3.9 (3)
Name	18.2 (2)	46.2 (30)	42.1 (32)
Images	81.8 (9)	78.5 (51)	78.9 (60)
Textual Description	54.5 (6)	23.1 (15)	27.6 (21)
Setting	54.5 (6)	63.1 (41)	61.8 (47)
Events	18.2 (2)	24.6 (16)	23.7 (18)
Dialect	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Outside Knowledge	54.5 (6)	69.2 (45)	67.1 (51)
Other Descriptions	36.4 (4)	10.8 (7)	14.5 (11)
Traditions/Customs	27.3 (3)	3.1 (2)	6.6 (5)
Foreign Language	45.5 (5)	18.5 (12)	22.4 (17)
Inferred White	63.6 (7)	60.0 (39)	60.5 (46)

*Note.* Percentages in the stories and informational texts columns are specific to within their respective genres.

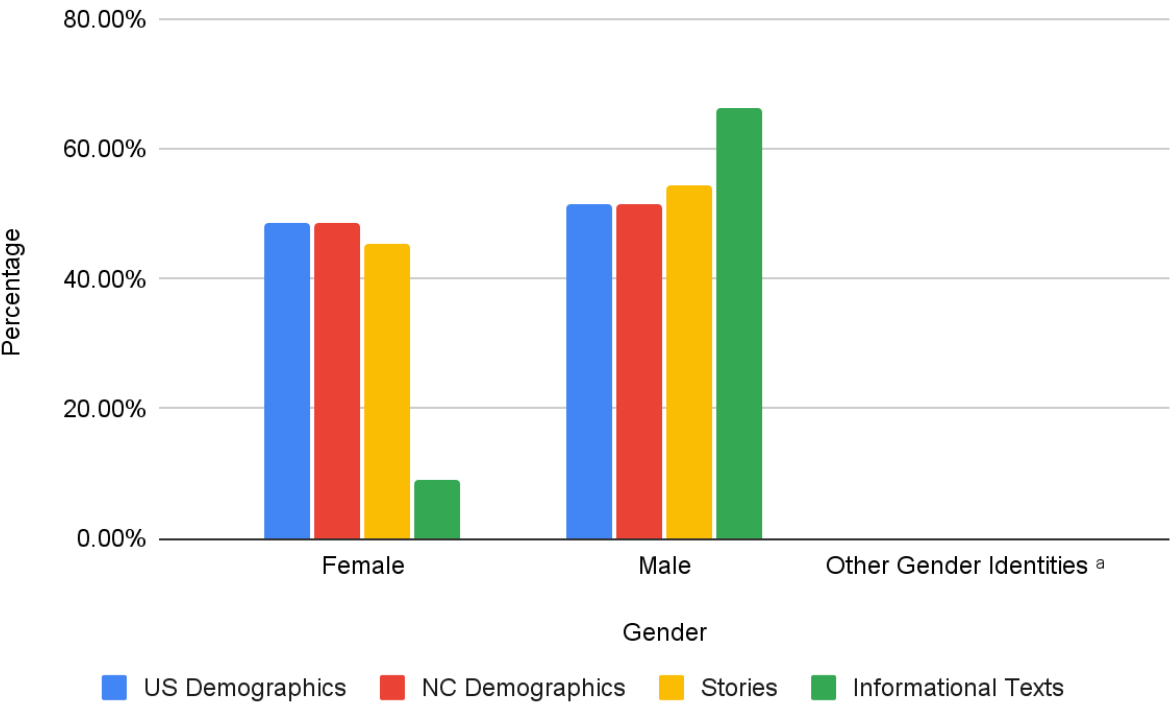
<sup>a</sup>This refers to the deductive and inductive codes used.

**Table 6***United States and North Carolina Public School Demographics*

	Female		Male		Totals	
Race/Ethnicity	US	NC	US	NC	US	NC
White	22.9	23.2	24.4	24.9	47.3	48.1
Black	7.4	12.4	7.7	12.9	15.1	25.3
Latinx	13.3	8.6	13.9	9.0	27.2	17.5
Asian	2.5	1.6	2.6	1.7	5.2	3.3
American Indian	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.6	1.0	1.2
Island Born	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.1
Multiracial	1.9	2.2	1.9	2.2	3.8	4.4
Totals	48.6	48.6	51.4	51.4	100	100

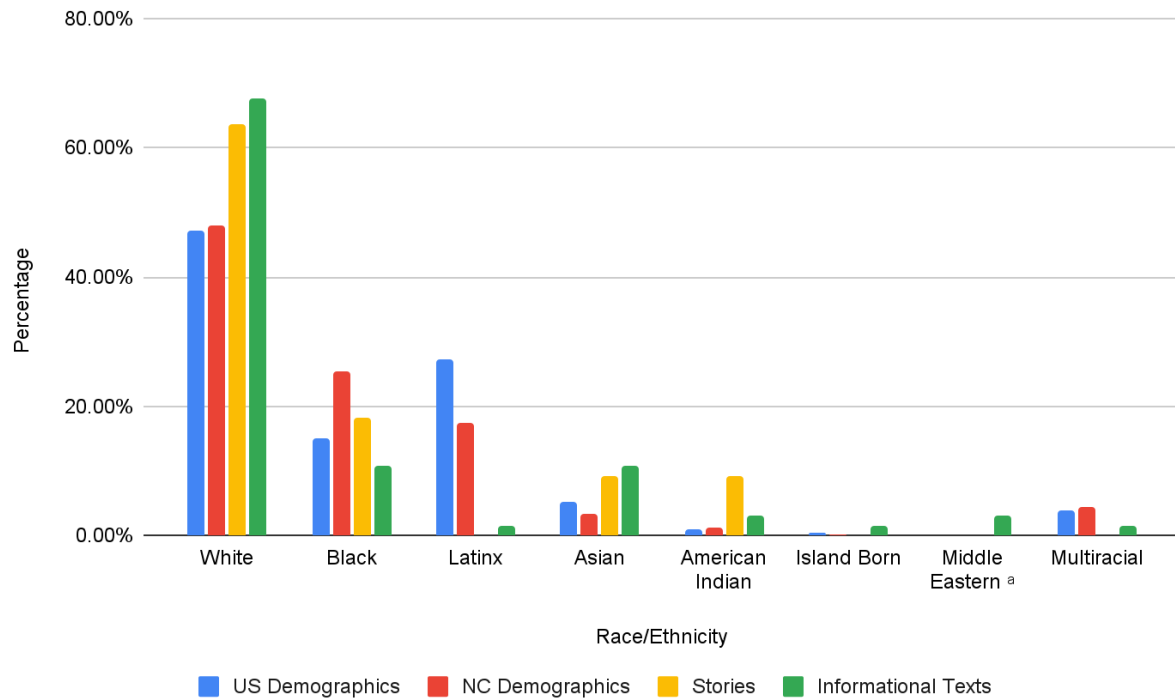
*Note.* Data retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education (2018); N= percentages of each group.

**Figure 1**  
*Gender Representation*



*Note.* 24.6% (16) were represented as groups with a uniform racial/ethnic identity, but not uniform gender identity;  
US and NC demographic data retrieved from U.S. Department of Education (2018)

<sup>a</sup> U.S. Department of Education does not provide demographics for students of other gender identities (e.g., non-binary, transgender, or non-conforming)

**Figure 2***Racial/Ethnic Representation*

*Note.* US and NC demographic data retrieved from U.S. Department of Education (2018)

<sup>a</sup> U.S Department of Education does not identify students as Middle Eastern, but the deductive coding system from Koss and Paciga (2020) includes Middle Eastern.

## Appendix A

### Annotated Bibliography

Bishop, R. S. (1990, March 5). *Windows and mirrors: Children's books and parallel cultures*

[Conference keynote address]. Celebrating Literacy: 14th Annual Reading Conference at California State University, San Bernardino, CA, United States.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED337744.pdf#page=11>

In this seminal source, Bishop gave a fascinating analysis of the role and impact of children's literature. Bishop explained that children's literature can provide mirrors and windows for children. Literature that acts as a mirror allows readers to see themselves and their experiences represented. It can be empowering and can affirm one's place in the world. Literature that acts as a window allows particularly the dominant culture to receive a glimpse into the people from cultures that are different from their own. If the dominant culture only sees reflections of themselves in the literature they read, it will give them an inaccurate representation of the world we live in, which can overinflate their self-importance. Bishop argues that both types of literature are critical for children. She also highlighted how books can often be socializers. They can promote subtle societal messages of who and what is valued in our society, which is why it is important to be critical of children's literature. I will use this reliable source in my honors project to highlight the important roles and potential impacts of diverse children's literature.

Boyd, F. B., Causey, L. L., & Galda, L. (2015). Culturally diverse literature: Enriching variety in an era of Common Core State Standards. *The Reading Teacher*, 68(5), 378-387.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1326>



In this peer-reviewed article, Boyd et al. (2015) gave an interesting and credible overview of culturally diverse literature specifically in an educational setting. The authors argued that books have the power to shape a child's worldview and can send subtle societal messages. The books that should be included in the school curricula should be reflective and unique to the student population that one serves. However, even though the amount of diverse children's literature published has increased, most books still focus on the dominant group (White, heterosexual, middle class, etc). To help teachers use more diverse books in classrooms, more also need to be published. The author also broadly discussed how the diversity within the Common Core Text Exemplar list is lacking. However, the authors felt that few diverse books included on the list were of the highest quality. When teachers are selecting diverse books to use in their classrooms, the authors suggested relying on diverse awards lists and consulting with other teachers, friends, and potentially students who can help to critically examine texts for inaccurate representations, stereotypes, and/or appropriation. Overall, it is critical that more diverse books are utilized in educational settings and that the diverse books used should be uniquely tailored to each classroom. I will use this source to specifically address why it is important to include diverse literature in educational settings.

Crisp, T., Knezek, S. M., Quinn, M., Bingham, M. E., Girardeau, K., & Starks, F. (2016). What's on our bookshelves? The diversity of children's literature in early childhood classroom libraries. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 42(2), 29-42.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1837539742?accountid=14605&pq-origsite=primo>

In this qualitative content analysis, Crisp et al. (2016) discussed the diversity of children's literature in early childhood classes. The authors conducted a content analysis

of the books in 21 early childhood classroom libraries. They specifically examined the representations of parallel populations in the books (groups in the United States that have been marginalized in the past). The parallel populations mainly focused on different racial and ethnic groups. They also analyzed the books for other characteristics like socioeconomic status, dis/abilities, religion, gender, language, and genre. Overall, they found that diversity was lacking in all categories. They found that gender was the category with the most representations, but even in that category there were about twice as many male representations as compared to female representation, and none of the books represented people who identify as transgender. One of the implications for this study is that when children in the United States are first exposed to literature in early childhood classrooms, they are most likely exposed to literature that lacks diversity. This means that many children will not have the opportunity to see themselves and their experiences in the books that they read, which could influence their understanding of their place in the world. Contrary to previous research, this study found that there was heterogeneity in the format/genre of informational texts analyzed. Due to this, future research could study the diversity specifically within informational texts for children. This article did not explicitly address limitations, which influences the reliability of the study. However, the article still illustrated a good analysis of children's literature in an educational setting, which is why I may use it to give context to the lack of diverse children's literature in educational settings.

Fullerton, S. K., Schafer, G. J., Hubbard, K., McClure, E. L., Salley, L., & Ross, R. (2018).

Considering quality and diversity: An analysis of read-aloud recommendations and

rationales from children's literature experts. *The New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 24(1), 76–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13614541.2018.1433473>

In this peer-reviewed journal article, Fullerton et al. (2018) examined and compared the recommended books for classroom read alouds by four professors and four librarians.

They analyzed both the reasoning behind the recommendations as well as the gender and racial representations in each book. In terms of gender representation, both the professors and the librarians recommended books that had a fairly equivalent gender representation of characters as well as the authors and illustrators. In terms of race and ethnicity, while professors choose books with a little more racial diversity, both librarians and professors chose a majority of books that featured White characters and that were mainly written by White authors and illustrators. When asked about the rationale behind the book

recommendations the professors and librarians rarely mentioned diversity as a factor.

Rather the librarians' most common rationales were the illustrator's craft, author's craft/plot, and author's craft/language. The university professors' most common rationales were themes and interpretations, the author's craft/plot, and the illustrator's craft. One limitation of this study included the small number of participants. Implications of this study include that diversity may not be a common rationale for the book recommendations by professionals. This study also further implicates the need to analyze books for diverse representation. In future research, more studies should analyze the book recommendations for children and the rationale behind those choices. Future research should also consider how the children's literature recommendations in library and university courses influence the book selections and practices of classroom teachers and librarians. I will use this credible and reliable source to provide context about the book

recommendations made by professionals due to the fact that the books recommended on the Common Core Text Exemplar were recommended by mainly education professionals.

Gomez-Najarro, J. (2019). Children's intersecting identities matter: Beyond rabbits and princesses in the Common Core book exemplars. *Children's Literature in Education*, 51, 392-410. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-019-09390-9>

In this peer-reviewed journal article, Gomez-Najarro (2019) discussed the diverse identities represented in Common Core Text Exemplar books. Gomez-Najarro specifically analyzed the representation from different social groups in the fiction books for grades two through three. Overall, the author found that historically marginalized groups are very underrepresented and that while females are represented, they typically assume supporting roles and/or adopt stereotypical gender roles. Implications from this study include that the growing diversity of students is not reflected in the Common Core Text Exemplar list, which means that teachers may need to utilize books outside of the Common Core curriculum to represent the diverse identities of their students. Future research could include analyzing other grade levels and/or the nonfiction books on the Common Core Text Exemplar list. The author did not explicitly state any limitations, which may impact the reliability of this study. However, this study will be helpful because I will be able to expand upon the findings in my own research study.

Gopalakrishnan, A. (2011). *Multicultural children's literature: A critical issues approach*. SAGE Publications.

In this book chapter, Gopalakrishnan (2011) gave an intriguing and credible overview of multicultural children's literature while also explaining the debate surrounding cultural authenticity. Multicultural children's literature was defined as literature that includes

various perspectives and is written by and about diverse populations. When analyzing multicultural children's literature, they generally fall into one of three categories. The first is melting pot books, which typically show a blend of different cultures, experiences, or ethnicities, but they focus on cultural assimilation and the idea that everyone has similar experiences. The second category is socially conscious books. These books are culturally generic, but they attempt to educate people about the unique experiences (usually related to social issues) of a particular cultural group. The final category is culturally conscious books, which authentically portray the languages, ethnicities, traditions of a particular group and are usually written from an insider's perspective. These latter books are typically considered to be the most multicultural. Another interesting point that Gopalakrishanan (2011) highlighted was the debate regarding cultural authenticity and insider versus outsider perspectives. While many people agree that we need more multicultural children's literature, the cultural authenticity within those books is arguably just as important. Some believe that to keep books as culturally authentic as possible, only "cultural insiders" rather than outsiders may write about particular stories and cultures. I will use this source to define some key terms related to multicultural children's literature. I will also use it to highlight the debate surrounding cultural authenticity.

Hardy, J. K., Pennington, R., Griffin, R., & Jacobi-Vessels, J. (2020). Comparing the effects of protagonist race on preschoolers' engagement in book reading. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(6), 781-791. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01043-7>

In this peer-reviewed journal article, Hardy et al. (2020) used a quantitative single case design to examine the relationship between preschool students and the protagonist's race

in children's books. The study was performed with three preschool students in a large room outside of their regular preschool classroom. One student was a girl who is biracial, the second was another girl who is Black, and the last student was a boy who is White. The authors concluded that while the protagonist's race in the stories did not seem to affect the student's engagement, the students more often preferred to choose a book with a character of their same race. However, one limitation of this study is that while they tried to choose books that were similarly engaging, they were all still different.

Depending on how much students enjoyed the different stories could have impacted their responses to them. This study could indicate that the race of the protagonists in children's books may impact the book preferences of students but that other factors could influence them as well. In future research, the relationship between using diverse children's literature and behavior could be examined. More researchers could also study the effect of the protagonist's race on specifically students who have complex racial identities (biracial, multiracial, etc.). I may use this reliable, peer-reviewed source in my honors project to discuss the potential impacts of using diverse children's literature in educational settings.

Koss, M. D., Johnson, N. J., & Martinez, M. (2018). Mapping the diversity in Caldecott books from 1938 to 2017: The changing topography. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 44(1), 4-20.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2132653383?pq-origsite=primo&accountid=14605>

In this peer-reviewed journal article, Koss et al. (2018) discussed the diversity within Caldecott winner books from 1938 to 2017. The researchers specifically analyzed the racial/ethnic representations of the main characters, authors, and illustrators. Overall they

found that the majority of main characters, authors, and illustrators were White. Interestingly they found that during the 1970s there was a slight increase in representation of diverse main characters, but then that representation decreased in the 1980s. However, in the 1990s there was once again a significant increase of the racial and ethnic representation that has not been matched in more recent decades. In terms of the diverse representation of authors and illustrators, compared to previous decades there was an increase in representation in the 2010s. One implication of this study is that the current events and the social or political climate may impact the diversity in the Caldecott award-winning children's books. During decades in which the Caldecott winning books included the most diverse representation, there were also many changes, events, and attention given to issues surrounding traditionally marginalized groups. Future research could investigate the publishing trends in terms of diverse literature. Unfortunately, this source does not include any limitations which may impact the reliability of the study. However, this study demonstrates the need to critically examine children's books for diverse representation and will be helpful in framing the context surrounding diversity in children's literature for my study.

Koss, M. D., & Paciga, K. A. (2020). Diversity in Newbery Medal-winning titles: A content analysis. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 16(2), 1-38.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1285140>

In this qualitative content analysis, Koss and Paciga (2020) discussed the racial, gender, and disability diversity in Newbery Honor books over time. The authors used an *a priori* code system to code the Newbery winning titles from 1922 - 2019. Overall, Koss and Paciga found that the books overwhelmingly featured White characters. In terms of

gender, they found that often books had both male and female characters, but there were more male characters than female characters. They also analyzed gender roles and found that female characters more often broke out of stereotypical roles than male characters did. They also found that only a small number of main characters had disabilities, and out of the few that did the majority had a physical disability. From these results, Koss and Paciga concluded that the Newbery winning books are not representative of the racial, gender, and disability demographics of children in the United States. Limitations of the study include that both authors are White, female, able-bodied individuals. The authors conceded that this impacted their “ways of knowing and experiencing the worlds and words presented within and beyond the Newbery corpus” (Koss & Paciga, 2020, p. 23). Another limitation was that they did not analyze any statistics related to the purchasing and circulation of books with a school or outside of school setting, so their conclusions regarding student and teachers’ access to these Newbery books were more hypothetical. Therefore, they encouraged future research into that connection. One implication of this study is that teachers may need to be more critical of the Newbery texts they use in classrooms because it is likely that it will not be reflective of the student population. This study also implicates the need for a more culturally responsive curriculum that utilizes diverse books that accurately represent the current student population. This source is a credible, peer-reviewed article that demonstrates the critical importance of analyzing the diversity within children’s literature.

McCaffrey, M. (2014). *Common Core English and language arts K–1 exemplar text set: A critical content analysis of cultural representations* (Publication No. 361933) [Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Arizona]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.



In this published dissertation, McCaffrey (2014) discussed the characteristics and representation within the Common Core Text Exemplar fiction books for kindergarten through first grade. Overall, McCaffrey (2014) found that the books had old publication dates, which may have contributed to them containing outdated language and gender roles. McCaffrey (2014) also found that the representation of People of Color was very limited and was not always culturally authentic. However, one limitation of this study was related to books that included animal characters. Many books featured animal characters, and therefore they could not objectively be assigned a cultural background, which meant that those books limited the findings. Implications for this study include the need for pre-service teachers to be given more instruction in finding and utilizing multicultural literature. Another implication relates to students' motivation and reading. The representation (or lack of representation) included in the books on the Common Core Text Exemplar list could impact a student's motivation to read. Future research could qualitatively analyze kindergarten through first-grade teachers' impressions of the Common Core Text Exemplars and their use of them in their classrooms. Overall, this source will be helpful because I will be able to expand upon the findings in my own research study.

Möller, K. J. (2013). Considering the CCSS nonfiction literature exemplars as cultural artifacts: What do they represent?. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 39(2), 58-67.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1657565897/fulltextPDF/B328410E58A4B5FPQ/1?accountid=14605>

In this peer-reviewed journal article, Möller (2013) discussed the racial and cultural representation within the nonfiction books included on the Common Core Text Exemplar

list for kindergarten through fifth grade. While there were some diverse racial and cultural representations in the books, it was still very limited. Within those diverse racial and cultural representations, there were a few excellent exemplars in terms of cultural authenticity, but there were many that had very negative, stereotypical, or culturally unauthentic representations as well. This suggests that the literature on the list is not accurately representing the student population. Some of the literature on the list may also further perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes. One limitation to this study is that it does not adequately cover all relevant issues related to the literature on this Common Core Text Exemplar list. They only analyzed nonfiction literature through the lens of racial and gender representation. Future research could further analyze other aspects of the literature on the list, including the levels of text complexity, the specific types of nonfiction represented, etc. This reliable study will help identify research gaps that I can answer in my own research study.

Moss, B. (2013). The common core text exemplars-A worthy new canon or not?. *Voices from the Middle*, 21(1), 48-52.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1440019788?accountid=14605&pq-origsite=primo>

In this article, Moss (2013) gave an overview of the concerns and critiques surrounding the Common Core Text Exemplar list. While most of the books on the list are not technically required to be used in the curriculum, some literary educators are concerned that many schools and teachers treat them as such. When creating the list, the quality, breadth, and text complexity were considered. However, some literary educators feel that the list overemphasizes canonical classic literature, does not include books that address contemporary issues, includes many dated informational texts, has inadequate

representations of multicultural books and authors, and does not align with the state curriculum standards. That being said Moss (2013) still felt that the list has some value because it provides a few examples of high-quality literature, helps students understand our literary history by exposing them to many classics, and it encourages the use of various literary genres in the classroom. I will use this credible peer-reviewed article to provide context surrounding the Common Core Text Exemplar list, especially in regards to how it relates to multicultural literature.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1982). The literary transaction: Evocation and response. *Theory Into Practice*, 21(4), 268–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405848209543018>

In this article, Rosenblatt (1982) discussed the Reader-Response Theory, which considers reading to be a transaction between the reader and the text. Rosenblatt (1982) explained two main types of reading stances, efferent and aesthetic. The efferent stance focuses more on the information and meaning that is carried away from the text. The aesthetic stance draws more on our personal feelings and experiences that are evoked from reading. It emphasizes the connections readers feel to the characters, their feelings, and their conflicts. Depending on the text and the reader, different responses and transactions will occur. Rosenblatt emphasized how both the reader and the text are important in this reading transaction. Rosenblatt is considered to be one of the leading experts of the Reader-Response Theory which indicates the credibility and reliability of this source. This is an effective theoretical framework because this theory may implicate that either the diverse representation (or lack of diverse representation) within the texts as well as the identity of the students reading the text may positively or negatively influence the

transaction that occurs when reading. Positive reading transactions can encourage reading engagement and comprehension as well as personal development.

Thomas, E. E. (2016). Stories still matter: Rethinking the role of diverse children's literature today. *Language Arts*, 94(2), 112-119.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1835329714?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>

In this journal article, Thomas (2016) gave a broad, reliable overview of the diversity within children's literature and the implications that it may have on children. Thomas specifically highlights statistics from the University of Wisconsin's Cooperative Children's Book Center which found that within children's and young adults' literature published over the past two decades about 85% or more has consistently featured White main characters. Thomas articulated well how even in books that feature diverse characters, they are still often dehumanized by inaccurate stereotypes and caricatures, which is why Thomas not only called for an increase in the amount of diverse children's literature but also for the need to critically examine the contents of it. Interestingly, Thomas also noted that the term *multicultural* children's literature has in some cases been shifted to *diverse* children's literature to more accurately reflect the growing differences in characteristics like gender, disabilities, religion, etc. In conclusion, Thomas summarized the implications of more diverse children's literature by explaining that it can be a source of empowerment particularly for children from marginalized identities and that all children benefit from literature that provides a window into cultures that are different from them, as well as literature that provides a mirror into their own. I will use

this source to support some of the benefits of using diverse children's literature and to broadly explain some of the specific issues in this field of study.

## Appendix B

### Text List

#### Stories

- Babbitt, N. (1975). *Tuck everlasting*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Burnett, F. H. (1985). *The secret garden*. HarperCollins Publishers. (Original work published 1911)
- Carroll, L. (1992) *Alice's adventures in wonderland* (J. Tenniel, Illus.). William Morrow Publishing. (Original work published 1865)
- Curtis, C. P. (1999). *Bud, not buddy*. Delacorte Books for Young Readers.
- Erdrich, L. (1999). *The birchbark house*. Hyperion.
- Farley, W. (2008). *The black stallion*. Random House Books for Young Readers. (Original work published 1941)
- Hamilton, V. (1999). *M. C. Higgins, the great*. Simon & Schuster. (Original work published 1993)
- Lin, G. (2009). *Where the mountain meets the moon*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Saint-Exupéry, A. (2000). *The little prince*. (Richard Howard, Trans.). Harcourt. (Original work published 1943).
- Singer, I. B. (2001). *Zlateh the Goat and Other Stories*. HarperCollins. (Original work published 1984)

#### Informational Texts

- Banting E. (2004). *England the land*. Crabtree Publishing Company.
- Berger, M. (1992). *Discovering mars: The amazing story of the red planet*. Scholastic.
- Buckmaster, H. (2010). Underground Railroad. In *The new book of knowledge*. Scholastic

- Carlisle, M. W. (1992). *Let's investigate marvelously meaningful maps*. Barrons.
- Cutler, N. G. (2009, September). Kenya's long dry season. *Time for Kids*, 15(3)
- Hakim, J. (2005). *A history of US*. Oxford University Press.
- Hall, L. (2009, September). Seeing eye to eye. *National Geographic Explorer*
- Kavasch, E. B. (2003, October). Ancient mound builders. *Cobblestone*
- Koscielniak, B. (2004). *About time: A first look at time and clocks*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Lauber, P. (1996). *Hurricanes: Earth's mightiest storms*. Scholastic.
- Montgomery, S. (2006). Quest for the tree kangaroo: An expedition to the cloud forest of New Guinea. Houghton Mifflin.
- Nelson, K. (2008). *We are the ship: The story of Negro league baseball*. Jump at the Sun.
- Otfinoski, S. (1996). *The kid's guide to money: Earning it, saving it, spending it, growing it, sharing it*. Scholastic.
- Ronan, C. A. (2010) Telescopes. In *The new book of knowledge*. Scholastic.
- Ruurs, M. (2005). *My librarian is a camel: How books are brought to children around the world*. Boyds Mills Press.
- Schleichert, E. (2002, June). Good pet, bad pet. *Ranger Rick*, 28-31.
- Simon, S. (2006). *Horses*. HarperCollins Publishers.
- Simon, S. (2006). *Volcanoes*. HarperCollins Publishers.
- Wulffson, D. (2000). *Toys!: Amazing stories behind some great inventions*. Henry Holt.

## Appendix C

### Excluded Texts

#### Informational Texts

Berger, M. (1992). *Discovering mars: The amazing story of the red planet*. Scholastic.

Lauber, P. (1996). *Hurricanes: Earth's mightiest storms*. Scholastic.

Otfinoski, S. (1996). *The kid's guide to money: Earning it, saving it, spending it, growing it, sharing it*. Scholastic.

Schleichert, E. (2002, June). Good pet, bad pet. *Ranger Rick*, 28-31.

Hakim, J. (2005). *A history of US*. Oxford University Press.

Simon, S. (2006). *Horses*. HarperCollins Publishers.

Simon, S. (2006). *Volcanoes*. HarperCollins Publishers.

#### Informational Text Chapters

Following the book citation, chapters that were excluded will be listed.

Wulffson, D. (2000). *Toys!: Amazing stories behind some great inventions*. Henry Holt.

Seesaw, Tops, Playing Cards, Windup Toys and Automatons, Bicycles, Toy Soldiers, Checkers

From Pinball To Video, Kites, Dolls, and Skateboards