

A Framework for Reckoning with Whiteness in Multicultural Children's Literature

Despite an all-time high of children's books containing multicultural content (28%), just 6% of all children's books in 2016 were written by Black, Latinx, or Native authors (Horning, Lindgren, and Schliesman). Long-term change to this reality depends on addressing systemic issues in children's literature that hamper the thriving of non-white authors. But given that the majority of books with diverse content continue to be written by white authors (myself included), there is also an urgent need to better understand how and where white authors learn (or do not learn) to productively receive feedback on their portrayals of minoritized communities. The same can be said for scholars of children's literature. Although ChLA's revised call for papers reflects greater responsiveness in this area, dynamics in scholarly spaces--from universities to listservs--suggest that we have not yet gained a collective grasp of the stakes of being answerable to minoritized communities.

Incorporating insights from my work as a literary scholar and a white YA novelist writing about Latinx experiences, my paper and contributions to the moderated discussion will focus on specific examples of the transmission or refusal of knowledge about racial and ethnic representation within children's literature. Relevant scholarship on anti-racism, critical race theory, and white racial identity supports the need for an explicit framework for analyzing white engagement with diversity in children's literature. First, we must acknowledge and understand the structures that allow white fragility to persist in children's literature communities. Second, we must commit to de-centering whiteness in our evaluation and mediation of *all* children's books, not just the 28% that present some multicultural content. Third, we must engage in a public process of discussing, scrutinizing, and answering for the tropes, metaphors, images, storylines, and frameworks that authors employ, particularly in relation to the portrayal and/or exclusion of minoritized groups. The proposed framework challenges all stakeholders to set aside practices that shelter white fragility and instead to assume shared responsibility for centering a multiracial, multiethnic reality in which a positive white identity is one possibility but is neither the default nor the standard.

Work Cited

Horning, Kathleen T., Merri V. Lingren, and Megan Schliesman. "A Few Observations: Literature in 2016." In *CCBC Choices 2016*. <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/choiceintro17.asp> Accessed 22 Sept. 2017.