



LOW HANGING FRUIT

Representation Matters in Your Classroom Library

By Jeannie Standal

Take a look at the titles in the book collection in your classroom. Are your students' realities reflected in those pages? Can they learn about communities different than their own? No? Read on!

Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors

Many of us are familiar with the idea of books as windows and mirrors. Some books give us a window into another world, time, or experience, and in some books we identify with a character and can see ourselves. The newer idea of sliding glass doors suggests that through imagination, we can have a bit of the experience of the characters in the story. When most or all of the books on a shelf reflect just one or two cultural points of view, those windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors become dark.

Searching for Diverse Books

Finding high-quality titles from diverse authors with authentic characters in relatable stories isn't always easy. Fortunately, there are some organizations and tools that can point us toward some good choices.

- The [ALA Youth Media Awards](#) recognizes exceptional books in many different categories. You've probably heard of the Caldecott and the Newbery Medals, but there are also awards that highlight the African-American experience (Coretta Scott King Award); the disabled experience (Schneider Family Book Award); Latinx Experience (Pura Belpre Award); and the LGBTQ experience (Stonewall Award). There is an award promoting the Asian/Pacific American experience (Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature); the Jewish experience (Sydney Taylor Book Award); plus lots of awards and lists that are focused more on age group. Many of these awards have a long history and years of winner and honor books to mine for additions to the classroom library.
- [American Indians in Children's Literature](#) (AICL) provides ratings for books featuring native characters and culture. Books have a quick rating, or curious readers can dive into very detailed reviews.
- And, of course, [We Need Diverse Books](#) is a valuable resource described in Links to More Learning.
- Don't forget your local expert, your school librarian!

Students who can see themselves, understand others, and imagine anything with a book can experience the world. When it comes to it, isn't that what reading is for?

LINKS TO MORE LEARNING



We Need Diverse Books

In their own words, We Need Diverse Books is "a 501c(3) non-profit and a grassroots organization of children's book lovers that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people." Among their many offerings are compiled resources for race, equity, and inclusion, and where to find diverse books (including an extensive list of relevant book awards, such as the Coretta Scott King Book Awards, the American Indian Youth Literature Awards, and the Lambda Literary Award for LGBTQIA literature, among many more), a summer reading series, a booktalking kit to help educators make the case for reading diverse books to their students and community, and WNDB in the Classroom, which aims to bring diverse books and authors into economically disadvantaged schools.

<https://diversebooks.org/>

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS



Do a Diversity Audit for your Classroom

Taking concrete steps to achieve better representation in your classroom may sound like a daunting prospect. Where on earth to begin? How about with a Bingo card? [This Edutopia article](#) offers a printable PDF bingo card, along with step-by-step instructions for taking stock of both the books you teach, and the books you personally read, with the aim of helping you fill in the gaps. It also offers some helpful insights into why this is a worthwhile exercise. Check it out!

DIGITAL TOOLS



NoveList K-8 Plus

Specifically designed for younger readers, the NoveList K-8 Plus readers' advisory database helps the K-8 set (and those who teach, parent, and provide readers' advisory to them!) find their next great read. Search for books by title, author, and series read-alikes, topics, appeal mixes (make your own!), and reading level. Also find tools for teaching with books and engaging young readers. Check it out here:

<https://lili.org/dbs/novelist-plus-k-8/>.



