



Colorful Pages

RESOURCES

Moving Beyond MLK Day

An Annotated Bibliography of Diverse
Picture Books (2016)

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Moving Beyond MLK Day: An Annotated Bibliography of Diverse Picture Books (2016) By Kaitlin Kamalei Jenkins

Where do all the protagonists of color go after Martin Luther King Jr. Day? Do they get shoved to the back of the library until next January? Until recently, many K-12 educators do not acknowledge the importance of appreciating cultural differences within classroom literature (Dong, 2005; Hall, 2004; McNair, 2003). When Dong (2005) taught a multicultural literature class, some of the class's pre-service teachers even denied that culture had any impact on their students. This is a complete misconception, and, unfortunately, a common misconception.

Students of color notice when their cultures are not represented in classroom literature. During an interview on childhood reading experiences, African-American adults and children relayed that they seldom read literature that offers messages about people who look like them. They also noted that, if they were able to read books with protagonists of color, they would have loved reading more and their reading experiences would have been enhanced (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). The interviewees are referencing the importance of multicultural children's literature.

Multicultural children's literature is children's literature written about ethnic minorities and/or featuring a main character from an ethnic minority. It can be a powerful tool to increase cultural empowerment within students of color and cross-cultural empathy within a whole classroom. The use of multicultural children's literature in the elementary school classroom is low. Hall (2004) had 18 elementary education teachers keep a read-aloud book log. After the duration of the research study, Hall found that, out of all the books the teachers read aloud to their students, only 13% of them featured non-white human protagonists.

However, this is not completely the educators' fault. Historically, there has been a significant lack of multicultural children's literature for educators to use. In 1965, Larrick surveyed 5,206 children's books to find that only 349 of them included one or more black children. More recently, there was a survey of the winners of the Newberry and Caldecott Medals, two popular and highly-recognized children's book awards, from the last ten years. The survey reported that only 31% of the Newberry Medal books and 22.5% of the Caldecott Medal books centered on diverse characters or themes (Springen, 2014).

Considering this information, many teachers need to be educated on how to access authentic multicultural children's books and the importance of doing so in a classroom. It is also important to help educators realize that multicultural children's literature should be used for subjects beyond cultural heritage months

or social studies. In order to aid this endeavor, I have created a list of 20 multicultural picture books that would help develop cultural empowerment and cross-cultural empathy within a classroom.

Format of the Book List

The book list is MLA-formatted. I use MLA-formatting instead of APA-formatting to provide more information. MLA-citations have the author's full name, which will help teachers find the books easily.

In addition to the citation, there are two paragraphs and a list following each citation. The first paragraph is a brief synopsis of the book. The synopsis will give the teacher the whole plot of the book, including the ending. This will allow teachers to make informed decisions on how the book's content will affect their students. The second paragraph describes why this book is considered multicultural literature and the positive effects it could have on students and readers in the classroom. Finally, the list at the end of each annotation notes the possible topics that teachers could use the book to teach. This will help teachers think of the book beyond just cultural teaching during cultural heritage months.

List of Books

Boelts, Maribeth. *Happy Like Soccer*. Candlewick Press, 2012.

This book is about Sierra, a young girl of color. Sierra is from a low-socioeconomic area. She lives with her aunt, who raises her. Her aunt

works fulltime at a restaurant and even works weekends. Sierra just joined a soccer team for which she enjoys playing. Her aunt is never able to make her soccer games because she works. Because of that, Sierra never has anyone to cheer her on during her soccer game. However, her aunt's boss allows her aunt to switch her shifts so that she is able to go to the game. Yet, when her aunt and Sierra get there, the game has been cancelled due to the rain. At the end of the story, Sierra and her soccer coach are able to move the game to a Monday so her aunt can come and cheer her on.

This book is multicultural literature because Sierra is a girl of color and from a low-socioeconomic family. Sierra proves to be a good role model because she is good at soccer and works hard. She also pushes through adversity because she has to travel for a long time to get to her soccer practices and games since her neighborhood is in a low-income part of town. In addition, this book demonstrates family diversity because her aunt is raising her. Her aunt is shown as a caring and proactive caretaker.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: family diversity; adversity; low-income families; problem and solution; plot maps

Boelts, Maribeth. *Those Shoes*. Candlewick Press, 2007.

This book is about Jeremy, who is a young, African-American boy. He lives with his grandmother. Their family does not have much money. All

Jeremy wants is a new pair of shoes that everyone in his classroom seems to have. Jeremy and Antonio are the only kids that do not have those shoes. One day Jeremy breaks his old shoes and has to wear a pair of shoes from the office. Everyone in class, except Antonio, makes fun of him. Because of that, he and his grandmother try to find a pair of the popular shoes for a cheap price. Jeremy ends up getting a pair that are too small. Eventually, Jeremy gives the shoes to Antonio, who has smaller feet and never made fun of him. Jeremy and Antonio become friends.

This book is multicultural literature because Jeremy is a young boy of color and comes from a low-socioeconomic background. His lack of money is a huge factor in this book, which can expose students to the feelings of children from low-socioeconomic homes. In addition, the book shows that Jeremy can still do good things and give to his friends, even though his family does not have money. In addition, Jeremy lives with his grandmother, who is a caring guardian, so it demonstrates positive family diversity.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: family diversity; adversity; low-income families; anti-bullying; empathy; plot map; character study; emotions

Diggs, Taye. *Mixed Me!*. Feiwel and Friends, 2015.

This book is about a little boy named Mike. His parents are of two different races, which lead him to be called “Mixed Mike”. Mike talks to the

audience about how people are confused and comment on his family structure and race. However, Mike shows that he is great the way he is and how he has many different friends that are different races, too.

This book embraces the multiculturalist idea of acceptance. Mike shows that being of two races/ethnicities is not a bad thing but makes him special and loved. Also, in the book, people try to change him (for example, his hair) and he stops them, which shows the reader that you should not change yourself for others.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: culture; diverse family structures; rhyming; acceptance; diversity; dialogue

DiPucchio, Kelly. *Grace for President*. Scholastic Press, 2008.

This book is about an African-American girl named Grace. Grace realizes that a girl has never become President of the United States. When she points this out to her teacher, her teacher has the whole grade hold a presidential election modeled after the United States' electoral college process. Grace and Thomas, a White boy, runs against each other for president. Thomas becomes lazy because he thinks he will win since he is a boy. Grace works very hard and listens to her classmates about what they want in a president. In the end, Grace wins the presidential election by a few votes.

This book is multicultural literature because it features a girl of color, Grace. Similar to *Santiago Stays*, the illustrations are the only way a reader knows the race of the main character. This is positive because it increases the representation of children of color in children's literature. Moreover, Grace is shown as a hard-working and positive role model, which can counteract any negative stereotypes or increase cultural empowerment.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: presidential election; electoral college; text sizes; text emphasis; prediction; opinion writing (ex. "Is Grace a good president?")

Dominguez, Angela. *Santiago Stays*. Abrams Appleseed, 2013.

This book is about a little boy who has a dog named Santiago. Santiago stays where he is sitting even though the little boy tries to get Santiago to come to him. The little boy tries many different things: toys, food, etc. The only thing that makes Santiago move is the cries of the little boy's baby sister. In the end, Santiago and the boy comfort his little sister.

It is an example of a multicultural literature book that just features characters of color. One can assume that the little boy is from a Latino family because of the dog's name, the illustrations of the characters, and the author's background. This book is good to provide exposure to

authors/illustrators of color and characters/character names from diverse backgrounds.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: punctuation; role of illustrations; dialogue; characters/settings/events

Dorros, Arthur. *Abuela*. Dutton Children's Books, 1991.

This book is about Rosalba's imaginary journey with her grandmother, her *Abuela*. It starts off with her actual walk into the park with her grandmother. Then, she is picked up by birds and transported to different places with her grandmother. They visit the places tied to her grandmother's immigration and different places tied to Rosalba's family. Finally, they land back into the park and are off for another adventure.

It is an example of multicultural literature because it explores the family life and history of a Mexican-American child. It briefly describes her grandmother's immigration and her different cultural and family aspects. In addition, it includes a lot of Spanish words and puts them in a context where the reader is able to figure out what they mean.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: imagination; fiction; imagery; description; setting; code switching; culture; Spanish

Johnson, Angela. *Daddy Calls Me Man*. Orchard Books, 1997.

This book is about a little African-American boy named Noah. Noah lives with his two parents who are fine artists. The book is told in four verses and four oil paintings. In the first one, a painting of shoes inspires Noah to put his little shoes next to his father's big shoes. Second, an abstract painting with curved lines inspires him to spin with his big sister. Third, a painting called "Noah's Moon" makes Noah wonder about the moon outside his window. Finally, a fourth painting is titled "Baby Sister", which is a painting of Noah, his big sister, and his new little sister. Noah talks about what he does for his baby sister and the story ends with his dad calling him "man".

This book is multicultural literature because Noah and his family are African-American. His parents are both fine artists, which provides a positive image of African-Americans. In addition, it is clear that Noah comes from a loving and caring home. This helps counteract any negative stereotypes students might have about African Americans and can increase cross cultural empathy.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: rhyming; fine art; inspiration; illustrations and text interactions; section titles

Meshon, Aaron. *Take Me Out to the Yakyu*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2013.

This book is about a little boy and his family who visit two different ball games. They go to one game in America and another in Japan. The book discusses the differences between, transportation, team spirit items, food, measurements, cheering, songs, and home lives. The books have a translated glossary in the back of frequently-used words in the book.

It is a great example of multicultural literature because it appreciates the differences between American and Japanese culture through the shared experience of baseball. It also addresses the subject of coming from two different cultures, like a Japanese-American boy does.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: Japanese culture; American vs. Japanese culture; compare and contrast; Japanese; culture; text sizes; dialogue boxes

Polacco, Patricia. *Mr. Lincoln's Way*. Philomel Books, 2001.

This book is about Mr. Lincoln, a principal, and his interactions with Eugene, a student. Eugene is known as “Mean Gene” at school because he bullies the other kids and does not do any work. One day, a student is being bullied by Eugene and threatens to get Mr. Lincoln. It is implied that Eugene refers to Mr. Lincoln as the “n-word”. Mr. Lincoln overhears this interaction and decides to take Eugene under his wing and help him correct his behavior. Mr. Lincoln realizes that Eugene loves birds and they make an atrium for birds. Eugene begins to like Mr. Lincoln and opens up to him.

Eugene says that his grandfather is racist and imposes these thoughts on him. Mr. Lincoln shows Eugene that you need to treat everyone with kindness and appreciate their different skin colors. Eventually, Mr. Lincoln and Eugene’s grandfather meet. At the end, Eugene tells Mr. Lincoln: “I’ll make you proud of me, Mr. Lincoln. I promise”.

This book is multicultural literature because it tackles the subject of racism. Eugene is shown constantly disrespecting people’s races, skin colors, and cultures. However, Mr. Lincoln helps Eugene correct this behavior by showing him love and giving a long speech about how the world is made up of many beautiful colors. In addition, Mr. Lincoln is an African-American man, who is shown as a positive role model and in a position of power. This serves to counteract any negative stereotypes students might have against his race.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: racism; bullying; character maps; plot map; problem and solution

Ringgold, Faith. *Tar Beach*. Crown Publishers, Inc., 1988.

This book is about a young girl of color named Cassie Louise Lightfoot. Cassie, a third grader, has a dream. In the dream, she flies over “tar beach”, the rooftop of her house, and sees her family and neighbors. Then, she explains aspects of her life. She focuses mainly on her dad’s work

situation. Her dad is in-and-out of work. Her mom cries a lot because her dad is out of work. However, Cassie talks about how she loves her dad and will give him the buildings that he has built.

This book is multicultural literature because it features a child of color who comes from a low socioeconomic environment. Cassie is presented as a smart and very observant child, which would serve as a positive role model for all children. In addition, Cassie explains her family's financial situation and shows that it is not always the family's fault that they are a low-income household. She demonstrates that her dad works hard when he has a job and when he is looking for a job. This can dispel any negative stereotypes students have about low-income families.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: dreaming; imagination; making observations; fiction versus personal narrative; illustrations versus text; family diversity; low-income families

Ringgold, Faith. *We Came to America*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

This book is about America and how every person has immigrated here from other countries, except for Native Americans. It discusses the different reasons why people come to America: slavery, travel, escape, and need for a brighter future. It also talks about what immigrants have brought to America, such as music, dancing, fashion, art, and food. It is written to be

a song or a poem with a repeating verse: “We came to America, / Every color, race, and religion, / From every country in the world”.

This book is a multicultural text because it concentrates on the different cultures that came to America. It demonstrates that we are all actually immigrants of America, unless we are Native American. This would help dispel any negative stereotypes students have about undocumented citizens or recent immigrants. In addition, it shows that we all came to America for the same thing, to explore a new country, which can help cultivate cross cultural empathy within students.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: poetry; song; rhyming; immigration (reasons for it, who has immigrated to America, etc.); the composition of America; culture

Say, Allen. *Grandfather’s Journey*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993.

This book is about the author’s grandfather, who is Japanese. His grandfather comes from Japan to America by a boat. He travels around the United States of America. Then, the grandfather returns to Japan to get married. Once he is married, they have a child, go back to America, and live in California for a while because it is the place the grandfather enjoys the most. The grandfather becomes homesick and moves his family back to Japan. They stay there and Allen Say is eventually born. There is a war and

the grandfather says he wants to move back to California. However, it is implied that he dies before he can. At the end of the book, Allen Say honors his grandfather's love for America and goes to California.

This book is multicultural literature because it features a Japanese family. It details how the grandfather immigrated to America, so it shows the positivity of immigration. Moreover, it shows a love for both American and Japanese cultures. This would promote cross cultural empathy and cultural appreciation in readers.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: immigration; illustration versus texts; journeys/traveling; Japan and America; maps

Soto, Gary. *My Little Car*. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2006.

This book is about Teresa, a Latino girl. Teresa's grandfather gives her a small car that she can pedal for her birthday. Teresa shows off the car to everyone and rides around in it constantly. However, Teresa does not take good care of it. She leaves it out when it's raining, lets animals roam in it, and does not put it away. Because of this, when Teresa's grandfather comes over, he sees that the car is dirty and bent. However, Teresa and her grandfather work together to make the car look brand-new again. Then, Teresa thanks her grandfather.

This book is multicultural literature because it features a girl of color. Although it does portray Teresa as careless, it shows how she changes into a hard worker and how her grandfather is a positive role model. In addition, it includes words in Spanish in the story. At the beginning of the book, there is a mini-glossary with the Spanish-English translation. This book would be great for students to appreciate the Spanish culture and realize that they are normal people with everyday problems.

Possible Mentor Text Ideas: dialogue using words other than “said”; Spanish; responsibility; hard work

Soto, Gary. *The Old Man & His Door*. G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1996.

This book is about an old man, who speaks Spanish and is Latino. His wife tells him to bring *el Puerco* (the pig) to the neighbor’s party in Spanish and leaves to go to the party. However, that word sounds a lot like *la Puerta* (the door) in Spanish. Therefore, the old man begins his journey to the neighbor’s party with a door on his back. Along the way, the old man runs into many different people and decides to help them. Each of the people reward him with a different food item. When he gets to the party, his wife tells him that she said to bring the pig, not the door. The old man then shows her the different food items he collected for the party. The old man and his wife make up and are happy.

This book is multicultural literature because it celebrates and shows the Latino culture and language. The book is based off of a little Mexican song: “La Puerta. El Puerco. There’s not different to el Viejo”. This helps students appreciate the Mexican culture. In addition, at the beginning of the book, there is a glossary of Spanish terms. The book is full of different words in Spanish. The glossary would help students make sense of the Spanish words and learn a little bit of Spanish.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: words that sound similar; listening; Mexican culture; Spanish; dialogue; problem and solution(s)

Soto, Gary. *Too Many Tamales*. G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1993.

This book is about Christmas Eve at the house of Maria, a Latino girl. She helps her mother make a batch of tamales. Her mother takes off her ring when they knead the masa. When her mother is not looking, Maria puts the ring on and continues kneading the masa. While she is kneading the masa, the ring falls off without Maria noticing. Then, at their Christmas party, Maria suddenly realizes the ring fell off and must be in the tamales. She employs her cousins to help her look for it by eating all the tamales. Yet, they do not find the ring. When Maria goes to tell her mother, she sees the ring on her mother’s hand. She confesses to her mother and her mother makes her make another batch of tamales.

This book is multicultural literature because Maria is a Latino girl. It showcases a person and family of color during a joyful time. In addition, it shows Maria and her mother making tamales, which is part of the Latino culture. The task is seen as enjoyable and the food sounds delicious. This helps readers appreciate the Latino culture.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: cause and effect; plot map; food in cultures; problem and solution(s)

Thong, Roseanne. *Red is a Dragon*. Chronicle Books LLC, 2001.

This book is about a young Asian girl and her world. She shows the different colors in her world. She tells the reader what things in her life are those different colors. At the end, she poses the question: “What colors are waiting outside your door?”

This book is multicultural literature because it features a girl of color. In addition, it explores her heritage by showing symbols of that culture. For example, she shows us the colors of lychee, firecracker, silk fans, and other symbols. At the back of the book, there is a glossary that shares the definition and cultural significance of each of the symbols.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: Chinese culture; cultures; colors; poetry; observations; rhyming

Thong, Roseanne Greenfield. *Round is a Tortilla*. Chronicle Books LLC, 2013.

This book is about a Latino girl and her world. She shows the different shapes that make up her world. The shapes are symbols of different things in her culture, such as tortillas, sombreros, trumpets, and stone metates. Some of the things are in Spanish. At the end of the book, there is a glossary with the definition and explanation of each of the symbols.

This book is multicultural literature because it teaches the reader about different aspects of the Latino culture. It demonstrates that Latino people have a very rich culture that includes food, dance, sports, and games. In addition, it has some Spanish in the text and gives a glossary to help readers understand the words. This allows for readers to appreciate the Latino culture more.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: rhyming; similarities and differences; shapes; Latino culture; Spanish; culture

Williams, Karen Lynn. *A Beach Tail*. Boyd Mills Press, 2010.

This book is about a little African-American boy named Gregory. Gregory and his father go to the beach together. Gregory plays in the sand by the waves. He draws a lion named Sandy. Gregory's father tells him to stay by Sandy. Yet, Gregory decides to draw Sandy a tail. He draws Sandy a very long tail that goes all the way across the beach. While he is drawing,

he passes by many different components of the beach. Suddenly, he realizes that he has left the original Sandy and does not know where his dad is.

Luckily, Gregory follows Sandy's long tail all the way back to his dad.

This book is multicultural literature because it features an African-American boy. It normalizes African-Americans instead of treating them like the "others". It shows that Gregory enjoys days at the beach and has everyday problems, too.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: onomopopia; plot map; observations; detailed and descriptive writing

Williams, Vera B. *A Chair for my Mother*. Greenwillow Books, 1982.

This book is about Rosa, a young Latino girl. She, her grandmother, and her working mother live together. Last year, their house burnt down. Everyone was safe, but their house was ruined and none of their furniture survived. Thankfully, their neighbors all chipped in and they were able to furnish their new apartment. However, they do not have any big chairs or recliners in their new apartment. Rosa's mother works very long hours and has nowhere to rest after her shifts. Therefore, they start a savings jar and put any extra money in it. When the jar was full, Rosa and her mom buy a new big chair with flowers in it.

This book is multicultural literature because it features a Latino girl. She and her family are presented as hard workers because they work to save up for a chair. This book also explores family diversity because their grandmother is living with them and there is not a father present. It presents their family diversity as a positive because they all work together to save. In addition, it is implied that they are from a low-income family. However, they overcome this adversity through hard work and are still a happy family.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: cause and effect; hard work; teamwork; personal narrative; comma usage

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Visiting Day*. Puffin Books, 2015.

This book is about a young African-American girl. She and her grandmother are preparing to visit the young girl's father. They go through many activities, such as baking a cake. Finally, the pair visit the young girl's father in prison. The young girl and the father embrace in a hug since they missed each other.

This book is multicultural literature because it features a child of color. It also discusses the tough topic of incarcerated parents. It shows the negatives of the situation, such as not seeing the parent a lot, but also displays the positives, such as being able to visit the parent. Furthermore, it

shows family diversity because the grandmother is the one that is taking care of the young girl. The grandmother is shown as a great and active guardian.

Possible Mentor Text Topics: plot; family diversity; incarceration; point of view; personal narratives

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