

The Power of Picture Books to Advance Equity: Bridging Research and Practice

Shana E. Rochester, PhD

ParentChild+ 2025 Annual Conference

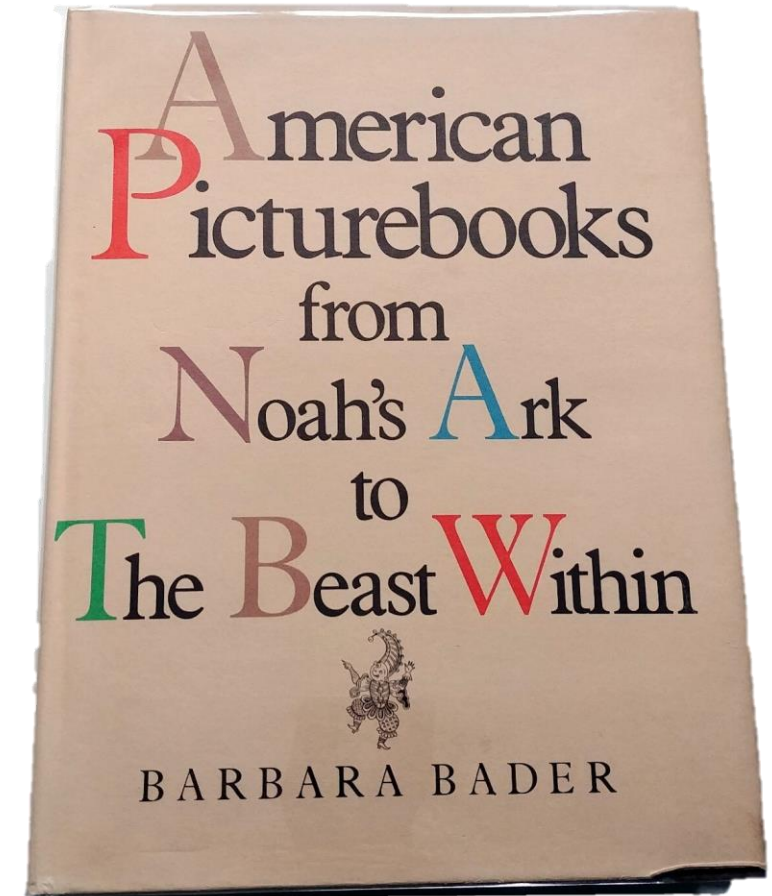
April 28, 2025

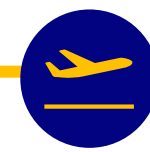
[Selected Slides](#)



Defining “picture books”

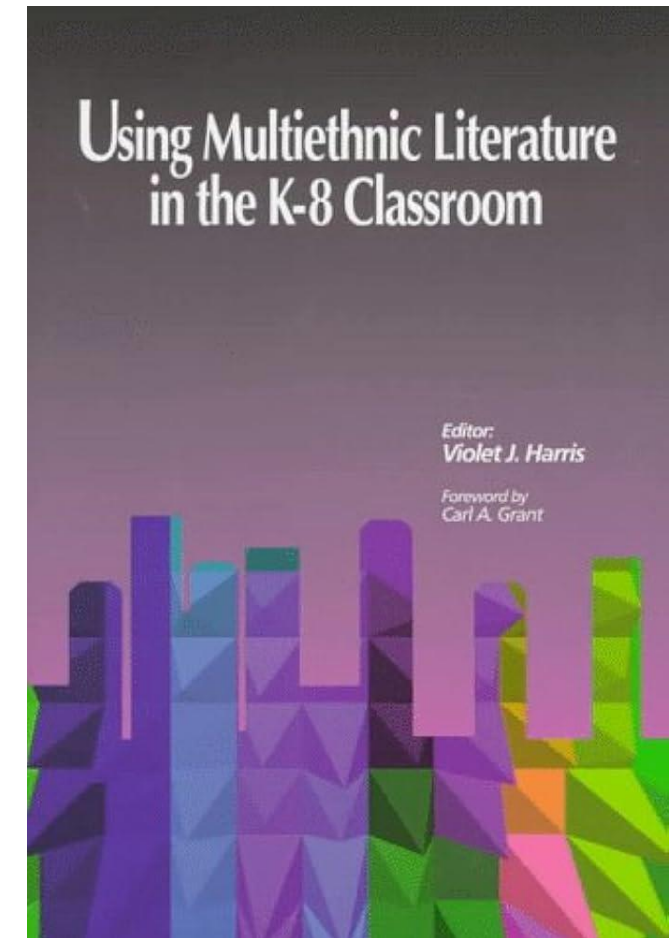
- “A **picturebook** is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost an experience for a child.
- As an art for it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page.
- On its own terms, its possibilities are limitless” (p. 1).



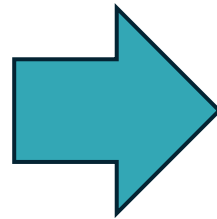
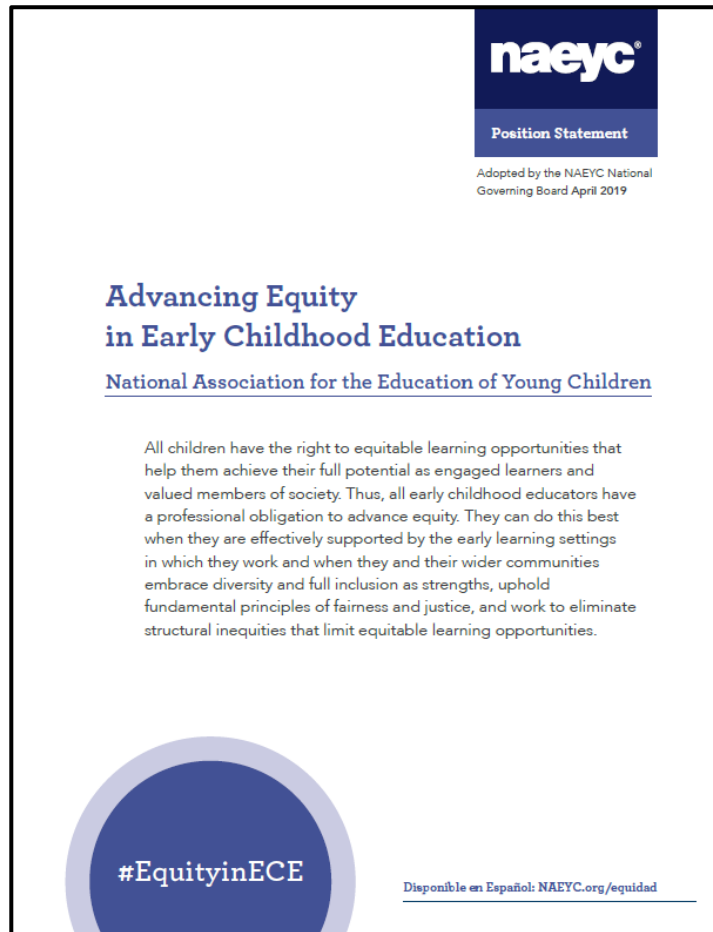


Defining “multicultural literature”

- “I believe that **multicultural literature** should be defined in a comprehensive and inclusive manner; that is, it should include books that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world” (p. 3).



Defining “equity”



Equity: “The state that would be achieved if individuals fared the same way in society regardless of race, gender, class, language, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic.

In practice, equity means all children and families receive necessary supports in a timely fashion so they can develop their full intellectual, social, and physical potential” (p. 17).



Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)

- Compiles data on books for children and teens since 1985
- Diversity subjects

* Category added in 2016 or later

Heritage/Region/Setting

- ☐ Arab *
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black/African
- ☐ Brown Skin Unspecified
- ☐ Indigenous
- ☐ Latine
- ☐ Middle East *
- ☐ Multicultural General
- ☐ Pacific Islander

Religion *

- ☐ Christian
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Other Religion

LGBTQ *

- ☐ Gender Nonconformity
- ☐ LGBTQ Character/Topic
- ☐ LGBTQ Family
- ☐ LGBTQ Non-Fiction

Disability *

- ☐ Cognitive/Neurological Disability/Condition
- ☐ Physical Disability/Condition
- ☐ Psychiatric Disability/Condition

Diversity in Children's Books 2015

Percentages of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds.
Based on the 2015 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison:
ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp



0.9%
American
Indians/
First Nations

2.4%
Latinx

3.3%
Asian Pacifics/
Asian Pacific
Americans

7.6%
African/
African
Americans

12.5%*
Animals, Trucks, etc.

73.3%**
White

Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen & Molly Beth Griffin
Released under a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

* About a quarter of the total children's books published in 2015 were picture books, and about half of those depict non-human characters, like animals & trucks.

** The remainder depict white characters.

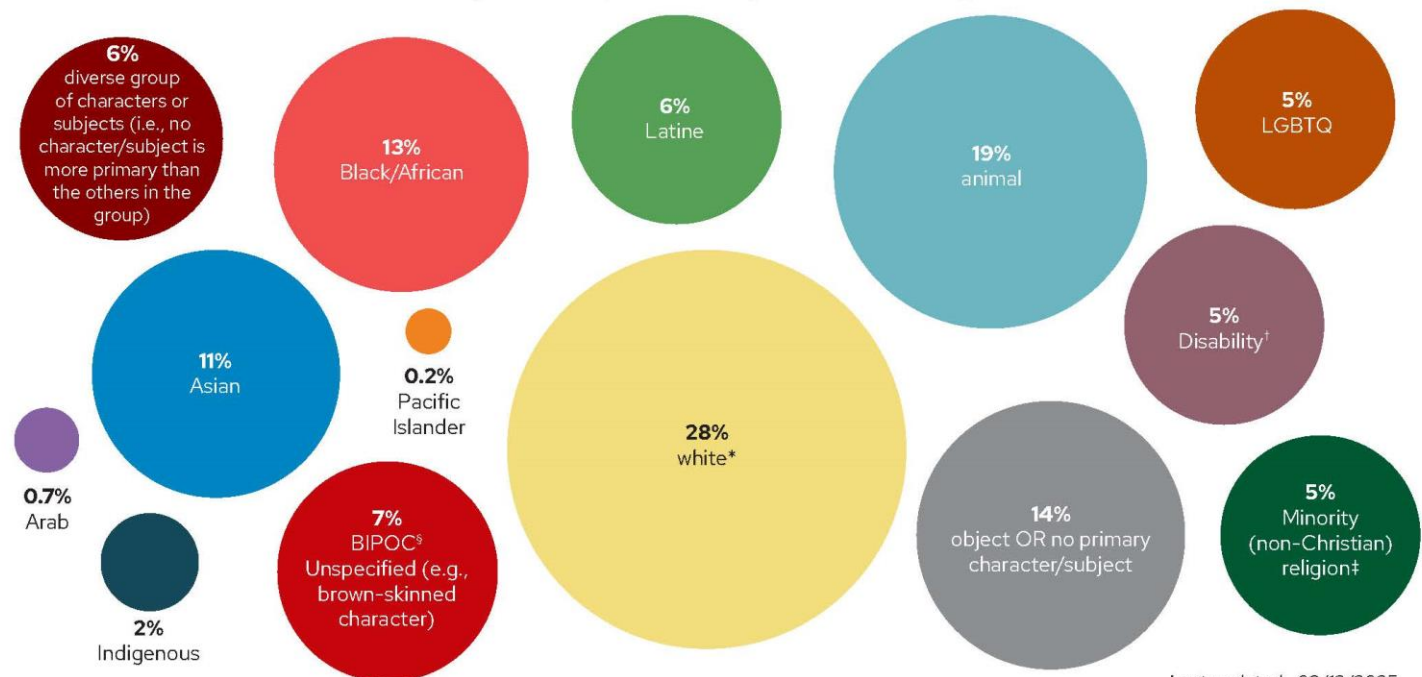
Source: Huyck, D., Park Dahlen, S., & Griffin, M. B. (2016). *Diversity in children's books 2015* [Infographic].

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/a34ixew74u5wr5kxpvkcf/AAhpTsl3y4PZtJNoEZlkwl0?rlkey=buxbqj6k74jvwphgx0rdoohsk&e=1&st=pgtobg84&dl=0>



2024 CCBC Diversity Statistics: PRIMARY CHARACTER/SUBJECT

Race/Ethnicity, Disability, LGBTQ, Religion



37% of 3,619 total books received have at least one BIPOC[§] primary character (fiction) or human subject (nonfiction).

Individual books with multiple primary characters/subjects or primary characters/subjects with multiracial or intersectional identities will be counted in all applicable categories. Percentages are not mutually exclusive and cannot be combined to calculate a total of the whole.

CCBC ©2025 Cooperative Children's Book Center
Please see our media kit to access the most recent version of this image, and for additional information about our work documenting diversity. The most recent version of this image available can be used without permission as long as it is reproduced in its entirety.

Last updated: 03/12/2025

* "White" is not counted for multiracial characters/subjects so as not to misrepresent a BIPOC[§] individual as white.

† "Disability" includes physical, cognitive, neurological, and psychiatric disabilities.

‡ 3% Jewish, 2% Muslim, 0.8% other minority religion

§ Black, Indigenous, and People of Color





Four types of multicultural books by themes and topics

- Useful for helping educators build a balanced and culturally diverse literature collection

Consciously inter-racial	People are people	Distinctive experience	Coping with discrimination
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vision of a multicultural society	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflected culture not distinct from the dominant one	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlights aspects (e.g., values) of a particular culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Powerful, historical books

Sources:

Bishop, R. S. (1992). Children's books in a multicultural world: A view from the USA. In E. Evans (Ed.), *Reading against racism* (pp. 19–38). Open University Press.

Möller, K. J. (2016). Creating diverse classroom literature collections using Rudine Sims Bishop's conceptual metaphors and analytical frameworks as guides. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 42(2), 64–74.



Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Program (ELP)

- Community-based partnership among
 - an early literacy research center
 - two urban learning centers in elementary schools
 - local branch of a public library
- Families of young children (0-3) invited to participate in quarterly sessions that promote children's language/literacy development
- Families received multicultural books and activity materials to keep in an effort to extend learning opportunities at home

Sources:

Mata-McMahon, J. (2024). *Sherman center for early learning in urban communities: Final report 2017 to 2024*. University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Rochester, S. E., & Mata-McMahon, J. (2022). Promoting kindergarten readiness during remote learning through community-based family literacy sessions. In K. Fox & L. Szech (Eds.), *The handbook of research on family literacy and home-school connections* (pp. 101–124). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-4569-3.ch007>



ELP session structure



Key:

Caregiver +
child

Caregiver
only

Child
only

Source:

Rochester, S. E., & Mata-McMahon, J. (2022). Promoting kindergarten readiness during remote learning through community-based family literacy sessions. In K. Fox & L. Szech (Eds.), *The handbook of research on family literacy and home-school connections* (pp. 101–124). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-4569-3.ch007>

ELP findings

- Served 261 families via 26 sessions
- More than 50% of families report increases in their child's reading habits after participating in ELP sessions
- Attending 2+ sessions during COVID-19 significantly predicted the number of books caregivers reported owning

“Hermoso programa estoy muy feliz ahora. Comprendo más y mis niños están más preparados para el kindergarten. Gracias a todos los que hacen posible este evento.”

(“Beautiful program. I am very happy now. I have a better understanding, and my children are better prepared for kindergarten. Thank you to all that make this event possible.”)

- ELP Caregiver, 2021

Sources:

Mata-McMahon, J. (2024). *Sherman center for early learning in urban communities: Final report 2017 to 2024*. University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Rochester, S. E., & Mata-McMahon, J. (2022). Promoting kindergarten readiness during remote learning through community-based family literacy sessions. In K. Fox & L. Szech (Eds.), *The handbook of research on family literacy and home-school connections* (pp. 101–124). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-4569-3.ch007>



Final thoughts

Literature transforms [the] human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.”

– Rudine Sims Bishop

Thank you! Let's continue the conversation.



Contact Information

Shana E. Rochester, PhD

srochester@childtrends.org