

Multicultural Literature: *Providing Mirrors and Windows*

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The Power of Multicultural Literature

In a multicultural curriculum, there are few stimuli with greater potential to move people to action than literature. Because it tells the stories of human events and the human condition and not simply the facts, literature does more than change minds; it changes people's hearts. *And people with changed hearts are people who can move the world.*



--(Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 580)

Average Number of Books and Bookstores in Three California Communities



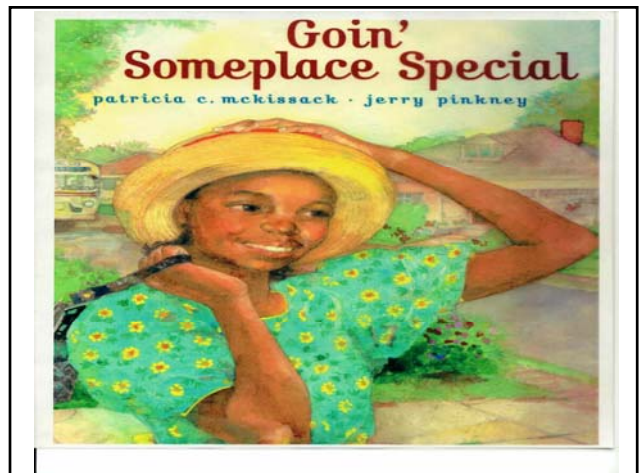
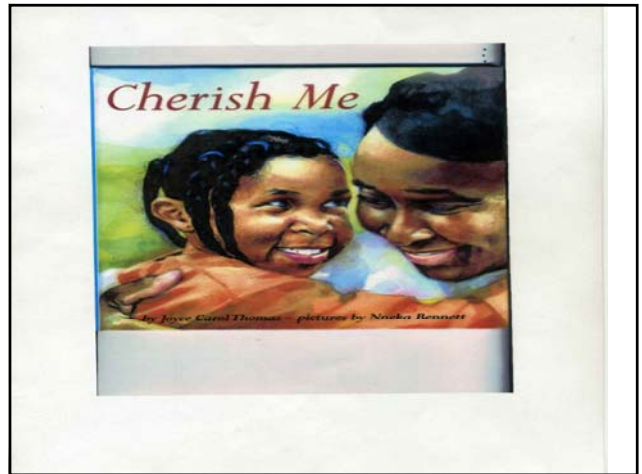
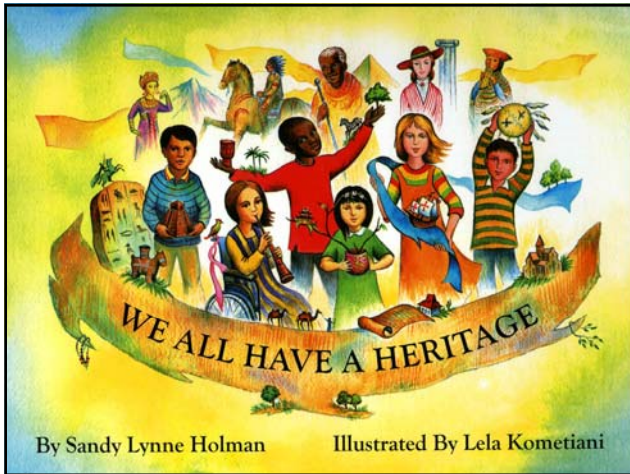
	<i>Books in home</i>	<i>Books in classroom libraries</i>	<i>Books in school libraries</i>	<i>Books in public libraries</i>	<i>Number of bookstores</i>
Beverly Hills (high SES & White)	199	392	60,000	200,600	5
Watts (low SES & Black)	.4	54	23,000	111,000	0
Compton (low SES & Black)	2.7	47	16,000	90,000	1

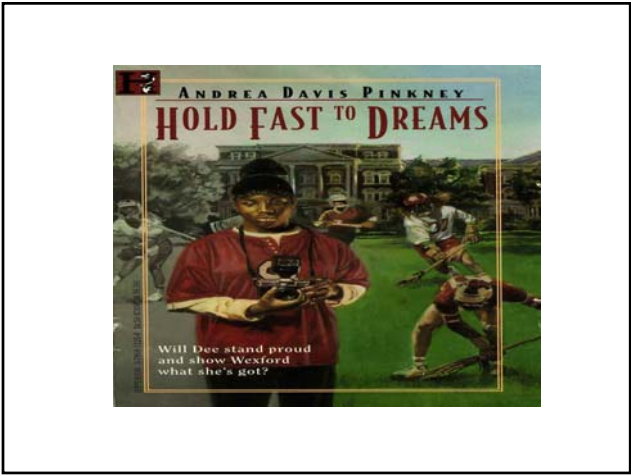
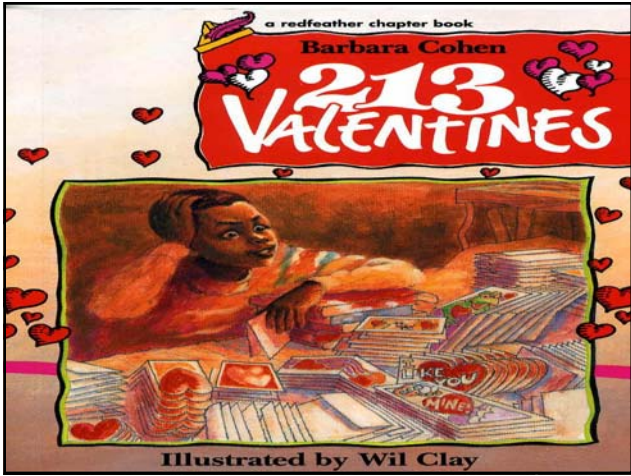
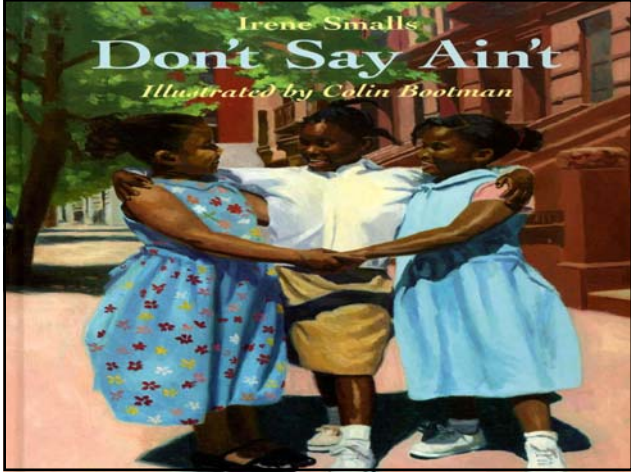
Smith, C., Constantino, R., & Krashen, S. (1997). Differences in print environment for children in Beverly Hills, Compton, and Watts. *Emergency Librarian*, 24(4), 8-9.

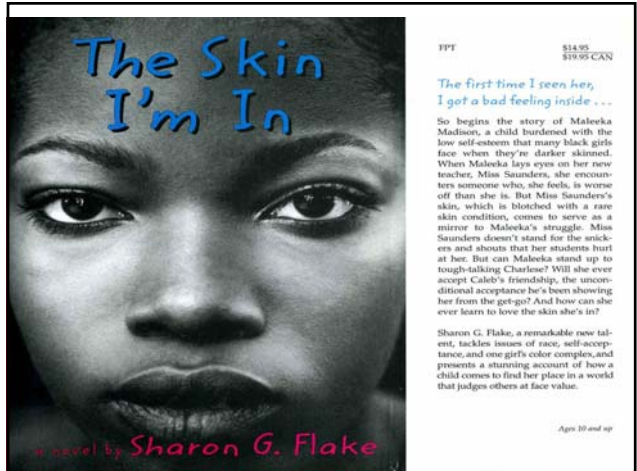
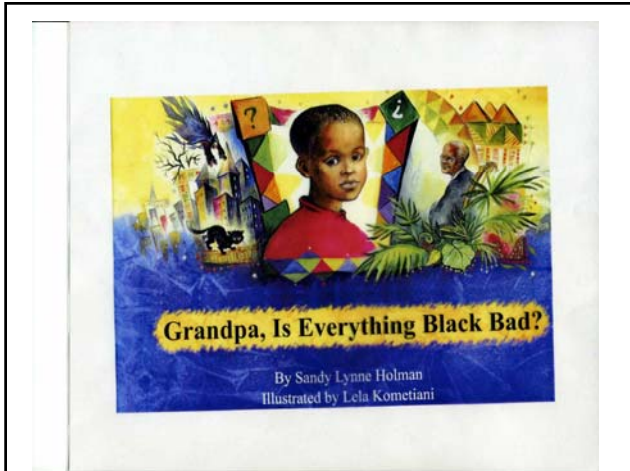
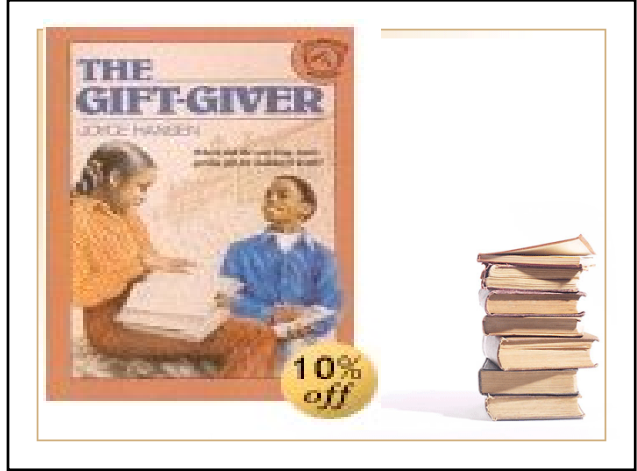
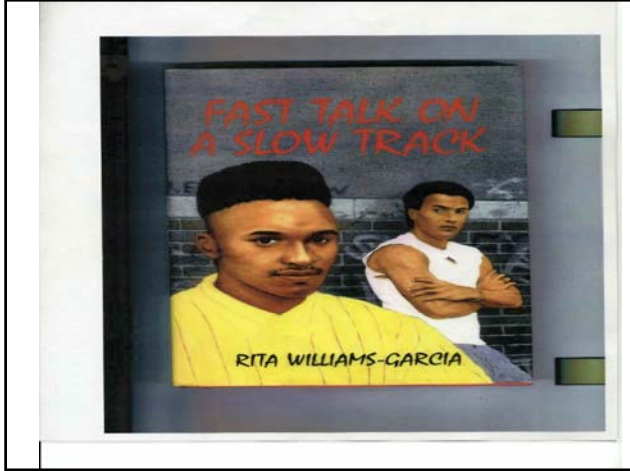
The Buying Power of Black America 2002

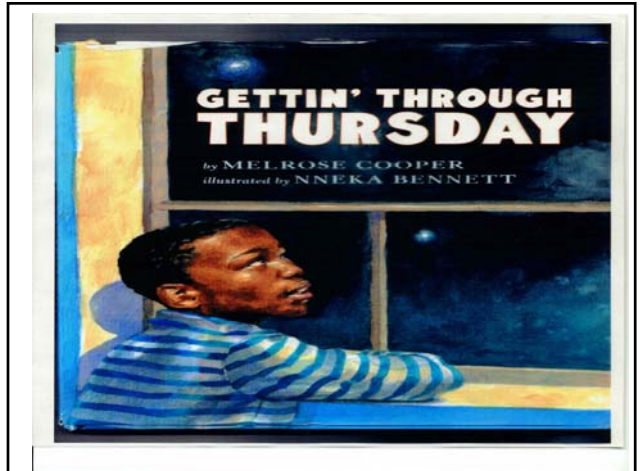
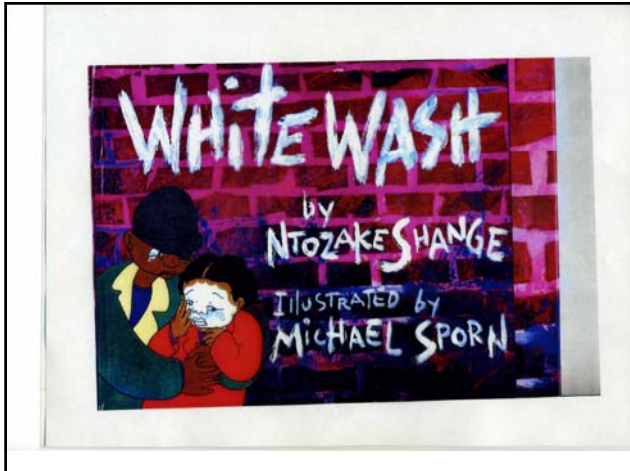
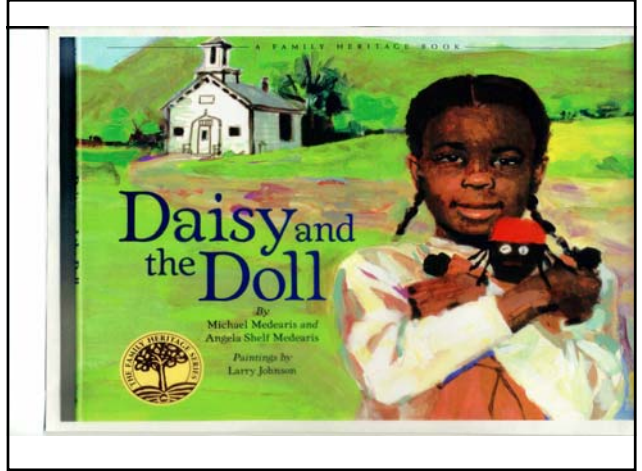
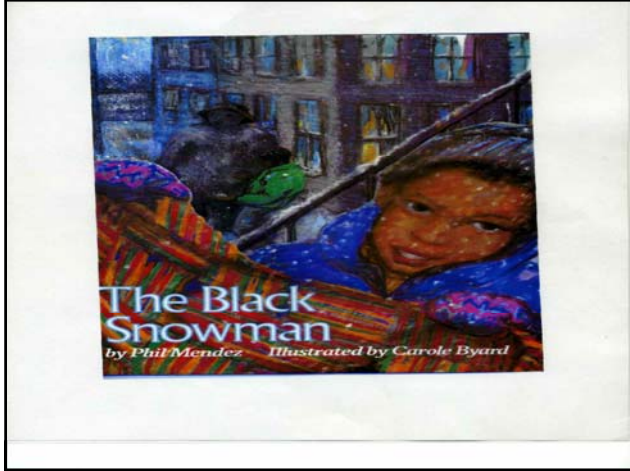
\$631 BILLION in earned income
(Dept. of Commerce's Consumer Expenditures Survey)

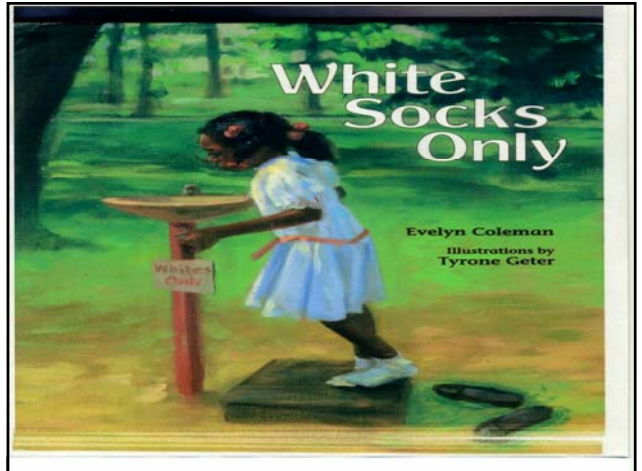
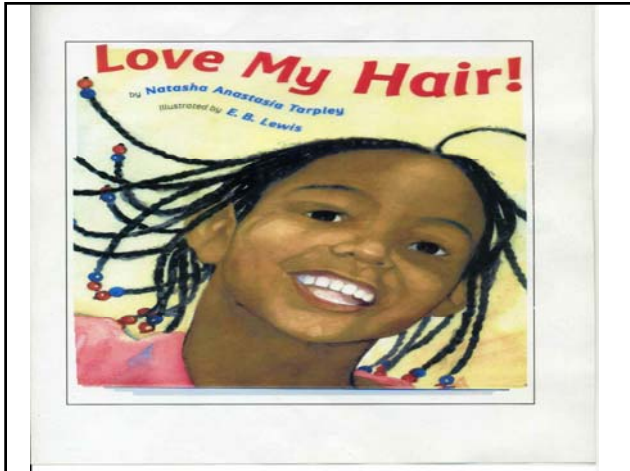
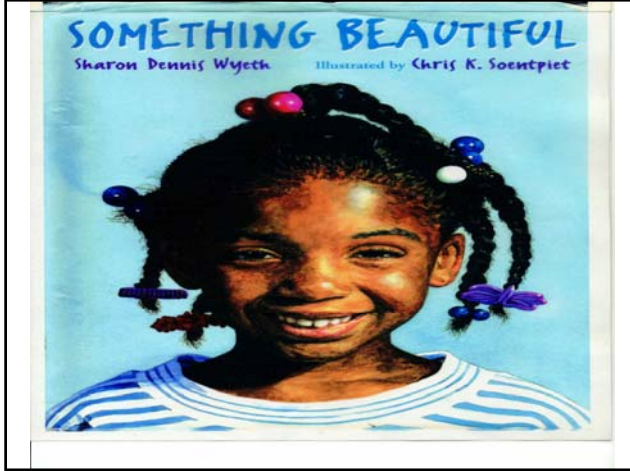
Household and related charges	131.7 billion
Food	54.7 billion
Cars, trucks, motorcycles	46.7 billion
Apparel products and services	22.9 billion
Health care	16.7 billion
Telephone services	13.6 billion
Household furnishing and equipment	11.6 billion
Personal care products and services	6.2 billion
Media	5.3 billion
Transportation, travel, and lodging	5.1 billion
Education	4.6 billion
Consumer electronics	3.2 billion
Tobacco products and smoking	2.6 billion
Entertainment and leisure	2.5 billion
Alcoholic beverages	2.2 billion
Toys, games, pets	1.9 billion
Computers and related equipment	1.9 billion
Books	303 million

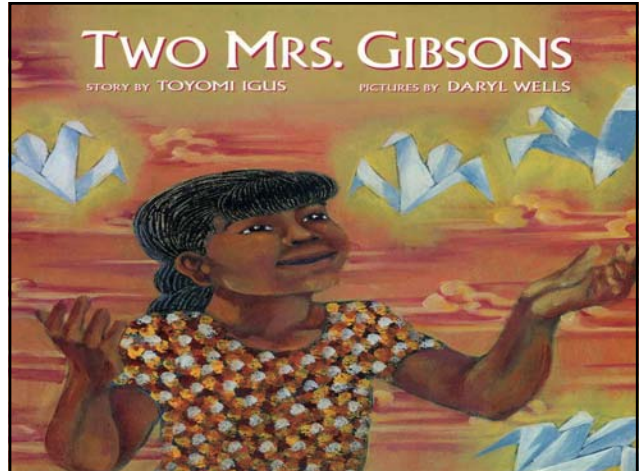
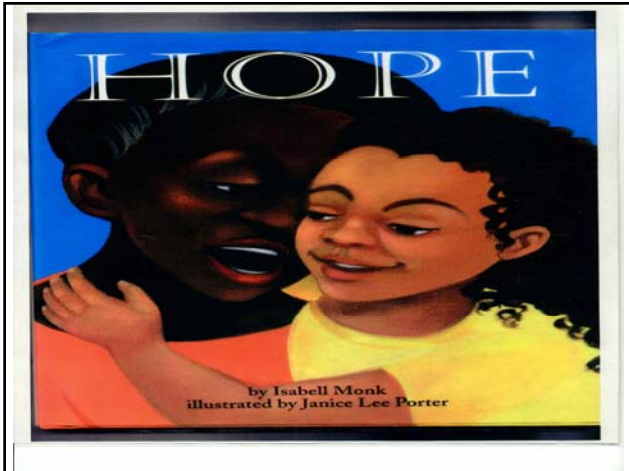
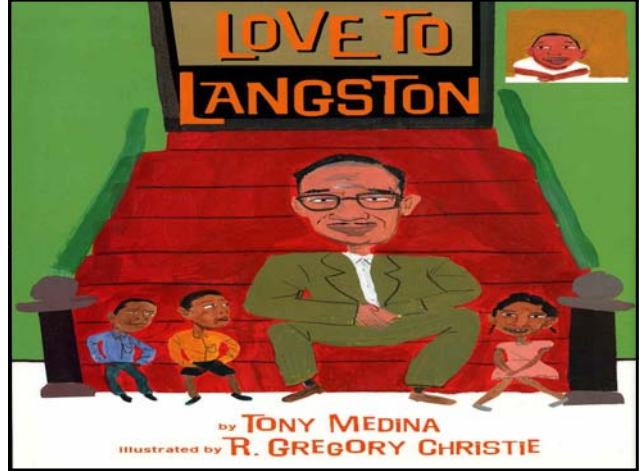
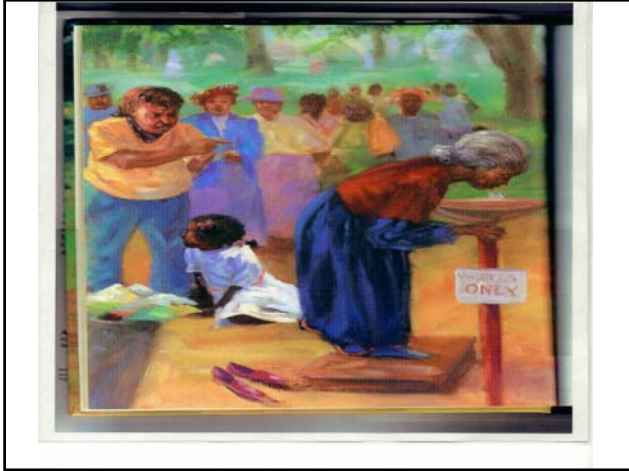


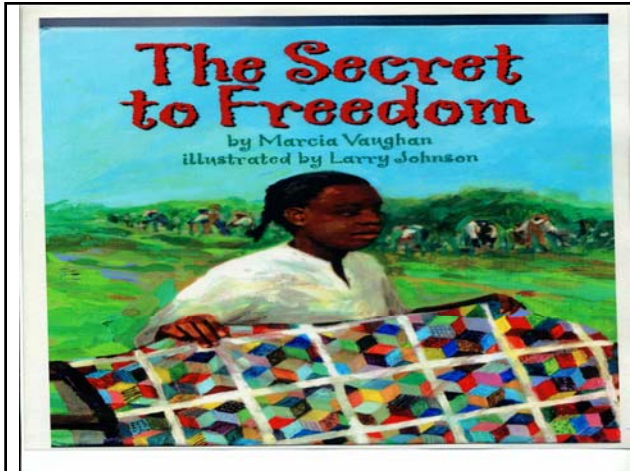
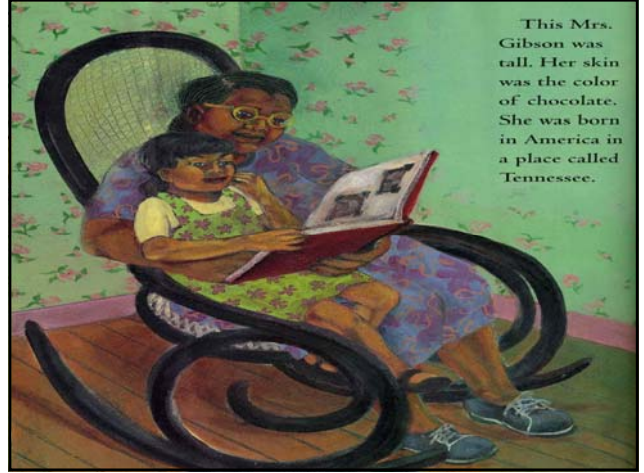
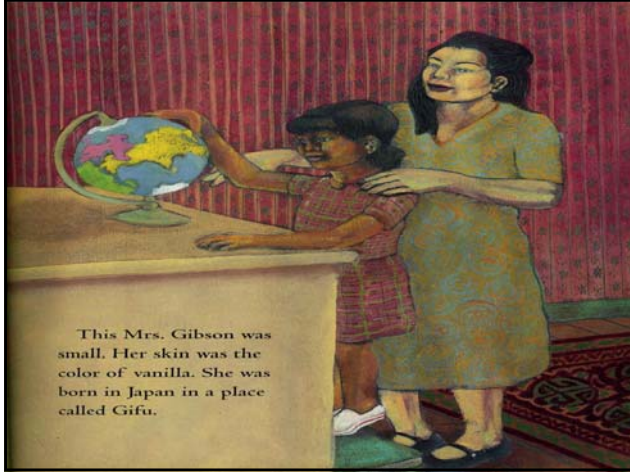


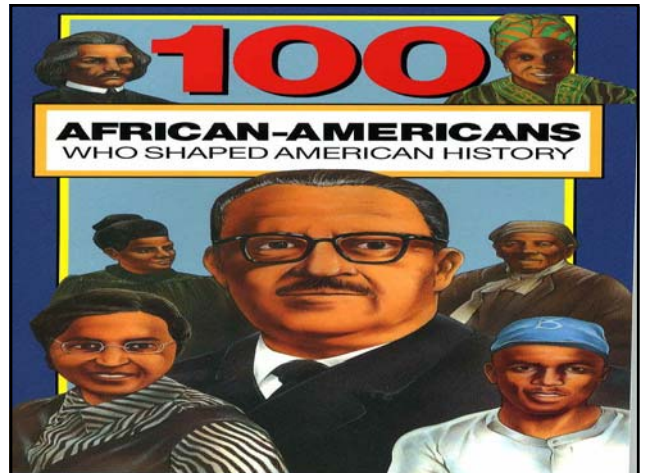
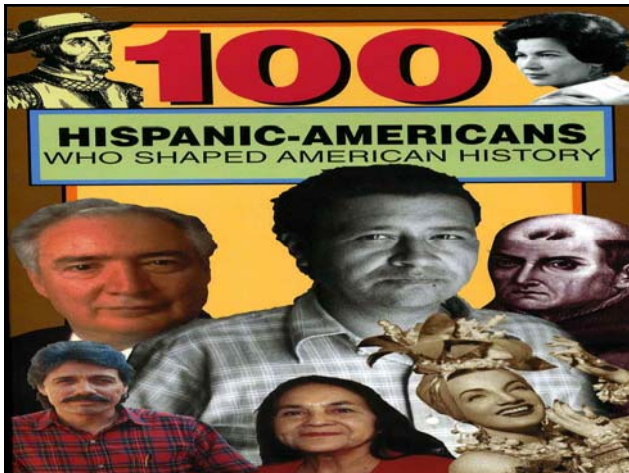
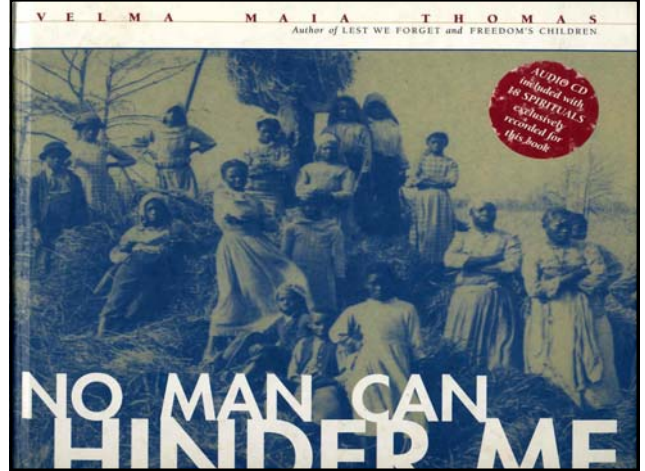
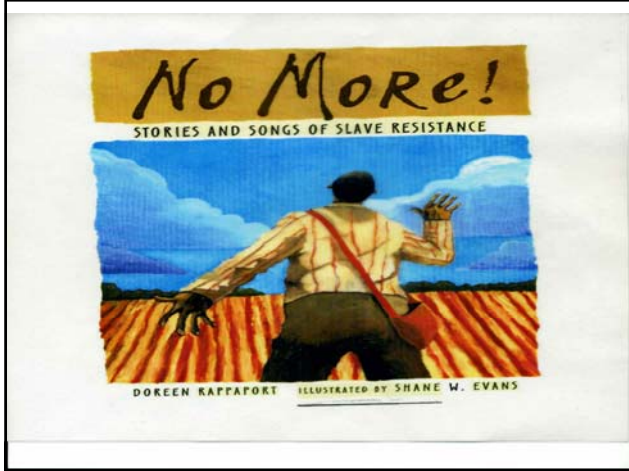


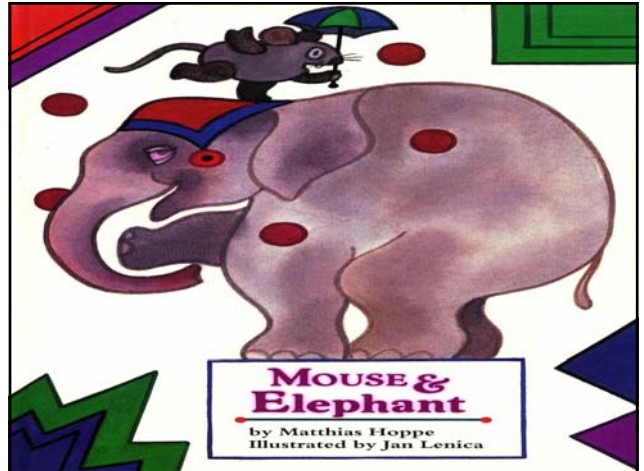
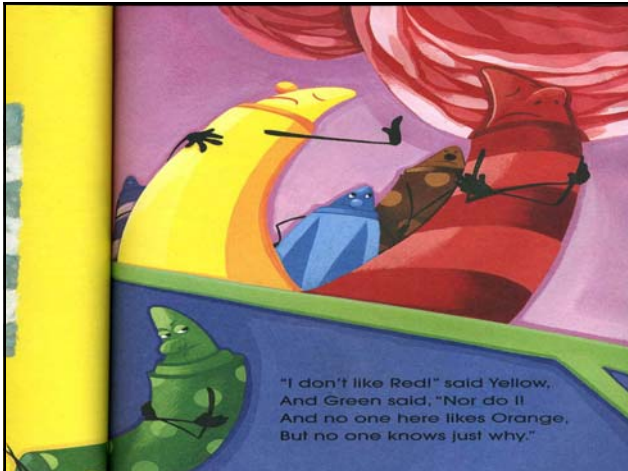
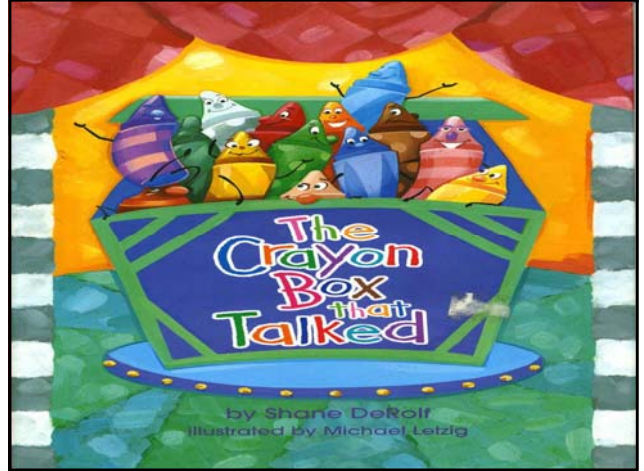
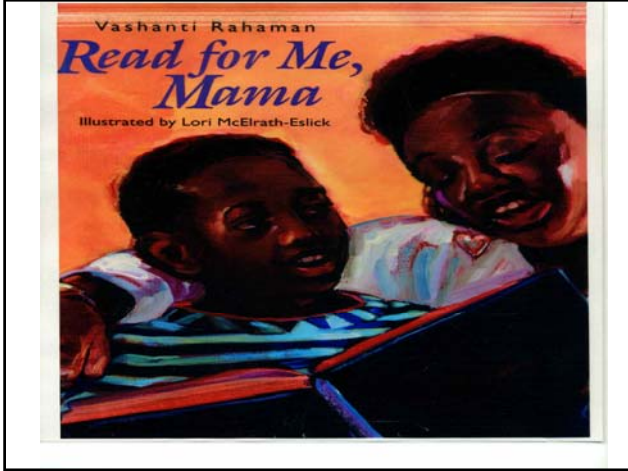


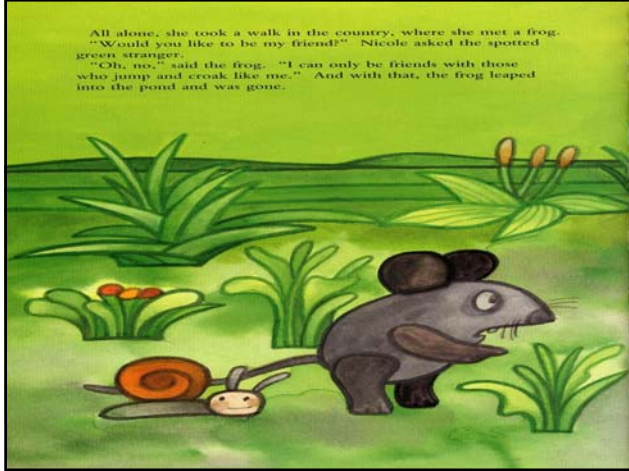












<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/presrvce/pe3lk28.htm>

Multicultural Children's Literature

The following Web sites offer listings and reviews of multicultural children's literature:

- [African Americans in Science: Books for Young Readers](#) (Haury, 1995)
- [African-American Voices in Children's Fiction](#) (Arrowhead Library System, n.d.)
- [Coretta Scott King Awards](#) for outstanding books by African American authors and illustrators
- [How to Choose the Best Multicultural Books](#) for children in grades K-8
- [Multicultural Book Reviews](#) for K-12 educators
- [Multicultural Resources](#) and bibliographies of African American, Asian American, Pacific Islands, Hispanic, Central and South American, Puerto Rican, Jewish, and Native American literature for children and young adults
- [Powerful African-American Images Revealed in Picture Books - Part 1 \(A-L\)](#)
- [Powerful African-American Images Revealed in Picture Books - Part 2 \(M-Z\)](#)
- [Powerful Asian-American Images Revealed in Picture Books](#)
- [Powerful Hispanic and Latin-American Images Revealed in Picture Books](#)
- [Powerful Native-American Images Revealed in Picture Books](#)
- [Tales of Wonder: Folk and Fairy Tales from Around the World](#)
- [Walk a Mile in My Shoes: Multicultural Curriculum Resources](#)

 A stack of several books of various colors and sizes, piled on top of each other.

20 REASONS WE NEED MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

From: "Promoting a Global Community through Multicultural Children's Literature" by Stanley F. Steiner (Libraries Unlimited)

- 1.) It provides an opportunity for all children to see themselves in the literature.
- 2.) It fosters development and positive self-esteem.
- 3.) It strengthens the significance of personal heritage.
- 4.) It helps raise personal aspirations.
- 5.) It provides a means for everyone to learn about people from all over the world.
- 6.) It recognizes and values the contributions of all people.
- 7.) It broadens understanding of history and geography.
- 8.) It cultivates respect, empathy, and acceptance of all people.
- 9.) It helps build a global community.
- 10.) It prevents people from feeling isolated.

 A stack of several books of various colors and sizes, piled on top of each other.

- 11.) It allows differences and promotes harmony.
- 12.) It provides a multitude of opportunities to discuss similarities and differences.
- 13.) It promotes social consciousness of people afflicted with social problems.
- 14.) It helps overcome denial and fears of difference.
- 15.) It provides daily opportunities to talk about diversity and current events.
- 16.) It promotes positive actions to rectify unjust behaviors and events.
- 17.) It blends easily into themes of study found in schools.
- 18.) It provides the needed balance of literature representative of many cultures.
- 19.) It offers a good option for locating well-written literature.
- 20.) It prepares us for the future.

 A stack of several books of various colors and sizes, piled on top of each other.

Evaluating Children's Books

"Do the author and illustrator present insider perspectives?"

The author should maintain an insider's mind-set and point of view when writing about a cultural group in order to portray it authentically. ... Illustrations should be accurate, true to the time period portrayed, and culturally authentic. They must not stereotype, homogenize, or ridicule any cultural group. Racial groups should be depicted with a variety of physical features that are not overemphasized. Illustrations play a major role in transmitting cultural images, especially in picture books. Often, a book's cover illustration sends an immediate message about the book's perspective." (pp. 101-102)

"Is the culture portrayed multidimensionally? Cultural groups should be presented multidimensionally in order to help readers realize the depth and breadth of experiences within cultures. ... Cultural groups should not be presented through images that could lead to stereotyping." (p. 102)

"Are cultural details naturally integrated? The flow of the story should be maintained while the cultural details necessary to make it come alive are related. The details should be presented in context so that cumbersome explanations are not necessary. If longer explanations are needed, footnotes or endnotes can serve to clarify." (p. 102)

Are details accurate and interpretation current? Details must be accurate and true to the situation in which they are presented. Factual errors, omissions, and changes are sometimes indicative of sloppy research and presentation. Other times, these problems may actually reflect an attempt on the author's part to meet the expectations of a mainstream readership with preconceived notions of cultures. Series books that focus on children in various countries are sometimes guilty of such intentional errors. ... There are also series books that are written according to a formula, such as books about other countries in which authors 'fill in the blanks' of standardized formats. In many cases, these authors have no first-hand experience with the country they write about." (p. 102)

"Is the language used authentically? The language and dialect spoken by characters should authentically portray the kinds of interactions typical of those characters, and terminology that refers to aspects of culture should be acceptable by contemporary standards." (p. 103)

"Is the collection balanced? A special consideration is the need to present children with a balanced collection of multicultural books. The term 'collection' refers to the books available in a school, classroom, or public library, and also to the books selected to serve as teaching units within a classroom." (p. 103)

"Does the work present cultural details authentically? The work should allow the readers to experience cultures different from their own. If the work reflects their culture, readers should be able to relate to and take pride in the work. If the work is not authentic, it can perpetuate stereotypes or provide misleading information.

Does the author write from the perspective of a cultural insider or outsider? Being a member of the culture in the literature makes it more likely that the author is accurately representing the cultural group.

Does the work promote stereotypes? When literature depicts nonmainstream cultures in a way that is condescending or stereotypical, there is little value of having the literature in the classroom.

Which cultural group is being represented? Teachers need to be sure that groups in addition to African Americans, Asian Americans, Latin Americans and Native Americans are represented in the literature used. For example, Jewish Americans, Appalachian Americans, and European Americans also have cultural experiences that can be shared outside of the 'generic' American experience." (p. 92)

Characteristics of Authentic Multicultural Books...

Just Us Books

- 1. Positive images that leave lasting impressions.** The images that are projected should reflect the positive aspects of our community in order to give children visual objectives to achieve. What we do not see, we usually do not believe.
- 2. Accurate, factual information that's enjoyable to read.** Too long have our children been bombarded by distorted or biased information, or pure misinformation. Our mission is to provide the facts, and present them in a fun, age-appropriate and easy-to-read manner.
- 3. Cultural authenticity/cultural specificity.** The cultural references in children's material should reflect the authentic experiences and background of African Americans. Children should be able to see that the material is specific to them.



4. Meaningful stories that reflect a range of African-American values and lifestyles.

Stories should include an attitude of respect for our ancestors, as well as give respect and accountability for our audience.

5. A clear and positive perspective for people of color in the 21st century. The material should highlight a clear path of positivity and progress, being fully oriented toward self-realization and the community spirit necessary for continued success in the future.

6. Nonfiction that is relevant to today's topics. It should be timely and germane to those issues affecting us presently or in the future.

7. Material that is self-affirming. If we do not affirm and define ourselves, who will? And do we trust others to do a fair, unbiased, and realistic job?



8. Strong three-dimensional characters. Characters should be well-rounded and fully developed, showing the multifaceted nature of people in general.

9. Attractive graphics. The graphics must be pleasing to the eye, culturally correct, and able to capture and maintain the attention of children of all ages.

10. Durability and affordability. Children's books by nature will be subject to stress and continual use. The quality of materials used should reflect this need for durability, and should also take into account the economics of many households with children.

11. A vehicle that opens the windows of knowledge, information and self-discovery. Speaks for itself, doesn't it? Make sure that your product is designed to open the young reader's mind and guide him or her on a journey towards knowledge and awareness of self and others.

