Reading and Teaching with Diverse Nonfiction Children's Books

Representations and Possibilities

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Introduction: Diverse Nonfiction in PreK–8 Classrooms

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This volume responds to the urgent need to advance scholarship on children's nonfiction literature that provides representations of populations traditionally marginalized in media and culture. Grounded in children's literature research and criticism, the authors in this volume take as a given the reality that issues of representation matter, and that, with the existence of exemplary children's nonfiction books, all educators, researchers, and scholars have a responsibility to move beyond texts with limited or problematic depictions and utilize quality books that accurately and authentically represent the world in which we live.

We stand with the activist librarians, parents and caregivers, teachers, community educators, and researchers before us who have argued fervently that representations in children's literature are inherently social, cultural, and political. Like them, we believe literary depictions are connected to power, position, and societal privilege. We strive in this volume to nudge, push, and challenge the fields of children's literature and education to evolve, expand, and divest from the selective tradition (Gardner, 2020; Harris, 1997; Williams, 1977), the limited literary canon. Nonfiction is often viewed as subordinate to fiction, receiving little attention in classroom practice (Duke, 2000). According to Kiefer and Wilson (2011), nonfiction provokes countless questions, including how to define, critique, or research a literary form that is tasked with the weight of "enlighten[ing], arous[ing] wonder, and reveal[ing] our capacity for self-awareness and understanding" (p. 291). Kiefer and Wilson (2011) pose an incisive question for educators and researchers of children's books: "What new directions might we propose for the study of nonfiction children's literature?" (p. 291). Through a conceptual framing of nonfiction that is inclusive, this book is, in part, a response to that question.

Nonfiction literature is often presumed to be neutral and apolitical; however, it is not. For example, within children's nonfiction, there is a continued sig-

nificance assigned to white, monolingual, heteronormative histories, subjects, and perspectives. Reading nonfiction literature, particularly diverse nonfiction, must therefore include an examination of the power dynamics and structural factors associated with that literature, such as who wrote, edited, and published it, as well as the social, cultural, racial, and political contexts in which nonfiction is produced, circulated, and read. Nonfiction children's literature continues to evolve aesthetically and ideologically, to some extent in response to larger social justice and equity-focused movements that began in the mid-1960s. Although not specific to nonfiction, organizational efforts such as the Council on Interracial Books for Children and Black Creators for Children helped to promote and publish authors and illustrators from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

Overall, representations of people across racial, ethnic, social, and cultural groups continue to increase due to ongoing advocacy for diverse literature; however, many of the resulting books are fiction. Policies and mandates such as Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS Lead States, 2013) foreground the reading of nonfiction texts in K–8 classrooms in order to gain specific skill sets for analyzing information. Educational initiatives such as these have had a profound influence on the overall publication of nonfiction children's literature. And yet, the classroom inclusion of culturally diverse books (including nonfiction) is not much different today than it was more than half a century ago (Crisp et al., 2016; McNair, 2016).

Critical Analysis of Diverse Nonfiction

We agree with Harris's (1997) assertion that engaging with content related to diverse experiences and histories that are weighted down with injustice often involves introspection that can create emotional and intellectual dissonance (p. xvii). However, rather than relegating inclusion, justice, and equity to the margins (Philip et al., 2019), we situate diverse nonfiction and the critical analysis of diverse books as an integral core literacy practice that provides opportunities for educators to counter constricted curricula in PreK–8 education. It also repositions and broadens teaching, planning, and literacy instruction by centering the histories, lives, and cultures of historically marginalized people. Engaging with diverse nonfiction can prompt readers to pause and to question dominant narratives. Moreover, it can disrupt rather than define or categorize oversimplified ideas about what makes fiction *fiction*, and nonfiction *nonfiction*.

Similarly, engaging with diverse nonfiction children's literature provokes us to constantly reconsider what constitutes diversity, which, like race, is both contextual and a shifting signifier (Hall, 1996). Like *multiculturalism*, *diversity* is a term that is often redressed, reinterpreted, and diffused within various spheres, translated to mean everything and nothing all at once. Therefore, even as we admit concern about the imprecise and vague nature of the term *diversity*, we also find it important to align ourselves with organizations and movements that have similar goals (e.g., We Need Diverse Books). We therefore use the term in solidarity while still finding it necessary to articulate what we mean when we use the term *diversity*.

We view diversity as social, political, and cultural resources preserved and sustained to articulate realities and dimensions of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, nationhood, geography, and language, all of which influence readers' consciousness, engagement, and responses to literature. This description is informed by theories of critical multiculturalism, culturally relevant teaching, and critical multicultural analysis. Throughout this volume, authors employ and in some cases expand (see Chapter 2 in this volume) Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) often-utilized metaphor, in which she described the functions of children's books as follows:

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms 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. (p. ix)

Bishop's significant body of work centers African American children's literature, but has influenced children's literature research and the critical analysis of parallel cultural groups (Hamilton, 1993), "creating a critical context for examining the children's literature emanating from diverse groups in our nation" (Bishop, 2011, p. 234).

Authors in the present volume also utilize critical multicultural analysis to disrupt white heteronormative master narratives. Yenika-Agbaw (see Chapter 1) describes *critical multicultural analysis* as an analytical framework that encourages readers to examine issues of power embedded in all texts, including nonfiction literature for children. Such analysis necessarily centers the knowledge and information by and about marginalized peoples, relations, histories, and

processes that have been excluded from curricula and texts (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Engaging with nonfiction literature that addresses these omissions and oversights helps PreK–8 educators to develop and sustain their cultural competence and critical consciousness, as well as that of their students. Moreover, as authors throughout this volume note, engagement with diverse nonfiction literature provides young people with models for understanding themselves and the world in which they live.

While engaging all children with diverse nonfiction is critical, as Caraballo and Lichtenberger (2020) document, this is the kind of content with which youths of color are especially invested in engaging, particularly as they "begin to historicize their lives and see themselves and their futures as historical actors" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 155). We are emboldened by research that informs educators about how diverse children's books serve to enrich understandings about the ways multiple identities influence knowledge of literature and literacies. We are driven by the experiences of young people, practicing educators, and preservice educators whose pedagogical experiences, perspectives, and knowledge of diverse societies have been transformed by engagement with diverse literature. As educators and children's literature researchers, we are also informed by our own experiences and positionalities, as a heterosexual African American woman (Roberta), a heterosexual white woman (Suzanne), and a gay white man (Thomas). We echo Harris's (1997) belief in the "monumental effects" of exposure and engagement with diverse children's literature, which also reminds us of the critical need for diverse nonfiction to be a more integral and systematic component of schooling (p. xvi).

Although we often disagree with the overly scientific stance of many reading psychologists, we do find points of convergence with their assertion that content matters. For example, psychologist Daniel Willingham (2009) argues that far too many students' reading abilities are curtailed not simply because they lack discrete phonics and comprehension skills or strategies, but because the emphasis on those practices during reading instruction eclipses deep and thoughtful explorations with content knowledge. We go a step further to argue for content knowledge that is more culturally sustaining, responsive, and relevant (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). Educators are uniquely positioned to help children become critical consumers of all media, including literature.

This volume brings together professional conversations about the role and function of nonfiction and informational texts in PreK–8 classrooms with ongoing discussions of diverse books and issues of representation in children's literature, including critical examinations of the quality and content of its depictions. Although there is considerable extant research on each of these topics, few

scholars have focused on depictions of parallel populations and other minoritized populations specifically in nonfiction children's literature (Crisp, 2015). The authors in this edited book help to create a critical context for analysis and engagement with diverse nonfiction children's literature.

Overview of the Book

Part I of this volume provides a theoretical framework for the book. In Chapter 1, Vivian Yenika-Agbaw discusses critical multicultural analysis, a framework that interrogates critical issues such as voice and power. Yenika-Agbaw demonstrates the effectiveness of critical multicultural analysis through her examination of several nonfiction children's books.

Part II of the book includes chapters that focus explicitly on the history and trends in nonfiction children's literature about specific parallel, underrepresented, or minoritized populations. While these chapters sometimes vary in their structure and approach to their subjects, their authors provide readers with an overview of relevant texts, criteria for selecting and evaluating nonfiction literature about that particular population, points for consideration, and arguments for why it is essential that educators include these books in their classrooms, curricula, and libraries.

Obviously, and unfortunately, it is impossible for this book to be comprehensive in its inclusion of the various identities and social locations that must be represented in nonfiction children's books. For instance, two notable absences from this collection are chapters on gender and people of size. Organizing the book and selecting identities and social locations to highlight also presented problems for us as editors. While some authors take a more intersectional approach in their individual chapters, we struggled with the fact that having separate chapter topics on, for example, people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people could reinforce oversimplified and binary understandings of identity and social location by unintentionally suggesting that there are no LGBTQ+ people with disabilities.

Further, due to the limitations of space, none of the chapters is an exhaustive discussion of its subject. It is our wish that this book will serve as a starting point, one that encourages readers to locate additional professional resources and primary sources and learn more about available books and the various populations represented in this text. Multiple bookshelves' worth of professional books can—and should—be written about each of the populations represented in this volume and the myriad other identities that have been left out. For example, we need professional resources exploring the histories and literary depic-

tions of Latinx queer women and African American people with disabilities. We hope that our volume will help foster additional, deeper, much-needed work.

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I

Theoretical Foundations

A Critical Multicultural Analysis of Power Relationships in Selected Nonfiction Picturebooks

1

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This chapter discusses critical multicultural analysis (CMA) and its relevance to children's nonfiction. CMA is an analytical framework that encourages readers to examine issues of power embedded in all texts, including nonfiction literature for children. The chapter presents key tenets usually associated with CMA and offers examples of ways in which educators can use these tenets to analyze children's nonfiction texts. Through this examination, power issues uncovered through the analysis are shown to be reminiscent of humanity's tenuous histories of domination and oppression.

Chapter Guiding Questions

- What is critical multiculturalism?
- What distinguishes critical multiculturalism from other forms of multiculturalism?
- How does CMA serve as an analytical framework through which readers can examine ideologies of power in children's nonfiction texts?
- How can adults help young learners become critical multiculturalists by reading and discussing children's nonfiction?

In our book *Does Nonfiction Equate Truth? Rethinking Disciplinary Boundaries through Critical Literacy* (Yenika-Agbaw et al., 2018), my coeditors and I problematize the notion of truth that is commonly associated with nonfiction. In particular, Laura Anne Hudock, Ruth McKoy Lowery, and I approached our project from the perspective of authors who are people situated in social worlds and professionals whose worldviews are shaped by sociohistorical and cultural contexts. Therefore, regardless of the degree of research that may be behind the process, the "truths" that help inform the literary/creative/informational nonfiction texts for children that authors create (the "truths" they may also pass on to readers) are steeped in ideology. Quoting from the *Oxford English Dictionary*,

Obviously, CMA is an analytical framework that not only encourages readers to actively engage in the analysis process but also guides them in how to accomplish this task by having them ask simple questions. These might include the following: What power relationships are evident? What sociocultural dynamics emanate from history? How are individuals interacting? For Johnson and Gasiewicz (2017), too, CMA "is an important tool for text analysis that compels readers to examine representations of power, authenticity, accuracy, and the sociopolitical and historical context present in a narrative" (p. 29).

Like most theoretical frameworks, there are tenets typically identified with critical multiculturalism from which CMA stems. While May (2003) identifies four, including one that situates race and ethnicity as being central in the power discourse, in this chapter, I privilege his second tenet, "acknowledging (unequal) power relations" (p. 209), which states that "individuals and groups are inevitably located, and often *differentially* constrained by wider structural forces such as capitalism, racism, colonialism, and sexism" (p. 210, emphasis in original). This tenet is more expansive, and thus affords ample opportunity to examine the types of "unequal power relations" that may be embedded in the four children's nonfiction books discussed later in this chapter. Figure 1.1 summarizes key features of CMA often of relevance to children's literature scholars and educators interested in engaging this framework.

Critical Multicultural Analysis of Selected Nonfiction Texts

While each of the nonfiction picturebooks analyzed here stands by itself, my analysis takes into consideration key ideas from the CMA tenet of particular interest to me for the purposes of this study, the most compelling being the idea of a power continuum. As Kelley (2008) observes, "power can be examined on a continuum: domination, collusion, resistance, agency" (p. 33). To this power continuum, I would add *exclusion* or silencing with an attempt to render groups

Critical multicultural analysis . . .

- is a way of reading literary texts for re-/misrepresentations, stereotypes, and inaccuracies;
- has a history that is linked to critical multicultural education to uphold democratic values;
- acknowledges the existence of power relationships in texts for readers to actively engage;
- holds readers accountable for their roles in perpetuating inequities; and
- enables readers to read *purposefully and critically*, making connections to our sociocultural histories that have often positioned cultural groups in a power continuum.

FIGURE 1.1. CMA: A summary of key ideas of interest to literacy educators.

invisible. This is of extreme importance because this form of power manipulation may remain subtle and nuanced amidst the rich information presented on a topic by an author or illustrator. In fact, it may become obvious to readers only when they take an active stance. Such a stance often entails looking at a variety of evidence (historical, scientific, sociocultural, etc.) in order to draw and substantiate conclusions. These could range from the omission of certain groups and their contributions, the mistreatment of people or creatures because of their otherness, and scientific and technological findings skewed in favor of particular cultural groups. My analysis of these nonfiction books, therefore, is one way to engage these kinds of power manipulations.

For the purpose of this chapter, I selected four nonfiction picturebooks from a list of recently published titles. Additionally, the choices of these books were made "because of their potential to act as telling cases" (Jones, 2018, p. 169)—as example cases to illuminate subtle ideology in otherwise aesthetically appealing and intellectually engaging books. I then checked their status on Amazon.com to gauge their popularity among buyers whom I consider potential readers of these books, or who might have access to potential readers of the selected books. Under the broad genre of nonfiction, the chosen picturebooks can be subcategorized further as biographical, in the case of *Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille* (Bryant, 2016), and as informational, for *Big Words for Little Geniuses* (Patterson & Patterson, 2017), *Trains* (Graham, 2017), and *Thank You, Earth* (Sayre, 2018). The nonfiction picturebooks target children of ages three to eight years old (preschool–grade 3). These are young children who might still be oblivious to the inner workings and past histories of the larger society, and their places and roles within the multiple sociocultural spaces they may occupy.

Ideologies of Cultural Dominance

To uncover power relationships embedded in these books, I begin by focusing on the rhetorical strategies the authors and illustrators use to present information deemed important on a topic. I look at the verbal and visual texts, paying attention to what information takes the spotlight and what information might be missing (or omitted), and I question why that might be so. Next, I examine the sociocultural, scientific, and technological perspectives that might have informed the selection of specific information to include in each text—in short, *what might have made this information more important from the author or illustrator's perspective?* Working only with the physical book, a cultural artifact, I do not profess to understand the author's or the illustrator's intent. I can only infer power relationships from the types of information that seem *dominant* in the

book and those that are *silenced* based on historical/scientific/sociocultural evidence as mentioned earlier.

Dominance of Sighted People

Jen Bryant's (2016) picturebook biography *Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille* won the 2017 Schneider Family Book Award for its portrayal of a person with a visual disability (blindness). It tells the story of Louis Braille and how he came to invent braille, an effective mode of nonverbal communication for the blind. A book on this topic is a major contribution in the field of children's literature, for it educates readers about the history of braille, including young Louis's personal struggle that led to its invention. Additionally, it expands readers' understanding of diversity beyond race, class, gender, and sexuality. There is ample research evidence to support the claims the author makes about Louis, as a sighted child who later became blind. What I consider problematic, however, in this book's portrayal of the culture of people who are blind is twofold, and concerns (1) the rhetorical strategy used in conveying the information and (2) the implied audience for the book. The front cover somewhat promises a story that will be inclusive of both readers who are blind and those without severe visual impairments, as is evidenced by the bilingual presentation of the book's title in English and in braille (though not raised, as it should have been). However, that is where the attempt ends, for the entire book talks about people who are blind using language that heightens their otherness. Braille as a legitimate language for communication is therefore simply acknowledged, for the story text is not raised, and, as such, deprives child readers who are blind and/or read braille of their rights to experience a book about a pivotal moment in their own culture's history.

This leads to the question of audience. If the picturebook is about the sociocultural histories of people who are blind, and clearly a biography of Braille, the man behind this language, why are persons with visual disabilities not given the opportunity to read it in a meaningful and personal way? Why should they wait for people who are sighted to read the story, discuss the significance of Braille's invention, and inform them that it was a milestone in human culture when it is they who use braille as their primary language of communication? This oversight of not writing the biography as a braille–English bilingual text objectifies people who are blind. In this way, I conclude that they are excluded and silenced from a discourse to which they should be at the center. They are thus dominated by the sighted population, including the author and the illustrator. Therefore, while the artists have a solid grasp of the subject matter based on their research, their positions as people who are sighted leaves them unaware of the need to

include those with visual impairments in a conversation that directly concerns them.

Social Class (Upper Middle) and English Language Dominance

Susan and James Patterson's (2017) *Big Words for Little Geniuses* is a picturebook alphabet dictionary, illustrated by Hsinping Pan, that considers children "little geniuses" whose parents and caregivers should encourage them to read big words for fun. On the jacket cover, the wife and husband authors note:

> There's no **gobbledygook** in this book! Just fun big words for your **Lilliputian** genius to learn! Why should your little genius's first word be *cat* when it can be *catawampus*? Start your child off with an early love of reading with these big words that are wonderfully fun to say. (emphases in the original)

The reference to a term from Jonathan Swift's (1726/2008) *Gulliver's Travels* already gives the reader a sense of the authors' ideology regarding English literacy education, and this has to do with the valuation of the canon. The power issue here is blatant. First, there is the question of audience. While the book's Amazon.com page lists the audience as preschool to grade 1, one might wonder why children this young really need to learn big words for fun. This book made both the *New York Times* and *Smithsonian* bestselling lists in 2017. Megan Gambino (2017), an editor for the *Smithsonian Magazine*, remarks that Susan and James Patterson

> have written an alphabet book that doesn't underestimate kids' abilities to learn new words. Sure, "A is for apple," but it's also for *arachibutyrophobia* (the fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth). And B is for bibliomania—the mission of James's fledgling children's book imprint, JIMMY Patterson, is to turn as many kids into bibliomaniacs as possible. (para. 3, emphasis in original)

We need to be mindful of the fact that, while the stated readers are very young children, an implied reader who is expected to broker this reading experience is a caregiver or an adult assumed to be of a certain educated class with a good mastery of the English language. This is the only way these adults may be able to help their children to not only learn how to pronounce the multisyllabic words in the visually playful alphabet dictionary, but to also try to have fun while learning. From the book creators' perspective, then, if the caregiver or adult lacks the appropriate background to assist their children in this way and embarrass themselves trying to pronounce these words, too bad!

On the power continuum, I see this as social class (specifically, upper middle class) dominance. Further, it silences children and families with limited proficiency in the English language and highlights their otherness. And, while the authors claim reading big words gives young children an early start to love reading, one may wonder if this is some kind of euphemism about the need to position children toward an educational path that paves the way to "Baby Ivies." For, as Victoria Goldman, author of *The Manhattan Directory of Private Nursery Schools* (2012), posits about the frenzy around having young children admitted into the right nurseries: "New York's top-tier nurseries can be feeder schools to the 'right' kindergarten, and then Trinity and Dalton, and upward to Harvard and they offer the right social element" (Goldman, 2003, para. 4). Might this be a hidden agenda for this book as well? It harkens back to the era of the canon wars, when knowledge was prescribed for children by the then US Secretary of Education, William Bennett, a coauthor of *The Educated Child: A Parent's Guide from Preschool through Eighth Grade* (Bennett et al., 1999). It is not clear how the Pattersons decided which words to feature in their text. Additionally, one may also wonder why they did not consider including words from languages other than English, since learning to read these would be fun too.

There is also what I consider parental or adult dominance, since the "little" genius would have to rely heavily on a capable adult in order to determine what kind of book to read for fun. It heightens their otherness as children. Some critics might say, "Don't adults already make these decisions about what kinds of books to buy for their preschooler?" Yes, they do, but not always with the intent of having them learn unusually complex words for fun. Therefore, while there is no doubt that the authors have adopted a novel approach to the alphabet book subgenre, with information that is accompanied by colorful images that attempt to convey the kinds of fun readers might experience, the adult authors' educated class superiority results in a lack of awareness of some children's sociocultural realities.

White Western Dominance, Non-White/Non-Western Silencing

Ian Graham's (2017) *Trains*, illustrated by Stephen Biesty, is an informational book that spotlights trains, focusing on their engineering histories—mostly in the West. Information is broken down into seven sections, with subheadings such as "Early Steam Trains," "American Steam Trains," "The Golden Age of Steam," "Diesel Replaces Steam," "Electric Trains," "Heavy-Duty Diesel Trains," "High-Speed Trains," and "Trains of the Future." Under each section, basic information is provided about the particular invention accompanied by a double-page spread image of the locomotive or train and additional information

in the sidebars of scaled-down images that might be considered an addendum. The history, though purported to be from a global perspective, focuses primarily on the Western engineers' contributions to the invention and perfection of railroad transportation. Readers learn about the different parts and types of trains, the engineers behind these inventions, the technicians who operate the trains, and the passengers who travel by train ("Early Steam Trains" through to the "Trains of the Future").

From the information presented, it is clear that the locomotive was invented in Britain and then spread elsewhere, but what is not made clear is how this invention was further developed in different parts of the world other than the West. For instance, how did it develop in Asia? Also, of particular concern in regard to the history of the "American Steam Trains" is the omission of contributions to the development of the American railroad transportation industry by groups like Chinese immigrants, who constituted approximately two-thirds of the workforce. Young readers need to know important information like this to enable them to understand further the sociocultural complexities behind the transcontinental railroad, the contributions of immigrants, and the sacrifices several communities made in the process. As described on the History.com website:

> In 1865, after struggling with retaining workers due to the difficulty of the labor, Charles Crocker (who was in charge of construction for the Central Pacific) began hiring Chinese laborers. By that time, some 50,000 Chinese immigrants were living on the West Coast, many having arrived during the Gold Rush. This was controversial at the time, as the Chinese were considered an inferior race due to pervasive racism. The Chinese laborers proved to be tireless workers, and Crocker hired more of them; some 14,000 were toiling under brutal working conditions in the Sierra Nevada by early 1867. (History.com, 2019, para. 8)

Why then is information about Chinese Americans' contributions omitted in the "American Steam Train" section of *Trains*? Also, neglecting to mention how the expansionist agenda of the transcontinental railroad disrupted Native American communities is problematic, for it renders this part of history invisible.

Graham's (2017) picturebook uses a colonial lens to interpret events on this exciting topic. One might expect that, if there are gaps in history in the verbal narrative in the text, these would be filled by the visual narrative. In *Trains*, this is not so, for all of Stephen Biesty's images of workers and passengers appear to be of white people. Where the text suggests people of color, the images are scaled down so it is difficult to identify their ethnicities. For instance, in the last pages of the book, under the subheading of "Trains of the Future," the Japanese L0 Series maglev is celebrated for setting "a new speed record for trains carrying people

when it reached 375 miles . . . per hour." A double-page spread image of the train accompanies the verbal text. However, the passengers all appear to be white. At the bottom of that same page, there is the Shanghai maglev, also celebrated for its speed. No passengers are shown in this scaled-down image of the train. This is how the reader exits the reading experience. Why, I wonder, are there no specific comments about the engineers behind these futuristic trains, and why are Asian passengers not featured in trains associated with their regions? We can conclude that the information projects white Western dominance and deliberately silences non-white/non-Western groups who have contributed in significant ways to the development of train engineering and railroad transportation. Very interesting, as well, is the exclusion of two continents from this global history on train transportation—Africa and South America—making it seem as though trains are not used for transportation anywhere in these continents.

Human Dominance and Silence on People's Interaction with Their Natural Environment

April Pulley Sayre's (2018) *Thank You, Earth: A Love Letter to Our Planet* is an informational picturebook for early readers that uses an epistolary format (written in the form of letters) to convey basic information about what Earth offers to human beings. From the onset, while the opening greeting might communicate a sense of gratitude, the power relationship between the human narrative voice and the planet, an object it thanks, reverberates throughout. Over successive pages, the narrative reads: "Dear Earth, . . . Thank you for water . . . mountains . . . minerals . . . plant parts we can eat . . . for being our home." Photographs that accompany the verbal text often verify or extend the information presented. From a critical multicultural stance, the reader may wonder why there is portrayal and mention of various flora and fauna only for what they offer people. It begs the following questions: Are we greater than Earth? Are we masters of Earth? Is Earth simply there to serve our needs? This may lead one to question the legitimacy of the expressed thanks. Thanking Earth for all the services it provides to humans could easily translate into thanking Earth for being there for human exploitation.

The author's note in the back of the book explains the intentions further: "This book is a thank-you note to the earth. The earth provides us with so much" (Sayre, 2018, p. 38). It offers thanks but does not hold humans accountable for their responsibility in preserving Earth. Thus, they can enjoy the services Earth renders without necessarily protecting it, even when they consider Earth "our home." In addition, there is not a single picture of a human being in this informational picturebook about Earth. If people are an integral part of Earth, should

we not be featured in the book in some capacity? This nonfiction text reflects an ideology of human dominance with humans removed or separated from the rest of the planet.

Helping Young Readers Become Critical Multiculturalists

From the above analyses, it is evident that nonfiction picturebooks are not free of power issues. These books are written by authors who have been (and are) socialized in various ways, and, though they conduct research on their topics, they are selective in their presentation of specific information. Most often, the selective process of what and how information is presented is intertwined with our sociocultural histories. For this reason, readers should not expect information to be presented in a completely objective manner. All information should be suspect until readers have done further research on the topic. Educators, therefore, should help young children become savvy readers of all kinds of texts, especially nonfiction, which is often believed to espouse truths (scientific, historical, and more).

Hollindale (1988) posits that:

> In literature, as in life, we have to start from where the children are, and with their own (often inarticulate) ideology. This offends some commentators, who prefer the literature to begin where they wish the children were, or assume that easy transformations can be made by humanely open-minded critical inquiry, whether based in classrooms or elsewhere. (p. 9)

Because children occupy social worlds—some of which are governed by the same rules as those experienced by adults—they already have certain awarenesses. In order to help them learn to strategically uncover ideologies of power embedded in nonfiction literature, educators must first cultivate attitudes of reading that keep young readers alert. Such attitudes, like the ones I have shared in this chapter, are informed by research and have been translated into classroom practice in a wide range of classrooms.

My analysis of these books focused on a power continuum does not preclude the fact that each book has its strengths. However, because I am reading these books through a critical multicultural lens, the findings highlight what I posit to be problematic with each. Excluding or silencing voices is never good for any society, as it causes unnecessary pain and stifles possibilities for some children. Dialogue affords us several opportunities to be more inclusive in our discourses and practices even if the dialogue might inflict a different kind of

pain. In this way, we are working together to solve a problem that places our collective humanity at the center. Children need to be aware of this very early in their educational journeys as they learn to approach any story as suspect—not the whole "truth." They must always ask, "What values are reproduced in this text?" This is why, like Hollindale (1988), I have come to accept that:

> Even if beliefs are passive and unexamined, and no part of any conscious proselytizing, the texture of language and story will reveal them and communicate them. The working of ideology at this level is not incidental or unimportant. It might seem that values whose presence can only be convincingly demonstrated by an adult with some training in critical skills are unlikely to carry much potency with children. More probably the reverse is true: the values at stake are usually those which are taken for granted by the writer, and reflect the writer's integration in a society which unthinkingly accepts them. In turn this means that children, unless they are helped to notice what is there, will take them for granted too. Unexamined, passive values are widely shared values, and we should not underestimate the powers of reinforcement vested in quiescent and unconscious ideology. (p. 6)

Although Hollindale's examples are again from works of fiction, the analysis can work for nonfiction, too.

Finally, then, as readers we need to be mindful of "unexamined assumptions" (Hollindale, 1988, p. 6) that might reflect an author's values and belief system and so quietly seep into their works. For instance, being people who are not blind may have influenced author Jen Bryant (2016) as she and illustrator Boris Kulikov *re*constructed Louis Braille's biography; class privilege might have distracted Susan and James Patterson (2017) as they made decisions about the types of words to include in their alphabet dictionary; white, Western arrogance might have muddled Graham and Biesty's (2017) historical narrative on trains; and human conceit might have fogged Sayre's (2018) heartfelt letter to Earth.

In Tables 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, which conclude this chapter, there is information and some ideas that educators can consider as they undertake the challenge of nurturing young readers as critical multiculturalists. These are ideas that I have tried in my courses with teacher candidates who are preparing to work with young children. While not definitive, they are good places to start.

TABLE 1.1. Examples of Inquiry Strategies by Category

Book Design	Voice/Identities	Authenticity/ Accuracy[a]	Power	Audience	Other
Title: How is it phrased?	Who is telling the story?	What seems authentic and how/why?	Power dynamics—between groups, cultures, creations, artifacts, etc.	Who is the primary audience? What linguistic aspects or signs convey this to you?	What else do you notice?
Peritextual features	How is the story told? Appeal of the illustrations? How are they positioned on the pages for information accessibility and entertainment appeal?	Information privileged/ omitted/ missing? Information and illustrations, how reflective of the social/ natural/ scientific worlds; historical periods?	Adult/child, scientific/layperson's local/global perspectives? Sociocultural groups, etc.	Primary and implied?	What else do you notice?
Front and back matter	Language use and font	*Front:* Does it open with an explanation? How convincing is it? Was it necessary? *Back:* How is the book advertised? What is highlighted or muted?	Gaps noticed and implications for power dynamics	Primary and implied?	What else do you notice?
Research evidence and source	Credibility of research sources	Author/illustrator's background as knowledgeable artists of nonfiction. Cultural background—insider/ outsider and measures taken to ensure accuracy and authenticity	Information omitted that is already common knowledge	Primary?	What else do you notice?
Aesthetic appeal: Alphabetic and visual language or signs	Cultural appeal of text: art/print	Language uses reflective of period/ discipline		Aesthetic appeal: Alphabetic and visual language or signs	Cultural appeal of text: art/print
Inference from the book design?	Inference from narrative and rhetorical strategies to draw conclusions?	Conclusions about authenticity and accuracy from information as presented?	Conclusions about power dynamics?	Inference about the suitability of text and audience?	What else do you notice?

[a] *Accuracy* implies factual information about the topic under discussion. Thus, with thorough research, scholars and educational researchers can verify what information on a particular subject is accurate or false without necessarily belonging to a particular sociocultural group. *Authenticity*, on the other hand, implies that information on the topic under discussion is conveyed by someone with intimate knowledge of the subject based on experiences that are rooted within the cultural spaces from which the topic emanates. It is not enough to present facts about the subject; it greatly matters *how* they are presented to convey an understanding of certain cultural norms and nuances associated with the group.

TABLE 1.2. Power in Nonfiction Literature for Children: Domination[a]

Book Title	**Responses with Textual Evidence**
Who is dominated and by whom?	
What forms do domination manifest in the book?	
What emotions are evoked in you on noticing forms of domination?	
How would you rethink this story to more accurately reflect . . . (a) the historical context? (b) the scientific reality? (c) the sociocultural reality of the context?	

[a] Adapted from Kelley's (2007) template.

TABLE 1.3. Power in Nonfiction Literature for Children/Adolescents: Exclusion

Book Title	**Responses with Textual Evidence**
Whose contributions are excluded from this book?	
What forms do these exclusionary practices take?	
What historical/scientific/sociocultural evidence can you locate from research to challenge information in this book?	
Other thoughts about your findings:	

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This edited collection brings together ongoing professional conversations about diverse children's books and the role and function of nonfiction and informational text in K–8 classrooms. At a time in which truth, science, and reality are under attack, this volume challenges the fields of children's literature and education to evolve, expand, and divest from the selective tradition and limited literary canons.

Nationally and internationally recognized experts ground their chapters in children's literature research and criticism, arguing the importance of including high-quality diverse books that accurately and authentically represent the world in which we live. Contributors explore the ways in which engaging with diverse nonfiction children's literature provides opportunities to counter constricted curricula and reposition the possibilities of pedagogical policies and mandates by centering the histories, lives, and cultures of historically marginalized and underrepresented people.

Each chapter features an overview of relevant texts, criteria for selecting and evaluating nonfiction literature, practical pedagogical strategies, connections to primary sources, and a description of our contemporary context alongside arguments for why it is essential that educators include this literature in their classrooms, curricula, and libraries.

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