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Using Diverse Texts to Support Students' Language, Literacy, and Identity Development

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Tool 3.1 Analyzing a Text for Diversity and Representation

Evaluation Criteria	Possible Issues with the Text	Ways to Address Issues
1. Backgrounds of author and illustrator?		
2. Copyright date (post 1973) and loaded words?		
3. Illustrations? - Stereotypes - Tokenism		
4. Story Line? - Perspective - Problems and success		
5. Lifestyles represented? - Stereotypes - Comparison with White middle-class as the "standard"		
6. Relationships among characters? - Human or animal - Power and agency - Heroes, villains, and interests served		
7. Author's perspective? - What perspectives are present? Absent?		
8. Historical & cultural perspectives? - Historical and/or cultural perspectives valued? Absent?		
9. Effects on a child's self-image? - Stereotypes - Opportunities for identification with underrepresented characters		

Adapted from Derman-Sparks (1998, 2013). *Ten quick ways to analyze children's books for racism and sexism*. California Department of Education

Tool 4.2a Prompting Cards for New Book Club Roles

<p>Representation Rep</p> <p>Who is represented in this book?</p> <p>Who is not represented?</p> <p>Who gets to tell this story? Why?</p> <p>Do you notice any characters being silenced? How and by whom?</p> <p>Are there any characters you would like to hear more from or know more about?</p> 	<p>Perspective Taker</p> <p>I noticed that ____ perspective dominates this book. What do you think about that?</p> <p>I wonder how the story would change if it were told from ____'s perspective?</p> <p>Who else might have an important opinion or perspective in this book? What might it be?</p> 
<p>Community Connector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Who has a personal connection to the events or the characters they would like to share? How does it help you understand this text?Are there any connections between this book and current events? How does that help you understand the book or the current events differently?How can we relate this book to our community? What can we learn about the book or the community from the connection we made? 	<p>Stereotype Seeker</p> <p>Are there any stereotypes, or representations of people as "typical" for a group?</p> <p>Do women, people of color, and other minoritized characters have agency? Or are they tokenized?</p> <p>Do characters lose out when compared with White middle-class as the "standard"?</p> <p>Who are the heroes? The villains?</p> 

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Blog: **Developing Justice-Oriented Readers**

<https://crrlc.lesley.edu/developing-justice-oriented-readers/>

Developing Justice-Oriented Readers



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Comprehension instruction with a social justice focus can support students to more deeply comprehend, develop critical thinking and empathy, and consider how to counteract social injustices. We can teach social justice-oriented comprehension like we teach other reading comprehension strategies – through the gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1986).

Justice questions are one way to develop justice-oriented readers. Justice questions are so important that you want students to ask themselves these questions every time they read. They start as external teacher language and are gradually released to become internal student thinking.

Step 1: Identify one to three justice questions.

Some examples from *Conscious Classrooms* (Briceño & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2022) include:

Grades K–2:

- *Who are the main characters and how did you connect with them (or not)? (E.g., mirror, window, sliding glass door [Bishop, 1990]).*
- *Who is telling the story? Whose perspective is absent or silenced?*

Grades 3–6:

- *Whose perspective is heard, absent, or silenced? Is the perspective trustworthy?*
- *What are the author's intentions? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?*
- *What connections can you make between the book and your family, community or current events? How does that connection help you better understand the book?*

You get to determine the justice questions for your class. Consider collaborating with your grade level team and/or vertically aligning your justice questions with the grades before and after yours.

Step 2: Model, model, model.

We think aloud, or model our thinking so that students can understand the concept, then make it their own. We can model asking and answering justice questions during a whole-group read aloud, during small group, or during individual conferences. During a first grade whole group read-aloud of *Carmela Full of Wishes* by Matt de la Pena, the teacher's modeling might go like this:

Teacher: *Let's consider our justice question, "From whose perspective is the story told?" I think this story is being told from Carmela's perspective. I am excited for her birthday, and I'm sad when she mentions her father isn't with her and her family. I'm seeing and feeling what Carmela is seeing and feeling, so the book is told from her perspective.*

Repetition of the justice questions and our thinking process is critical; we can't model just once and expect all kids to "get it."

Step 3: Provide opportunities for students to practice with you and with one another.

This can be done using turn and talk in a whole group setting, or during small groups or book clubs. A third grade teacher might say the following:

Teacher: *Just like we talked about perspective earlier today, when you're in your book club groups, consider whose perspective is being told. Is it only one perspective, or are there different perspectives? Is it the perspective of a diverse character? What do you think of their perspective? Please make the justice question part of your book club discussion today. Remember that you can use your prompting cards and sentence stems to help you.*

Don't forget to formatively assess at each step in the process. Consider providing prompting cards or sentence stems as scaffolds during this stage. If a few students are struggling, you may choose to model for them in a small group or provide additional scaffolding or practice.

Step 4: Provide opportunities for independent practice and ongoing assessment.

This may be during a reading conference or via student writing. A fifth grade reading conference might go something like this:

Teacher: *What justice question did you ask yourself about this book?*

Student: *I asked myself what the author's intentions were. I think maybe R. J. Palacio wrote "Wonder" to help the reader understand what it's like to have a face that's different. Maybe other differences, too? I just finished chapter 3 so I'll see if that's right as I keep reading.*

Since we read across the curriculum, justice questions can be practiced across the school day as we "apprentice" (Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998) students into deeper, justice-oriented comprehension that will make them more critical readers and therefore better future participants in our democracy.

References

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