

March 2017

Where Are the People of Color?: Representation of Cultural Diversity in the National Book Award for Young People's Literature and Advocating for Diverse Books in a Non-Post Racial Society

Steven T. Bickmore

Yunying Xu

Myra Infante Sheridan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/taboo>

Recommended Citation

Bickmore, S. T., Xu, Y., & Sheridan, M. I. (2017). Where Are the People of Color?: Representation of Cultural Diversity in the National Book Award for Young People's Literature and Advocating for Diverse Books in a Non-Post Racial Society. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 16 (1). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.16.1.06>

Where Are the People of Color? Representation of Cultural Diversity in the National Book Award for Young People's Literature and Advocating for Diverse Books in a Non-Post Racial Society

Steven T. Bickmore, Yunying Xu, & Myra Infante Sheridan

Abstract

Guided by the research question "How are the diverse issues of race/ethnicity represented in the NBA?," this descriptive content analysis examines the representations of author gender, author race/ethnicity, protagonist race/ethnicity, protagonist socioeconomic status, and genre of the 100 National Book Award finalists and 20 winners from 1996 to 2015. The dataset indicated that there are problematic representations of race/ethnicity, and the National Book award is not as diverse as we have expected. Of the 23 culturally relevant texts in the National Book Award, only 5 are winners. The results of this study show that using only award lists to guide teachers' book selections is problematic.

Keywords: Diversity; Young Adult Literature; Book Awards; Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

Introduction

The thinking about this paper began in earnest the week after Jacqueline Woodson won the National Book Award for Young's Literature (NBA). Since the beginning of my academic career, I, Steve, have tried to convince preservice teachers to include more diverse books in their classrooms. I have brought their attention to

Steven T. Bickmore is Associate professor of English Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning in the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Yunying Xu is a doctoral student in the Literacy Education program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Myra Infante Sheridan is a graduate student in the Literacy Education Ph.D. program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Email: steven.bickmore@unlv.com

list of awards—The Coretta Scott King Award, the Pura Belpre Award, the Printz Award, Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award, the Stonewall Book Award, among others. The NBA, however, is the most prestigious. I had hoped that Woodson would win the award and was astonished when the joy of the movement was overcast by Danny Handler, aka Lemony Snicket, with a racial joke.

It was clear to me that we were not in a post racial society. I thought about how diversity—especial racial diversity—was represented among the short lists of the NBA over its relatively short history. What would a simple quantitative evaluation of the nominated authors and the novels' main characters say about the representation of diversity in young adult literature (YAL). The next fall of 2015, I found myself at a new university teaching a graduate course focused on race, class, and gender. The idea for the paper resurfaced and two doctoral students, one a Latina from southeast Texas and one an international student from China, were interested in working on the article. In part, they wondered if their identities were present in these award-winning books. The fall of 2015 would be the announcement of the twentieth winner. As a result, we began analyzing the 100 finalists. We worked on the article and submitted a draft to a journal that focused on YAL.

The paper was rejected in early April of 2016. This happens; all of us that work in the academy know that a paper can be rejected for a number of valid reasons—not the right fit, the wrong call, not polished enough, bad interpretation of data, or just not focused as accurately as it might ought be. It is not unusual for authors and reviewers to radically disagree. In this case it seemed that we, as authors and the reviewers, agreed on the need for diverse books in the hands of students and teachers, but there was a gap in the method of reporting the raw results about the award and how much opinion and advocacy should be included. Should an article include open advocacy for change, for deeper inclusion of diverse authors, and for the use of awards in instructional situations. As authors, we read the tone of the comments of the reviewers who were suggesting that, yes, we need diverse books, but aren't we doing better? There are more diverse authors, aren't there? Perhaps we are doing better and perhaps we are not. Clearly, there are more awards that focus more directly on minority groups and concerns. Does the existence of these awards, however, excuse the dominant award, the NBA, from including a more balanced representation of diverse authors and characters? Could it be that over the course of 20 years the very best books in terms of literary quality were not written by diverse authors, even though their books won awards in other venues? Perhaps we did need to pull back and make a simple first step by reporting the facts.

So, let's back up a bit. The paper was being written as Donald Trump announced his candidacy for the President of the United States (June 2015) and announced that when Mexicans arrive from Mexico, they are not sending the best. Slowly, he began to distance himself from other Republican hopefuls. He did so as he claims to "Make America Great Again," while suggesting a ban on Muslims, a revelation of how he talks about women in private—at least once, and how he represented a

reporter with arthrogryposis. Now, just as we finish these comments in January of 2016, a few days before the inauguration, President Elect Trump strikes back at the 21st winner of the NBA award, U.S. representative John Lewis, who won with his coauthor, Andrew Aydin, and illustrator, Nate Powell, for *March Book Three* (2016). This action proves to be ironically fortuitous of the purposes of this paper's analysis. To be fair, John Lewis claimed that, due to what he perceives as significant Russian meddling, Mr. Trump is not the legitimate president. To balance that, during a significant portion of President Obama's eight years in the presidency President Elect Trump questioned his legitimacy by hanging on to the birth certificate issue. Apparently, what is good for the goose isn't good for the gander. President Elect Trump's attack came in a tweet—the new form of intense political commentary and disagreement. President Elect Trump claimed that John Lewis was "...all talk, talk, talk—no action or results. Sad!" It would be hard to argue that John Lewis has been all talk and no action.

On the other hand, given recent political events, public commentary in social media, and plans for boycotts and marches, it might be easier to argue that the results of the work of John Lewis, Martin Luther King Jr., and President Barack Obama have not advanced racial relationships in the U.S. to the degree that many citizens in the U.S. might have imagined. Does this dispute between these two high-profile political leaders from two distinct sides of ideological isles, furthermore, represent our inability to discuss differences? We are a diverse country, hopefully, and can in-depth discussion of diversity in YAL can stand as a proxy for our attempt to communicate and move forward?

Now back to the reviews and our reactions. Absolutely, we wanted the paper published. We followed the suggestions to limit the editorial comments and focus in on just presenting the quantitative data from the study. We did not discuss, for example, the other awards and how they might be replacements for the big award. Do books by diverse authors get ignored by the NBA because publishers or others assume these books will get recognized by the more focused awards? While the reviewers point to other studies that deal with the lack of diversity in publishing, these studies do not focus on how this lack of diversity plays out in awards. These studies, furthermore, focus on children's literature and not young adult literature. One reviewer points to Hill's *The Critical Merits of YA Literature* (2014) and Hayn and Kaplan's *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today* (2012). Both books do treat the importance of diverse books and the authors are well aware of this since the first author wrote the foreword in the first and contributed a chapter in the second. Nothing in either book, nevertheless, tracks how diverse Young Adult Literature is represented any award.

We spent too much time, previously, discussing the speed in which social media seems to address these crucial issues, while academic publications are slow, methodical, and, in our opinion, often too neutral in their interpretation of the data. We also wanted to discuss cultural relevance, how authors do or do not

identify their identity or ethnicity, or how teachers include (or not) these texts in classroom libraries or instructional units. As a result, we did everything we could to restrict and curb our qualitative researcher impulses. We reported the facts about how and when diverse authors and their books appear among the 100 books that made the first 20 short lists and, additionally, the twenty winners of the award. As you might assume, the list of items we wanted to discuss are really a list of topics for further research and discussion. We believe that our following analysis of the NBA states the facts and will exist as a stimulus for further research and advocacy pieces. Work that will help us understand the urgency behind such groups such as We Need Diverse Books and the Black Lives Matter movement. Work that will help the young adult research community advance our understanding of diversity among the body of books called young adult literature and how that literature is used in classrooms.

Framing the Conversation

Race and ethnicity issues in children's literature and Young Adult Literature have had a dominant presence in social media over the last two years and any google search about the issues will point to more current discussion, observations, and editorials. We focus on two events in late 2015 to serve as a frame. Two children's titles, Ramin Ganeshram's *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* (Ganeshram & Brantley-Newton, 2015) and Emily Jenkins's *A Fine Dessert* (Jenkins & Blackall, 2015), refocused public attention on how slavery was depicted in children's books. Scholastic's pulling of *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* (2015), more specifically, has been viewed as a victory in response to People of Color's (POC) backlash against the book. Ramin Ganeshram's (2016) response in *The Guardian*, however, repositions the book's "banned" status. In a tweet, Ebony Thomas (2016) indicates that some people are trying to frame the situation not as "banning," but as a publisher's withdrawal of the book as a consequence of negative reviews and censures. The issue of race/ethnicity in children's and YA literature and #WeNeedDiverseBooks campaign, as a result, were on the stage again. Indeed, as we finish the first draft of this manuscript, a similar conversation was occurring in the run up to the presentation of the 2016 Oscars. Chris Rock not only lampooned the racism surrounding the Hollywood film industry, but also made an inappropriate joke about Asians (Ryzik, 2016). We do not believe we can laugh our way out of the issue.

This article is not the first call for finding diverse books and how they are represented. In 1965 Larrick published a groundbreaking piece "The All-White World of Children's Books," emphasizing that only 6.4% of the total 5,206 children's book published from 1962 to 1964 included one or more Blacks in the illustrations. Many of us who study and research young adult literature (YAL) wonder how much the first call for diverse books has moved us forward in representing diverse populations and how People of Color are represented in children's literature and YAL now

during the second call. We also wonder if the influence of both the call for diverse books movement along with such movements as “#BlackLivesMatter” and “We Need Diverse Books” are helping us identify and provide culturally relevant books for the increasingly diverse populations of students in America’s public schools? As we were thinking about these questions, we focused on some well-known national literary awards for young adults, specifically, the National Book Award for Young People (NBA). We focus on this award because The National Book Award for Young People’s Literature is a subcategory under a large umbrella that attempts to represent the best in American publishing. In addition, as we began the paper the award had published the short list for the twentieth year and no study had recorded or documented its record of diversity.

When Jacqueline Woodson won the NBA for *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), she became not only the first African-American woman to win the award in 19 years, she became the African-American winner, period. We wondered if an analysis of the award could provide any insight to whether or not there has been progress since the Larrick (1965). In other words, is the renewed call for more inclusive book sponsored by the We Need Diverse Books campaign—and others—a needed reminder? With that in mind, we began a content analysis of the 100 books that made the shortlist of the NBA from 1996 to 2015. This is not a critique of the award committees, of the quality of the winner, or of the process of the NBA award. We ask, instead: How is racial/cultural diversity evident or not in this collection of quality texts in 20 years of NBA history? What can we learn through conducting a close analysis?

What scholars and authors are doing on social media, as well as what we are trying to do here, is to “cultivate a system of children and YA literature—reviewers, librarians, educators, professors, publishers—that holistically integrates people of color” (Kraus, 2016, para. 18). Several academic have blogs that push the academics dialogue faster than the publication of scholarly reports (Teri Lesesense, Writers Who Care, and the Nerdy Book Club are good examples). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the racial/ethnic representations in the NBA, in order to raise people’s awareness within the YAL industry (including publishers, writers, academics, teachers, librarians, and readers).

Methods

Guided by the research question, we did a descriptive content analysis (Krippendorff, 2012) of 100 NBA winners and finalists from 1996 to 2015. Initially, we put all 100 books in an Excel spreadsheet in the order of the year they were awarded/honored.¹ We put the winner of each year as the first one in each group and highlighted them in yellow in order to distinguish them from the finalists. Thus, the categories we began with included: author, author gender, author race/ethnicity, protagonist, protagonist gender, protagonist race/ethnicity, protagonist SES,

setting, genre, and grade levels. After cataloging all the information, we recorded the frequency of each subcategory separately. We collected data on all 100 finalists and then isolated the findings of the 20 winning titles. We develop a set of criteria for each of the categories that we planned to investigate.

Author Race/Ethnicity

From the outset of the study, we were sensitive about identifying an author's race or ethnicity. We did not want to be the agents of naming. Authors' self-identification was the determining factor as the information was found in their personal website or other sites--such as publisher's websites etc. For example, An Na, author of *A Step From Heaven* (2001) self-identified as Korean-born Children's book author, so we classified her as Asian American as well as Korean American. If authors did not self-identify, however, meaning that they might put labels like "American author" in their bios, we classified them as unspecified. If they were unspecified, we looked for further details in other sources to see if there are any indications of birth place, family heritage, etc. For example, Gene Luen Yang, author of *American Born Chinese* (Yang & Pien, 2006), is labeled as an American writer. When we look at his biography in detail, we found that he is the son of Chinese immigrants. His father was from Taiwan and his mother from Hong Kong. Thus, we put him in a larger category of Asian American as well as smaller category of Chinese American.

Protagonist Race/Ethnicity

Determining a protagonist's race/ethnicity was occasionally more difficult than determining an author's race/ethnicity. In Virginia Euwer Wolff's *True Believer* (2001), for example, the protagonist could be any ethnicity. In most of the 100 books, the protagonist's race/ethnicity is easily identifiable. For genres like fantasy, adventure, and murder mysteries, however, it was difficult to locate the protagonists' race/ethnicity, because many authors did not provide sufficient character descriptions. Thus, we also classified them as undetermined. For science fiction, many of the text included non-human protagonists, so we classified them as undetermined. Some non-fiction books included multiple protagonists of undetermined ethnicities.

Findings and Discussion

We deliberately combine the findings with a discussion. While we are presenting quantitative data we feel compelled to give context and explanations that might help the readers begin to see the implications of the quantitative findings within the large world of young adult literature. These books do represent literary quality. Throughout the discussion we will explicate our data points, but will do so by also pointing to surprises in the findings—both findings that suggest movement towards addressing diversity and those that suggest there is more work to be done.

Race/Ethnicity of Author

We looked at the ethnicity of the authors of the 100 texts: 77 texts were written by White authors (or unidentified authors) and 23 texts were written by non-White authors. When isolating the 20 winning titles, the data shows 15 were written by White authors and five were written by non-White authors (See Table 1).

The representation of the authors of color is spread out in unpredictable ways. We found that, in 2015, 2012, 2008, and 1997, all finalists are White authors. In essence, the 23 texts by diverse authors are spread out over 16 years, representing an average of close to one and half authors during those years. We found that, in 2013, 2010, 2007, 2002, 2001, 1999, and 1996, more than one text written by non-White authors were recognized. Among those seven years of more than one ethnic finalist, only three years, 2013, 2007, and 1996, have non-White winners. In 2013, Cynthia Kadohata's *The Thing about Luck* (Kadohata & Kuo, 2013) wins the award. While Kadohata is not the first Asian author to be nominated, she is the first Asian (Japanese American) from any subcategory to win. In 2007, Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie & Forney, 2007) is the winner, and in 1996 Victor Martinez's *Parrot in the Oven—Mi Vida* (Martinez, 1996) is the winner. We note Sherman Alexie is the first Native American to win the NBA, although Louis Erdrich, who wrote *The Birchbark House* (Erdrich, 1999) was the first Native American nominated as a finalists in 1999. Victor Martinez is the only nominated Mexican American in the first 20 years of the NBA, winning in the award's inaugural year, 1996. It is noteworthy that the NBA has both a Native American and a Mexican American winner, but there is a lack of inclusion within the award. In short, these two authors run the risk of existing as token inclusions in the classroom if and when teachers new to the genre of YAL look to this award

Table 1
Ethnicity of Authors

	Finalists	Winners
White	77	15
African American	10	1
Chinese American	2	0
Native American	2	1
Armenian American	1	0
Haitian	1	0
Japanese American	1	1
Korean	1	0
Korean American	1	0
Mexican American	1	1
Palestinian	1	0
Polish American	1	0
Vietnamese American	1	1

for guidance. We document that the NBA has not nominated any Native Americans as finalists for eight years (not since 2007), and has not recognized any Mexican Americans since the first year of the NBA (1996). Followers of young adult literature might wonder about the absence of Joseph Bruchac, Pam Muñoz Ryan, Benjamin Alire Saenz, and Matt de la Peña among others.

In the last five years, the NBA selected Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), Cynthia Kadohata's *The Thing about Luck* (2013), and Thanhha Lai's *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011) as winners. If we look at the 20 winning texts, the first non-White winner was awarded in 1996, the year the NBA started. It took 10 years to have another non-White winner, Sherman Alexie, in 2007. However, the next gap is smaller, three years, to see the next winner in this category, Thanhha Lai, in 2011, and we observed that a non-White authors won the NBA more frequently in the last five years than the during the first 15.

When we look at African American and Asian American authors' award nominating experiences in the NBA, we see different pictures than the ones created by looking at the Native Americans and the lone Latino author. Looking at African American authors in the NBA history, we found that the first nominated African American was Walter Dean Myers for *Monster* (Myers & Myers, 1999) in 1999, but it took 15 years for the announcement of the first African American winner, Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), in 2014. Though there were 10 nominated titles from 1999 to 2014, there was only one winner. It is also noteworthy that of the ten books, Woodson and Myers wrote six (three each) of the nominated books and Williams-Garcia wrote two.² While ten books were nominated, they represent the work of only five authors. Anyone familiar with African American authors of YAL might wonder about the absence of several important authors—Sharon Draper, Sharon Flake, Nikki Grimes, and Christopher Paul Curtis among others.

Asian American authors' award-nominating experience is also unique. The first Asian American nominee was An Na's *A Step from Heaven* (2001) in 2001, but it was 10 years before Thanhha Lai's *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011) won the award. Since the inception of the award, there are only six titles with authors who can be described as Asian in any manner beginning in 1996 with Helen Kim's *The Long Season of Rain* (Kim, 1996). The next appearance of an Asian author is five years later in 2001 with the South Korean born American author An Na's *A Step from Heaven* (2001). The next arrival is in another five years later with Asian American author Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006). After that there was another five year wait until Vietnamese American Thanhha Lai's *Inside Out and Back* (2011) was nominated and then wins the award in 2011. Only two more books by Asian authors are nominated and both in the same year, 2013. First, Gene Luen Yang received a second nomination for his novel *Boxers and Saints* (Yang & Pien, 2013) and second, Japanese American Cynthia Kadohata received a nomination for *The Thing about Luck* (2013) and it won the award.

We note, additionally, that outside of these large racial/ethnic minorities within

the United States (African American, Asian American, Mexican American, and Native American), other minority authors were nominated but did not win. For example, the NBA nominated the first and only Korean author in 1996, the first and only Polish American author in 1998, the first and only Armenian American in 2000, the first and only Palestinian-American in 2002, and the first and only Haitian-American in 2007.

Race/Ethnicity of Protagonists

We were also curious about the ethnicity of the protagonists. Of the 100 texts in the finalists list, we identified 45 White protagonists, 37 non-White protagonists, and 18 protagonists with undetermined ethnicity. (See table 2 ethnicity of protagonist).

Except for the 18 unidentified protagonists, the majority, 46, of the remaining 82 titles featured White protagonists. In order to see the racial/ethnic representation in NBA clearly, we felt it is necessary to juxtapose the ethnicity of authors and protagonists in our discussion, because the academic debate on who should write about certain cultures (i.e. cultural insiders or outsiders [Cai, 2002]) is ongoing.

Of the remaining 36 texts featuring non-White protagonists, 16 portrayed African Americans. We found, however, that the NBA only has 10 titles written by African Americans, and we explored this inconsistency. We found that the six titles highlighting African American protagonists were written by White authors. White authors wrote about African Americans, and slightly over one third, or six of the 16 titles presenting African Americans protagonists were written by cultural outsiders. We found that there are three titles featuring Africans, and they were all written by White authors. Two of these titles were written by the same author, Eliot Schrefer, and one by Nancy Farmer.

Table 2
Ethnicity of Protagonist

	Finalists	Winners
White	45	9
Undetermined	18	2
African American	16	3
Asian	5	2
Asian American	4	1
African	3	0
Native American	3	1
Armenian	1	0
Haitian American	1	0
Mexican	1	1
Mexican American	1	1
Middle Eastern	1	0
Polish	1	0

When we look at the winning texts starring African American main characters, there are a total of 3 texts. *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Woodson, 2014) is the only text, however, written by a cultural insider. The other two titles (Phillip Hoose's *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice* [2009] and M. T. Anderson's *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, VI* [2006]) were written by White authors.

Looking at the time span of all the nominated and winning texts, we found gaps. The first book featuring an African American was nominated in 1999, Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* (Myers & Myers, 1999). The first book starring an African American protagonist to win the NBA was not until 2006 when M. T. Anderson's *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, VI* (2006) won. Those who follow the NBA, however, waited until 2014 to witness the first book written by and about an African American to win.

The cultural insider and outsider issue also echoes the award-winning experiences of books portraying Asian American authors. In the NBA award, no cultural outsiders have written about Asian American cultures. All four books starring Asian American protagonists were written by cultural insiders, Asian Americans of several subgroups. We did discover some cultural outsiders wrote about Asian culture—a distinction we are making that signifies books written about protagonists in Asian countries, not Asian Americans within the United States. Of the five texts featuring Asian protagonists, three were written by White authors and two by cultural insiders. Two of these texts, *Never Fall Down* (2012) and *Sold* (2006) were written by Patricia McCormick; the first features a Cambodian and the second a Nepalese. The final text in the group written by a White author is *Homeless Bird* (2000) by Gloria Whelan, the winner in 2000.

As we looked at all the texts introducing Asians and Asian American together, we also found gaps across the time span. The first text featuring Asians was nominated in 1996, the first year NBA started, and four years later the first book with an Asian protagonist won. It has been 16 years since *Homeless Bird* (Whelan, 2000) won the award, and since then, there have been two books nominated with Asian protagonists in 2006 and 2012, but no winners. The first book starring an Asian American, An Na's *A Step from Heaven* (2001), was nominated in 2001. It took 10 years to observe the first book featuring an Asian American, Thanhha Lai's *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011), to win the NBA in 2011.

Of the three books starring Native Americans protagonists, two were written by cultural insiders, which are Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie & Forney, 2007) and Louise Erdrich's *The Birchbark House* (1999). The other one portraying Native Americans, Debby Dahl Edwardson's *My Name is Not Easy* (2011), is written by a White author. We discovered that books featuring Haitian American, Middle Eastern, Armenian, Polish, and Mexican American protagonists are all written by cultural insiders, except one book featuring a Mexican, Nancy Farmer's *The House of Scorpion* (2002). We also noted that

author Nancy Farmer also wrote a 1996 nominated text, *A Girl Named Disaster* (1996), from a cultural outsider perspective.

Implications

We also realize that many titles written by racially/ethnically diverse groups involve characters struggling with issues of identity, social inequality, poverty, and other difficulties. For the purposes of our study and to represent the 23 percent of texts that were written by non-White authors, we created a category called Culturally Relevant Texts (See Table 3). By culturally relevant, we mean those texts that are written about a culture by cultural insider and engage students within that culture, who would not otherwise not see their culture reflected in a book. Subsequently, even though some authors have written books about a culture that is not their own in an open-minded and balanced way, we have excluded these texts from our category. We recognize and applaud their literary merit, their usefulness in the classroom, and their value as an introduction to outside readers to cultures they do not experience. Like fiction on any level and for any audience, part of a text's value exists in its ability to offer vicarious experience. Nevertheless, the purpose of the study is to focus attention on how both the nominated and winning texts in the 20 year history of the NBA represent diversity. To conclude, we focus on what the group of culturally relevant books show us beyond the obvious quantitative data we have presented and discussed above (See Table 3: Culturally Relevant Texts).

Although mainstream YAL often deals with issues of identity, because adolescents of color are more aware/reflective of identity than their dominant culture counterparts (Tatum, 1997) key among the issues in this group of 23 texts that we have labelled as Culturally Relevant Texts is identity. Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014), for example, illustrated her struggles of growing up as a black girl in America and how that shaped her identity throughout. Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie & Forney, 2007) also demonstrated a funny, but painfully real, story of how a Native American boy struggles to find a better life through education and experiences off of the reservation. Titles about Asian Americans also include identity struggles. Most of the titles in this collection are immigrant stories depicting protagonists struggle as immigrants in the U.S. An Na's *A Step from Heaven* (2001), an example of this, portrays a Korean girl as she transitions from being Korean to being American; Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (Yang & Pien, 2006) rendered an American born Chinese boy's confrontations with heritage, family expectation, and assimilation.

One of the problematic findings, in terms of what this group of texts might say to the large population of students in urban and metropolitan communities with growing diverse populations, is its depiction of impoverished settings. If teachers choose books from our Culturally Relevant Texts list, are they still choosing books

that focus on adolescents who not only struggle with identity, but seem to do so in challenging, racially charged settings, with depictions of poverty, and opportunities that might appear surreal given the bleak surroundings? Can these books also serve as beacons of light and possibility? We believe they can, but adolescents also need to learn to navigate these difficulties with the aide of culturally competent teachers. We continue to argue that these texts are of high literary quality and can be nuanced in theme, structure, and presentation. We will also advocate for more diverse books with a wider variety of settings, characters, and situations that more accurately represent a large range of racial/ethnic realities.

To further illustrate our findings, we point to Sherman Alexie's (2011) well-known online article entitled "Why the Best Kids Books Are Written in Blood." He argues good stories are always depicting the painful life. Literature, thusly, should be written to give children weapons to survive their painful life instead of providing protection for children to escape the reality. In response to Sherman Alexie's opinion, we found that many of our Culturally Relevant Texts could be considered

Table 3
Culturally Relevant Texts

*Indicates a Winning Title

Book Title	Author
<i>19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East</i>	Nye, Naomi Shihab
<i>A Step from Heaven</i>	Na, An
<i>American Born Chinese</i>	Yang, Gene Luen
<i>Autobiography of My Dead Brother</i>	Myers, Walter Dean
<i>Boxers & Saints</i>	Yang, Gene Luen
<i>Brown Girl Dreaming*</i>	Woodson, Jacqueline
<i>Carver: A Life in Poems</i>	Nelson, Marilyn
<i>Forgotten Fire</i>	Bagdasarian, Adam
<i>Hush</i>	Woodson, Jacqueline
<i>Inside Out and Back Again</i>	Lai, Thanhha
<i>Jumped</i>	Williams-Garcia, Rita
<i>Lockdown</i>	Myers, Walter Dean
<i>Locomotion</i>	Woodson, Jacqueline
<i>Monster</i>	Myers, Walter Dean
<i>No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War</i>	Lobel, Anita
<i>One Crazy Summer</i>	Williams-Garcia, Rita
<i>Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida*</i>	Martinez, Victor
<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*</i>	Alexie, Sherman
<i>The Birchbark House</i>	Erdrich, Louise
<i>The Legend of Buddy Bush</i>	Moses, Shelia P.
<i>The Long Season of Rain</i>	Kim, Helen
<i>The Thing about Luck</i>	Kadohata, Cynthia
<i>Touching Snow</i>	Felin, Sindy M.

as stories “written in blood” that reflect children’s lives and provide them the tools to traverse the challenges they encounter.

As we discussed the findings, at various points we were confounded by too many singletons; too many examples of a single text to represent a group. Our primary example is Victor Martinez. A span of 20 years is too long for him to stand as a representative of the large portion of Latino students in America. Not to mention that they are not only Mexican, but Costa Rican, Honduran, Guatemalan, Peruvian, Brazilian, and so on. We struggled with the term Asian American as well. We do not believe that Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Laotian, or Cambodian, etc., peoples have the same experiences. We feel that returning to our former quick suggestion to “examine the award winner in the NBA” is insufficient. Instead it seems essential to direct them to the Pura Belpre Award, the Coretta Scott King Award, the John Steptoe Award, Printz Award, the Stonewall award, among many others, that focus on the contributions of diverse authors. For individuals to develop as culturally competent teachers, we encourage wide reading, to explore multicultural approaches to teaching and discussing complex problems in a diverse society.

Given the demographics of America’s teaching force, many of our practicing teachers continue to be White middle class females who find themselves as cultural outsiders in the schools they teach. We claim it as inappropriate to offer book lists that are 75% White authors and only 25% diverse if they teach classes that can be 40%, 50% or even 100% populated by students of color.

Notes

¹ A permanent link to NBA and analysis for this paper: <http://www.yawednesday.com/national-book-award-for-young-peoples-literature.html>

² While planning the coding, we did not consider how frequently a given author has a book nominated. However, as noted in the discussion of African American authors, the issue becomes important. We discovered that 18 authors received multiple nominations. There were three authors, Woodson, Myers, and Sheinkin, with three nominations and 15 with 2 each. Among this group, six authors, or a full third, have won the national book award and none of them won for their first nomination. Indeed, Woodson won with her third nomination. Both Myers and Sheikin, even with three nominations, have not won.

References

- 2014 National Book Awards. (n.d.). Retrieved March 03, 2016, from <http://nationalbook.org/nba2014.html>
- Albers, P. (1996). Issues of representation: Caldecott Gold Medal winners, 1984-1995. *New Advocate*, 9(4), 267-285.
- Alexie, S., & Forney, E. (2007). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Alexie, S. (2011). *Why the best kids books are written in blood*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2011/06/09/why-the-best-kids-books-are-written-in-blood>.

- Allen, A. M., & Others, A. (1993). Changes in sex-role stereotyping in Caldecott Medal Award picture books, 1938-1988. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 7(2), 67-73.
- Anderson, M. T. (2006). *The astonishing life of Octavian Nothing, traitor to the nation. I The pox party* (1st ed.). Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Black Lives Matter Freedom & Justice for all Black Lives. (n.d.). Retrieved March 03, 2016, from <http://blacklivesmatter.com>.
- Campbell, E. (2016). *Book review: A birthday cake for George Washington*. Retrieve from <https://campbele.wordpress.com/2016/01/13/book-review-a-birthday-cake-for-george-washington>.
- Cai, M. (2002). *Multicultural literature for children and young adults: Reflections on critical issues*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Crisp, T., & Hiller, B. (2011a). "Is this a boy or a girl?": Rethinking sex-role representation in Caldecott Medal-Winning picturebooks, 1938-2011. *Children's Literature in Education*, 42(3), 196-212.
- Crisp, T., & Hiller, B. (2011b). Telling tales about gender: A critical analysis of Caldecott Medal-winning picturebooks, 1938-2011. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 37(2), 18-29.
- Dellmann-Jenkins, M., & Others, A. (1993). Sex roles and cultural diversity in recent award winning picture books for young children. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 7(2), 74-82.
- Dellmann-Jenkins, M., & Yang, L. (1997). The portrayal of older people in award-winning literature for children. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 12(1), 96-100.
- Despain, S. M., Tunnell, M. O., Wilcox, B., & Morrison, T. G. (2015). Investigating shifts in diverse family structures in newbery award and honor books utilizing U.S. census data, 1930-2010. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 54(4), 316-340.
- Dougherty, W. H., & Engel, R. E. (1987). An 80s look for sex equality in Caldecott Winners and honor books. *Reading Teacher*, 40(4), 394-398.
- Edwardson, D. D. (2011). *My name is not easy* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Marshall Cavendish.
- Erdrich, L. (1999). *The birchbark house* (1st ed.). New York, NY: HyperionBooks for Children.
- Erskine, K. (2010). *Mockingbird (Mok'ing-burd)*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.
- Farmer, N. (1996). *A girl named Disaster*. New York, NY: Orchard Books.
- Farmer, N. (2002). *The house of the scorpion* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.
- Ganeshram, R. (2016). *My book on George Washington was banned. Here's my side of the story*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/feb/18/my-book-on-george-washington-was-banned>.
- Ganeshram, R., & Brantley-Newton, V. (2015). *A birthday cake for George Washington* (First edition. ed.). New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Hayn, J., & Kaplan, J.S. (2012). *Teaching young adult literature today: Insights, considerations, and perspectives for the classroom teacher*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hill, C. (2014). *The critical merits of young adult literature: Xoming of age*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hoose, P. M. (2009). *Claudette Colvin: Twice toward justice* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Melanie Kroupa Books.
- Hurley, S. R., & Chadwick, C. D. (1998). The images of females, minorities, and the aged in Caldecott Award winning picture books, 1958-1997. *Journal of Children's Literature*,

- 24(1), 58-66.
- Jenkins, E., & Blackall, S. (2015). *A fine dessert: four centuries, four families, one delicious treat* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Schwartz & Wade Books.
- Kadohata, C., & Kuo, J. (2013). *The thing about luck* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.
- Kim, H. (1996). *The long season of rain* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Holt.
- Kinman, J. R., & Henderson, D. L. (1985). An analysis of sexism in Newbery Medal Award books from 1977 to 1984. *Reading Teacher*, 38(9), 885-889.
- Kraus, D., (2016). *Diversity in book awards: A conversation*. Retrieved from <http://www.booklistreader.com/2016/02/17/childrens-literature/diversity-in-book-awards-a-conversation/#.VsWkmWHIFoQ.twitter>.
- Krippendorff, K. (2012). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lai, T. (2011). *Inside out & back again* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Harper.
- Leininger, M., Dyches, T. T., Prater, M. A., & Heath, M. A. (2010). Newbery Award winning books 1975-2009: How do they portray disabilities? *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 45(4), 583-596.
- Lesesne, T. (n.d.). *The goddess of ya literature*. Retrieved March 03, 2016, from <http://professornana.livejournal.com>.
- Lobel, A. (1998). *No pretty pictures: a child of war* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
- Martinez, V. (1996). *Parrot in the oven: mi vida: a novel* (1st ed.). New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- McCormick, P. (2006). *Sold* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Hyperion.
- McCormick, P. (2012). *Never fall down: A novel* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Balzer + Bray.
- McDaniel, T. R., & Davis, A. P. (1999). You've come a long way, baby—or have you? Research evaluating gender portrayal in recent Caldecott-winning books. *Reading Teacher*, 52(5), 532-536.
- Miller, B. J. F. (1998). What color is gold? Twenty-one years of same-race authors and protagonists in the Newbery Medal. *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries*, 12(1), 34-39.
- Mondor, C. (2016). *We Need to stop publishing books depicting happy slaves*. Retrieved from <http://www.chasinggray.com/archives/2016/01/we-need-to-stop-publishing-books-depicting-happy-slaves.html>.
- Myers, W. D., & Myers, C. (1999). *Monster* (1st ed.). New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Na, A. (2001). *A step from heaven* (1st ed.). Asheville, NC: Front Street.
- Powell, J. L., Gillespie, C. S., Swearingen, R. A., & Clements, N. E. (1998). The history of gender roles in the Newbery Medal winners. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 24(1), 42-57.
- Pulliam-Moore, C. (2016). *He owned these people: This new children's book about George Washington depicts slaves as happy bakers*. Retrieve from <http://fusion.net/story/256078/a-birthday-cake-for-george-washington>.
- Ryzik, M., (2016). *Chris Rock's Asian joke at Oscars provokes backlash*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/01/movies/chris-rocks-asian-joke-at-oscars-provokes-backlash.html>.
- Tatum, B.D. (1997). *"Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race* (1st ed.). New York, NY: BasicBooks.

- Teachers, profs, parents: Writers who care.* (n.d.). Retrieved March 03, 2016, from <https://writerswhocare.wordpress.com>.
- The Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature. (n.d.). Retrieved March 03, 2016, from <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/printz>.
- Thomas, E. [@Ebonyteach] (2016 Feb 18). 1) No one banned that book. The book received negative reviews & censure. 2) It is #BHM. Can we *please* move on?. [Tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/Ebonyteach/status/700354166904987649>.
- United States Census Bureau. (2014). *Quickfacts United States*. Retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>.
- We need diverse books.* (n.d.). Retrieved March 03, 2016, from <http://weneeddiversebooks.org>.
- Welcome to the Newbery Medal home page!* (n.d.). Retrieved March 03, 2016, from <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/newberymedal/newberymedal>
- Whelan, G. (2000). *Homeless bird* (1st ed.). New York, NY: HarperCollinsPublishers.
- Wolff, V. E. (2001). *True believer* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.
- Woodson, J. (2014). *Brown girl dreaming*. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA).
- Yang, G. L., & Pien, L. (2006). *American born Chinese*. New York, NY: First Second.
- Yang, G. L., & Pien, L. (2013). *Boxers & saints* (First edition. ed.). New York, NY: First Second.