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### Advocacy Project

There are huge gaps in diverse representation for children's literature. From the characters represented to the author's writing them, children's literature is tragically underrepresenting so many kids. Particularly in the NYC DOE, white children are the lowest populated in the school system but the most represented in literature. All children need to feel seen and represented in school so that they can feel motivated and successful. This means that both school-aged children and their communities are being affected by the lack of representation and diversity in literature. Studies have shown that lack of representation in school equates to lack of motivation and attachment to being successful. These studies also articulate that the way to raise anti-racist and anti-prejudice children from a young age is to expose them to all races, backgrounds, and cultures. Lack of diversity in children's literature is also doing a disservice to children who are the most represented. Lack of representation prevents children from critical thinking, diversifying their perspective of the world, and decreasing their willingness to value people who are different than them. This issue needs to be addressed now because of the inherent systemic racism, prejudice, and discrimination in our country. I believe it is crucial to educate our young children and be inclusive and supportive to everyone. I don't believe that is being

accomplished with the current representation of race, culture, gender and ability in children's literature.

According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center's report from 2018, the majority of people represented in Children's literature are white. The CCBC is part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education. The graphic reflects the statistics of characters represented in children's literature are 50% white, 27% Animals/Other, 10% African American, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 5% Latinx, and 1% American Indians/First Nations, 3.4% Disabled, 3.1% LGBTQIAP+. Lee and Low Books, the largest multicultural children's book publisher in the United States, cites that 37% of the US population are people of color and 13% of children's books in the past 24 years contain multi-cultural content. When it comes to author's, Lee and Low Books clarifies in an article titled "The Diversity Gap in Children's Book Publishing," that Black, Latino, and Native authors combined wrote only 7% of the new children's books published in 2017. The article goes on to say "There still seems to be a particular resistance to allowing African American creators to tell their own stories. It could also be the lack of opportunities and/or access given to African American authors as KT Horning noted last year. According to detailed CCBC statistics, only 29% of books about African/African American people were by Black authors/illustrators. Also, only 34% of books about Latinx folks were written/illustrated by Latinx people whereas last year the percentage was 61%" (Jalissa). This shows how dramatic the need for representation in children's literature truly is.

I believe that in order to tackle these issues at hand, there needs to be a change in the content and creators of children's literature. Specifically, I think that more diverse books need to be provided to schools and utilized in curriculum, especially in early childhood classrooms. My

main points of contact will be book publishers, school administrations, and parents to raise awareness of the issue at hand and raise awareness as well as financial backing to make a change. Book publishers are in a position to help because they have a platform that they can give to BIPOC authors to tell diverse stories that will help more students feel represented and give more perspective to the currently represented populations. School administrations have the ability to dictate budget and approval for more diverse books in classrooms, and lastly parents might have the financial means to donate to the cause to fund diverse books and events to raise awareness. I believe that this advocacy project can start small in local communities and eventually expand to a larger scale.

In the journal titled *Theorizing Visual Representation in Children's Literature* by Peggy Albers, it explains that “children internalize, explicitly or implicitly, particular assumptions about the world and the people in it. Scholars whose work is situated within these theories aptly have constructed strong arguments in support of a critical perspective when reading texts. Yet, scholarship must also turn to perspectives that are often unassociated with the field of literacy, which provide additional insight into how readers make sense of their worlds” (Albers page 167). The journal explains how powerful the exposure of children's literature can be because it affects how they view people and the world. Whether race, gender, or culture- this is why representation is important!

In the text titled *The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature* by Dana L Fox and Kathy G. Short, it explains that “children need stories in their lives that authentically convey their own and Others' cultures. Stories do matter to children. They influence the Ways in which children think about themselves and their place in the World as well

as the ways they think about other cultural perspectives and peoples” (Fox page 7). The text goes on to explain that literature serves as a crucial role in multicultural education, social justice, and reform. This is why representation in children’s books is so important to their development and growth into becoming an adult who has a powerful effect on their community.

To bring attention to others about my topic, I will provide statistics and viable unopinionated information about the lack of diversity in literature in hopes to make my efforts and end result more seamless. I found some resources for diverse children’s literature with Lee and Low Books, which is the largest multicultural children’s book publisher in the United States. I would start by going to the school I currently work at sharing these resources. Then I would curate a book list and ways to support or analyze children’s literature to send out to the parents, with administrative approval. I will seek support from the other staff and administrators to pool our resources and outreach capabilities together. Those resources could include any libraries, book distributors, educational philanthropists, or school administrators or super intendants who can help achieve increased budgets for children’s literature. I will then aim to send out the statistics on representation in children’s literature and why we should all be desperate to diversify the selection and give reasons behind the effects that it has on the community and our children.

I will host story times and readings for children to raise money for more diverse books in schools and spread awareness to the importance behind it. This will also act as an open mic or platform for diverse authors to read unpublished children’s stories or ideas they have that could help diversify authors of children’s literature. My first step will be to go to the parents in my school to raise money and get people in attendance to the story times and readings. I will also ask

the staff I am working with to volunteer their time and efforts to be readers or help coordinate spaces to host etc. I will also lean on the staff or community to possibly coordinate with vendors willing to come to the events and provide food or other fun kid-centered activities that can make the events more enticing to buy tickets for. I will also use these events to not only raise money but to also possibly gain attention of people in the department of education or administration with the power to increase funding. I believe that once they can see the positive effect of representation in story times with diverse characters, they will be more inclined to support the cause. I will attempt to raise \$3000 dollars from parents and increase funding in the school district for libraries and more diverse literature by \$10000 dollars. This will go towards the purchasing of diverse books, preferably from Lee and Low Books, as well as shelving and space to place the books in a school library or directly in classrooms.

I believe that all children need to see themselves as their peers in literature that is read and discussed in school. For kids to feel seen, heard, and safe in an environment, I believe that they need to be a part of the conversations and represented in what they do in their classes. For children already highly represented in literature, I think that it is important for them to see diversity. This way they can grow to understand and like people who are different than they are. Another critical need for diversity in children's literature is for children to not feel like they are the only ones who matter. If they can see that all types of people are important enough to be represented, that narrative will stay true in their development. I think that my identity as a white person directly affects my desire to do better for the kids that don't have the same privilege as I do. As a woman, I want all genders to be represented in literature for children, especially powerful and capable roles.

## Works Cited

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