

Why We Need Diverse Books

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events



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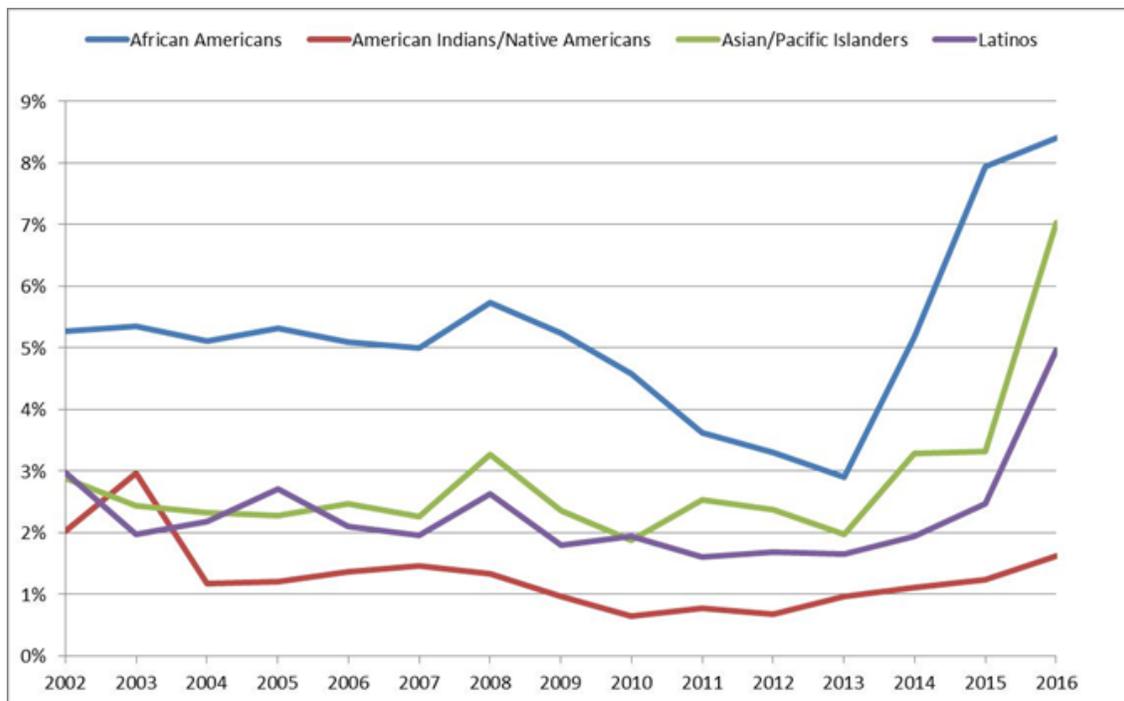
Topic Summary

In recent years, there has been a lot of attention paid to the diversity of children's books, shining a light on the lack of diversity and amplifying the need for more children's and young adult literature that reflects our multicultural society. In 2014, an organization named We Need Diverse Books formed, following a regularly trending hashtag with the same name (#WeNeedDiverseBooks) that helped bring attention to the issue. We Need Diverse Books advocates for changes in the publishing industry "to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people."

In 2015, an African-American 11-year-old girl named Marley Dias brought further awareness of the issue by launching the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign, highlighting the lack of kids' books with African American characters. Marley is an avid reader but according to her, was tired of all the books she was given to read at school because they were all about "white boys and their dogs." She set out to change that and started her campaign to collect and donate 1,000 books that feature black girls as the main character. Marley has amassed more than 9,000 books and is now writing her own book.

Often, when educators and others talk about diverse children's literature, they use the terms "mirrors" and "windows." A mirror is a surface that forms reflections and when you look into one, you see yourself. Hence, "mirror books" are books that contain reflections of people—their race, culture, gender family, religion, etc.—and enable people to see themselves in books in a variety of ways. Reading books about your own identity group(s) can help people feel good about those parts of themselves. A window is an opening where you can look outside. Hence, "window books" show the people reading them a window into other people, events and places that they might be unfamiliar with. Window books help to expose children to different kinds of people.

The [Cooperative Children's Book Center](#) (CCBC) compiles annual data about the diversity of children's literature and their statistics indicate improvements in recent years; however there is still progress to be made. The number of diverse books being published each year remained steadily low for more than two decades, but in 2014 it began increasing noticeably, which could be due in part to the We Need Diverse Books movement. While the number of diverse books has increased, it is still not on par with the general demographics of our country. Further, the number of books written by people of color is still quite low.



Age

7 and up

Questions to Start the Conversation

- Why do you think there is a focus lately on diversity in children's books?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about the lack of diverse children's books?
- Why do you think Marley Dias started her #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign?
- Do you think you read more "mirror" or "window" books? Why do you think that is?
- What would be a mirror book for you? What would be a window book?

Questions to Dig Deeper

(See the Additional Resources section for articles and information that address these questions.)

- What other aspects of your life or forms of media lack diversity?

- Do we have diverse books at home, in our library and local bookstore? Why do you think that is?
- What other actions can people take to make sure there are more diverse children's books available?

Ideas for Taking Action

Ask: What can we do to help? What individual and group actions can help make a difference?

- Conduct an informal "study" of your school or neighborhood library and bookstore and assess the diversity of their book collection. Talk with the librarian or bookstore manager about including more diverse books.
- Use the [#WeNeedDiverseBooks](#) hashtag to share your thoughts on social media about the importance of diverse books.
- Write a letter to a book publisher about the need for more diverse children's books.

Additional Resources

- [Diverse Books Matter](#) (ADL Lesson Plan)
- [Dolls are Us](#) (ADL lesson plan)
- [Books Matter: The Power of Children's Literature](#) (ADL blog)
- [Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice](#) (online bibliography)
- [The Diversity Gap in Children's Publishing 2017](#) (Lee & Low Books)

BACK TO TABLE TALK