Hot Topic: Racism

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Definition

Racism is a belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race and that these can be used to distinguish one as inferior or superior to another race.

“Racism is not merely a simplistic hatred. It is, more often, broad sympathy toward some and broader skepticism toward others...”
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• And where can we find guidance to develop the collection?
Introduction

As library media specialists we need to be aware that racism affects the lives of our students in nuanced and more obvious experiences.

The implications should be a sensitivity for the importance of a diverse collection and a response to the challenge which calls for decisions on the collection. There may be barriers to developing the collection, but awareness of the value of a multicultural collection should provide incentive to do so.

Developing a diverse collection which provides students with windows and mirrors to the lives they seek or need to understand is imperative as the library media specialist builds a collection for the 21st century learner and citizen of the world.
As library media specialists we need to be aware that racism affects the lives of our students.

We must always seek to increase our awareness of its presence.

Quick study:
Read the newspaper.
Keep current with ALA viewpoints.
The ALA speaks to the violence, racism and loss of Cynthia G. Hurd, manager of the St. Andrews Regional Library Branch in the Charleston county public library system who was lost that day.

Alexie Sherman describes the lives of his family, friends, and members of the community when isolated and confronted with ongoing poverty on a reservation in Spokane, Washington.

Ta-Nehisi Coates speaks about the failure of the Baltimore school system for him and the dim view he and his community took of the police who could not protect black children on their way to and from school but ultimately provoked and and harmed “the black body.”
Recall books that you may have read on racism.

Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*. First published in 1961.
James Baldwin’s *No Name in the Street*. First published 1972.
Take a look at the school library shelves.
Infographic describes statistics of the Cooperative Children’s Book center (School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison) about children’s picture books that were published in 2015.
The Cooperative Children’s book center examined children’s trade books since 2002 to see how many were written by authors of color or featured strong characters that were African American, Indian/first nation, Asian/Pacific or Latino. In 2015 out of 3,400 books received only 107 were written by African American authors, and only 270 had African American characters who played a strong role or were the protagonist in the story.
Implications

How can the library media specialist develop the collection to better serve the needs of students.

Aim to develop a collection which includes stories about
• the population inside the school,
• the community surrounding its walls,
• and the larger community
Learn about the students and about the community. There are plenty of places online with data you could use:

Reduce the barriers that exist to enrich the library collection:

- budget constraints,
- controversial material considerations,
- time constraints
- concern about circulation
Overcome, reduce, or eliminate those barriers:

• Budget: Pitch the importance of diverse materials to the administration, use a site like donorschoose.org to fundraise, and use the public library.
Reduce those barriers:

- Controversial elements: Read aloud a portion of the book or plan a book study to encourage conversations.
Overcome those barriers:

Time constraints:
• Check out Hyperion/Disney imprints from Jump at the Sun publications offer books with strong characters who are African American.
• Continue an ongoing quest for materials by subscribing to the Horn Book magazine and School Library Monthly
• Search for books, make lists, and save links like CCBC’s Multicultural literature

Andrea Davis Pinkney was a magazine editor at Essence when she met and asked the publisher at Simon & Schuster, “Why aren’t publishers creating more diverse content – series, board books, narrative nonfiction?” Her question moved her into the publishing world and her ideas took her into writing.
Circulation: Display the books with inviting signage, covers showing, with other books on a topic, or do book talks.
Reduce those barriers:

The CCBC notes the importance of small independent publishers, the commitment of individual editors, the importance of children’s book awards to encourage writers to create stories for a diverse audience. And the charge for school library media specialists is to make the books available so that children will be aware that there are books in the library that reflect them in many ways.
It is important to realize that despite budgetary and time constraints, the library media specialist must provide books that readers need as well as books that they want.

A diverse collection will encourage the young reader.
Transitional readers of color just practicing their reading skills need reading material that reflects their experiences and their culture with characters that look like them. (Hughes-Hassell, S., Koehler, E., & Barkley, H. A., 2010).

Children who cannot see themselves in the works they read are essentially inferring that they are less valued or invisible. Those who do not see others in books may gain a false sense of their importance. (Sims Bishop, R., 2012). Reflections on the development of African American children's literature. *Journal Of Children's Literature, 38*(2), 5-13.
“When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities, because together they are what make us all human.”

A diverse collection supports 21st century learning skills

Selecting books is a privilege!

... Our decisions affect the capabilities of young readers to find books in which they can find themselves and in which they can meet new people.” (The Show Me Librarian, 2015)

“If the school library media specialist doesn’t have diverse books in the collection, it may be seen to the readers that these books and their characters are “less-than.” The absence of the choice eliminates other perspectives and experiences. It suggests that readers cannot handle, relate to or understand an “experience that does not mirror their own.” Not collecting and promoting quality titles “with diverse protagonists projects the selector’s bias onto the reader.” (2015.)
• What can we do to increase awareness of the problem within ourselves, our school and the community?

• How can we develop a collection that increases materials for a diverse population?

• Why is important that materials for a diverse population are acquired and made available, even actively marketed? Even if our school population is not so diverse?

• And where can we find guidance to develop the collection?
• Read, examine the collection, know the population.
• Find resources, make time, make lists, read.
• Students need to be able to see themselves in what they read and to see others and understand their cultures.
• Seek out resources from specific publishers and lists from ALA and CCBC
If we can always add to our awareness and then take tiny steps to make the school library collection more diverse, we will begin to touch the lives of all children in the library to move us all forward.
References


