

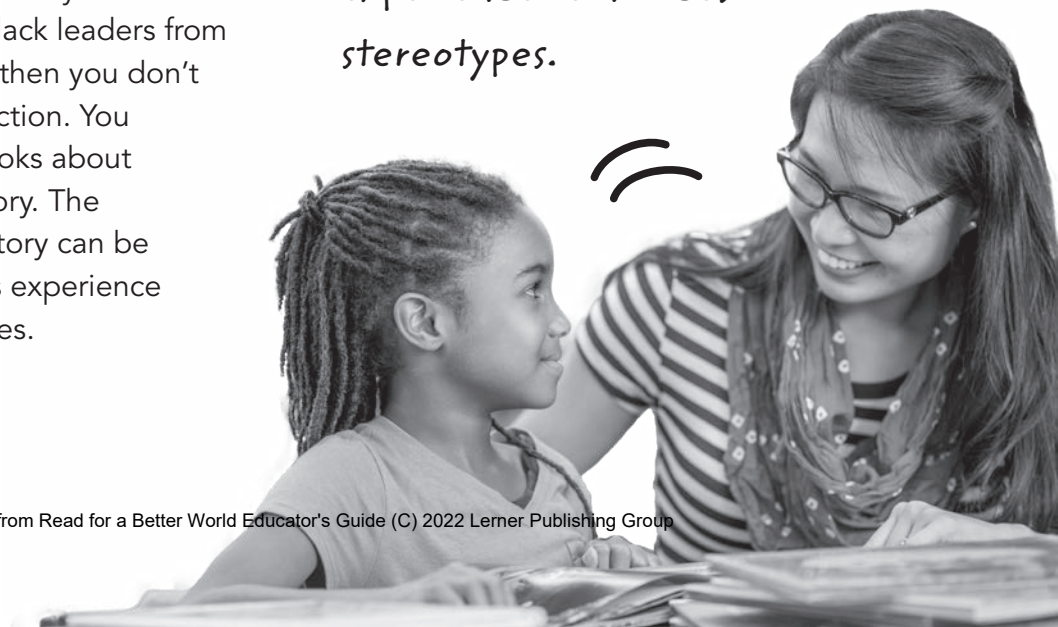
Diversifying Your Library

Research shows that a literacy-rich environment is important and that children who are exposed to books become more motivated and capable readers. In school and at home, access to books is critical, as children who are surrounded by books are more likely to become readers. School-based libraries are especially important for children who have limited access to books in their homes or communities.

Children need access to stories that represent aspects of their lived experience as well as stories that reflect the diversity of the world around them. Though representation in children's books has increased over previous years, there is still a surprising lack of diverse representation in children's texts relative to the diverse student population.

It is essential to consider what books are already in your library so you can offer not just more stories that feature diverse characters, but also feature a variety of stories and text types to ensure children are getting access to different stories and different ways of telling stories. Research suggests that books about diverse groups often have limited content. In these books, the same narrative is told again and again. So, what might seem like a diverse collection is just multiple iterations of the same story. For example, if the books in your collection tell only stories of Black leaders from the Civil Rights era, then you don't have a diverse collection. You just have a lot of books about one moment in history. The idea that only one story can be told about a group's experience reinforces stereotypes.

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Auditing Your Current Library

One way to consider the diversity of your library is by doing an audit. First, consider the students your library serves by asking yourself the following questions:

- What are the demographics of my students?
- What are the languages they speak at school and at home?
- What are some of the topics they are interested in?

Then, as you review the books in your collection, ask:

- Who is represented in this story?
- Who is this story about?
- What is this story about?

Consider how race, ethnicity, and gender show up in the books in your library. How many books feature Black characters? How many stories feature a girl as the main character? Once you quantify who shows up in the books you already have, now ask: What shows up? What is the story being told?

Audit your library with a count of the race, ethnicity, and gender of the main characters. If these aren't stated explicitly, look for clues in the pictures or character descriptions. Then, capture the story being told. Use this chart to help you audit your collection.

Title & Author	Ethnicity of Main Character	Race of Main Character	Gender of Main Character	Story Being Told

What surprised you about this audit?

Now consider the students in your class.
How does this library reflect them?

Do you notice patterns in the stories being told?
If so, what stories are overrepresented?

Consider This

This audit is a sample of types of representations to look for in your library. But it is important to also consider how other groups are represented within it. For example, while representations of disability have improved in the past decade, those representations are often stereotypical or negative. Consider how disability shows up in your collection. Are there any characters that have physical disabilities? What about learning disabilities or sensory disabilities? If there are characters with disabilities in your collection, are they the main character? Are they pitied or otherwise portrayed as incomplete or inadequate due to their disability?

Additional Resources to Help You Diversify Your Library

Sometimes it is challenging to know where to turn to find diverse books. There are many resources to help you find diverse books for your collection. Try these!

- **Lerner: Voices Matter—Celebrate Diverse Books**
lernerbooks.com/diversebooks
- **We Need Diverse Books**
diversebooks.org/
- **American Indians in Children's Literature**
americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/
- **Disability in Kidlit**
disabilityinkidlit.com/

Integrating Diversity into the Curriculum

You've done your audit. Now what? It's not enough to have diverse books on the shelf. You also need powerful instruction to engage readers! How do you engage children with these texts? How do you integrate these books into the curriculum? Diverse texts aren't meant to be "sometimes" books that are discussed only during certain holidays or celebrations. In fact, saving books to share during certain times of the year silences diverse voices throughout the year.



It is important to consider how you will weave these books into your daily instruction. As you consider big themes that you share with children (including the themes of identity, diversity, justice, and action), consider how to inspire children's curiosity so they will be interested in the books in this collection.

Teaching with diverse texts doesn't require you to know everything about a person, a culture, or even a country—but it does mean you have to go beyond your own comfort in order to offer a broad range of issues and topics.

Other ways to include diverse books:

- Ask students to write six-word reviews of the books they read so that other students can get a quick introduction to the collection.
- Pair the texts in this collection with other texts children may engage with as part of the school's curriculum.
- Promote diverse stories through read aloud or quick book talks.
- Use curiosity as a tool to engage with texts.

Consider This

As you look for books to add to your library, consider ways to stay current on the latest books. Reading published reviews is one way to learn about new books. Following social media accounts of avid reviewers is another way to stay current. Ask yourself: What pathways have I created to discover more diverse books?

Notes

