Lower Merion Library Systems
Diversity Audit Report:
Children’s Picture Books

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Table of Contents

Background 2

Aim and Objective 3
  Objectives 3

Literature Review 4

Method 5

Results 6
  Figure 1. Representation in Lower Merion Library System by Branches 6
  Figure 2. Lower Merion Library System Representation Compared to Diverse Book Finder 7

Recommendations 8

Conclusion 10

Appendix 12
  Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx) Recommendations 12
  Middle Eastern/North African/Arab Recommendations 14
  First/Native Nations/American Indian/Indigenous Recommendations 16
  Asian/Pacific Islander Recommendations 18
Background

Lower Merion Library System (LMLS) comprises six public libraries serving a population of over 60,000 in the suburbs of West Philadelphia. The branches located in Lower Merion Township include Ardmore, Bala Cynwyd, Belmont Hills, Gladwyne, Bryn Mawr (Ludington), and Penn Wynne.

In 2020, the LMLS Board of Directors released a statement condemning racism and violence of all kinds. LMLS began a process of evaluating the library system’s core values and purpose to decide the best way to serve their diverse community and respond to systemic racism.

Developing a diverse collection is one of three ways the LMLS is addressing issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. LMLS staff attended a seminar titled Equity in Action: Fostering an Antiracist Library Culture, which included training on collection audits with a focus on the library’s collection in terms of diversity of characters, point of view, and experiences.

Reaching out to the community, LMLS requested assistance from an MLIS graduate student through Drexel University’s College of Computing and Informatics Capstone Project. In the Capstone Project, I supported LMLS in a diversity audit of children’s picture books using Diverse Book Finder’s Collection Analysis Tool. The Director of Libraries, Head of Processing, Children’s Librarians, and Technical Librarian served as my mentors over a 10-week internship which concluded in this report.

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1 About Us. Web. 7 May 2021, https://lmls.org/about-us/
Aim and Objective

The LMLS requested the report to include quantitative information from the Diverse Book Finder’s Collection Analysis Tool and qualitative information to support collection development. This report will identify the current representation of Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/ African/African American, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx), Middle Eastern/North African/Arab, First/Native Nations, and bi/multiracial characters in the LMLS collection of children’s picture books. In addition, the report includes an analysis of the current representation and book recommendations to increase the representation of diverse characters in children’s picture books.

Objectives

- Utilize the Diverse Book Finder’s Collection Analysis Tool to conduct a diversity audit of children’s picture books in LMLS branches: Ardmore, Bala Cynwyd, Belmont Hills, Gladwyne, Ludington, and Penn Wynne.
- Demonstrate how each branch contributes to the representation of Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African/African American, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx), Middle Eastern/North African/Arab, First/Native Nations, and bi/multiracial characters in the LMLS collection of children’s picture books.
- Identify the current representation of Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African/African American, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx), Middle Eastern/North African/Arab, First/Native Nations, and bi/multiracial characters in the LMLS collection of children’s picture books.
- Compare LMLS collection of children’s picture books to Diverse Books Finder’s collection of widely available children’s picture books.\(^4\)
- Reveal areas to improve the representation of Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African/African American, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx), Middle Eastern/North African/Arab, First/Native Nations, and bi/multiracial characters in the LMLS collection of children’s picture books.
- Recommend titles to support the development of an equitable, diverse, and inclusive children’s picture book collection.

Literature Review

Beyond identifying the representation of Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African/African American, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx), Middle Eastern/North African/Arab, First/Native Nations, and bi/multiracial characters, the report takes into account how each group is represented when recommending titles for collection development.

When recommending titles to LMLS, I considered concepts widely used in library journals when discussing diversity in children’s picture books. These concepts will guide the review and selection process. In particular, the report upholds Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop’s theory that children’s picture books act either as “mirrors” in which children can recognize themselves in characters and develop a sense of self, or “windows” by introducing children to characters whose lives are different from their own. The report will also incorporate the thematic categories used by Diverse Book Finder. The Diverse Book Finder’s Collection Analysis Tool includes categories for how a character is represented in the picture book: Any Child, Beautiful Life, Biography, Cross Group, Folklore, Incidental, Informational, Oppression & Resilience, Race/Culture Concepts. These categories created by Aronson, Callahan, and O’Brien (2017) are how the Diverse Book Finder classifies themes within the collection. By denoting the themes that dominate children’s picture books, the Diverse Book Finder’s collection recognizes the importance of telling varied stories and avoiding the “single story.” Incorporating these concepts, I will consider three major questions when selecting titles: Does this picture book center Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African/African American, Central and South American

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Lower Merion Library Systems Diversity Audit Report: Children’s Picture Books

(Hispanic/Latinx), Middle Eastern/North African/Arab, First/Native Nations, and bi/multiracial characters? Does this picture book offer a wider depiction of Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African/African American, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx), Middle Eastern/North African/Arab, First/Native Nations, and bi/multiracial representation? And will this picture book be helpful in introducing children to other cultures, experiences, lifestyles?

Method

Using Polaris, excel files were made to extract picture book information for Ardmore, Bala Cynwyd, Belmont Hills, Gladwyne, Ludington, and Penn Wynne. The parameters were set to extract per branch, JP, call number, publication date 2002-2022, and to exclude withdrawn, lost, damaged, and not in circulation.

The excel files for each branch were uploaded to Diverse Book Finder’s Collection Analysis Tool. Each branch received a Collection Analysis Report from the Diverse Book Finder. The Diverse Book Finder’s Collection Analysis Reports included three graphs and two tables. Graph 1. Who is Represented in Your Collection?, Graph 2. Who is Represented in Book Widely Available?, Graph 3. How These Groups Are Represented in Your Collection?, Table 1. The Diverse Book Finder Categories, Table 2. How These Groups Are Represented in Your Collection. The Collection Analysis Reports for each branch were reviewed individually.

Each branch’s result for Graph 1. Who is Represented in Your Collection? and Graph 2. Who is Represented in Books Widely Available? were imported into an excel spreadsheet. Using auto sum, the results for each branch were combined to reflect the entire LMLS results for Graph 1. Who is Represented in Your Collection?
Lower Merion Library Systems Diversity Audit Report: Children’s Picture Books

The excel spreadsheet was imported into Tableau to create visualizations: Figure 1. Representation in Lower Merion Library System by Branches and Figure 2. Lower Merion Library System Representation Compared to Diverse Book Finder.

An excel spreadsheet was created to recommend titles for First/Native Nations/American Indian/Indigenous, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx) and Middle Eastern/North African/Arab. The recommendations include Diverse Book Finder’s categories, titles, author, EAN product code, supplier, and publication date. Titles without a category are not within the Diverse Book Finder’s collection.

Results

Figure 1. Representation in Lower Merion Library System by Branches
**Figure 1** depicts how each branch contributes to the representation of Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African/African American, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx), Middle Eastern/North African/Arab, First/Native Nations, and bi/multiracial characters in the Lower Merion Library System’s picture book collection. The physical size of each branch denotes the collection size and is reflected in how each branch contributes to the library system. For example, Ardmore is significantly smaller than Ludington in size and respectfully Ardmore’s smaller collection size is reflected in their smaller representation. This was a relationship a few LMLS librarians wanted to see visualized.

**Figure 2. Lower Merion Library System Representation Compared to Diverse Book Finder**
Figure 2 shows the gaps within the LMLS collection by comparing it to the Diverse Book Finder's collection which is considered to include books widely available. Notice how First/Native Nations/American Indian/Indigenous and Middle Eastern/North African/Arab have low representation even in the Diverse Book Finder’s collection. Nevertheless, there is still a significant gap between what LMLS has compared to Diverse Book Finder’s collection.

Recommendations

After examining Figure 2, Asian/Pacific Islander, First/Native Nations/American Indian/Indigenous, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx), and Middle Eastern/North African/Arab were in most need of development. The titles selected to increase representation for these groups are listed in an excel spreadsheet included in the appendix.

In addition to the recommendation list, there are a few suggestions for ways librarians could integrate these titles in order to increase circulation of diverse titles. By including these titles into events, programs and displays will provide young reader’s windows into diverse cultures and experiences.

National Library Week and International Children’s Book Days occur the first week of April. This would be an opportunity to include picture books that encourage reading from the perspective of different cultures. Suggested titles would be: Book Fiesta by Pat Mora which depicts Latino children inviting children from other cultures to their book fiesta. Waiting for the Biblioburro by Monica Brown which tells the real story of Columbian biblioburro who would bring books to remote neighborhoods without libraries. Hands Around the Library: Protecting Egypt's Treasured Books by Karen Leggett Abouraya, a true story about the demonstrators who
protected a library in Alexandria, Egypt in 2011. These picture books include bilingual text, glossaries, and provide opportunities to discuss access to books.

Suggested reading for the Summer Reading 2021 Program would be *Mayanito's New Friends / Los Nuevos Amigos de Mayanito* by Tato Laviera, in which a young Mayan prince explores the jungle and imagines new friends from all over the world. With this year’s theme, Tails & Tales, *Mayanito's New Friends* provides the opportunity to discover new environments and animals.

A new addition to any beach display would be *Saffron Ice Cream* by Rashin Kheiryeh, where a young Iranin girl remembers her family’s beach trips to the Caspian Sea. *Paletero Man* by Lucky Diaz celebrates community and summer sweet treats in Los Angeles. These titles provide windows into other cultures while relating to all children’s excitement of summer.

Pen-Pal programs! *Dear Juno* by Soyung Pak and *Dear Primo* by Duncan Tonatiuh both tell the stories of children writing to loved ones. Pen-Pal programs provide the opportunity to improve literacy, handwriting and exchange from other cultures.

Introducing picture books from other cultures expands the possibilities of new activities and perspectives. By consciously adding diverse picture books to themed storytimes and activities circulation will increase. Windows can open by simply interchanging the wheels on the bus for *The Wheels on the Tuk Tuk* by Kabir Sehgal for a toddler storytime and introduce young readers to new cultures.
Conclusion

Overall, the Lower Merion Library System children’s picture book collection was comparable to the Diverse Book Finder’s collection of books widely available. The representation of Black/African/African American characters seems on par with what the Diverse Book Finder considers widely available. Yet, development is needed to equally represent Asian/Pacific Islander, First/Native Nations/American Indian/Indigenous, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx) and Middle Eastern/North African/Arab characters.

While cross referencing the Diverse Book Finder’s collection, Ingram’s iPage’s curated lists and recommended lists from School Library Journal, it became apparent that LMLS has already purchased many picture books that populated these lists. Although the representation is small, LMLS has purchased highly reviewed picture books that feature Asian/Pacific Islander, First/Native Nations/American Indian/Indigenous, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx) and Middle Eastern/North African/Arab characters. There seems to be certain picture books that are recommended more than others. Some books from the Diverse Book Finder’s collection weren’t reviewed by Kirkus or the School Library Journal. The Social Justice Books was an excellent source to find reviews of picture books that didn't appear in most recommended lists. Social Justice Books have their own curated list, rating system, and resources for racial discussions. Because cross referencing book reviews was important to find picture books with appropriate representation, iPages categories helped to filter titles without reviews from Kirkus and School Library Journal. In addition, there were a few books that were either not provided by Ingram or no longer being published. These aspects narrowed the amount

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of picture books that would be available to develop representation of these groups. Nevertheless, the priority was to find picture books that offered redeeming, affirming representation.

The Lower Merion Library System has picture book collection that adequately represents Black/African/African American and has a few highly reviewed picture books that center Asian/Pacific Islander, First/Native Nations/American Indian/Indigenous, Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx) and Middle Eastern/North African/Arab characters. With further development and integration of recommended picture books, LMLS will continue towards presenting a diverse collection of picture books that represent our community.
### Central and South American (Hispanic/Latinx) Recommendations

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<th>Publication Date</th>
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## Lower Merion Library Systems Diversity Audit Report: Children’s Picture Books

### Beautiful Life

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## Middle Eastern/North African/Arab Recommendations

### Beautiful Life

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### Lower Merion Library Systems Diversity Audit Report: Children’s Picture Books

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### June 2021
First/Native Nations/American Indian/Indigenous Recommendations

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<th>EAN Product Code</th>
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### Lower Merion Library Systems Diversity Audit Report: Children’s Picture Books

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# Lower Merion Library Systems Diversity Audit Report: Children’s Picture Books

## Asian/Pacific Islander Recommendations

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June 2021
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